

The Jewish Journal

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Jewish Federation
of Ocean County
Celebrating 49 Years!

Jewish Journal 732.534.5959

April 2026 ✧ Nisan – Iyar 5786

Jewish Federation 732-363-0530 www.ocjf.org

Community Wide
YOM HASHOAH
— COMMEMORATION —

Tuesday, April 14, 6:30 PM

Registration required - www.jewishoceancounty.org/yomhashoah

Survivors and families email federation@ocjf.org
to participate in candlelighting.

Local News - see pages 4, 5 and 6

Let's Connect - see pages 16 and 17

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What I Learned about Antisemitism from AI



By Keith Krivitzky, Managing Director
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I have become a big fan of AI. My AI platform has become an indispensable research assistant, thinking partner, and editor. I use it for work projects consistently, as well as planning my life, schedule, travel, and personal activities.

That said, I don't trust my AI colleague and confidante.

He (in my case it's a "he") speaks with confidence when he is just wrong, cites sources that are outdated or incorrect... and sometimes he just makes stuff up that he presents as authoritative. We have seen news reports about other incidents

We also need ways to call out and penalize those who casually play with bias, exaggeration, and falsehoods.

where AI has veered into antisemitism and conspiracy theories directly.

Yet, despite this, as well as fears about an AI takeover of humanity, AI is here to stay. What's going on here? Why do we get this sort of behavior?

One reason for this, it seems, is that some AIs were programmed/trained to seek their users' approval. And so they skewed responses to what they thought their audience wanted to hear. Put simply, AI was looking for approval and affirmation.

This is not an excuse or justification for the quirks of AI, but I think there is an analogy here to antisemites – and we can learn something from our efforts to train and set up guardrails for AI.

First, and this isn't an insignificant or incidental step...we need to recognize the-

re is a problem. Not just for those of us who experience the prevarications of AI – or the ickiness of antisemitism. These are broader, macro problems that affect and impact us all.

So, what's the problem? Sure, hate, that's an easy one. Necessary but not quite sufficient. Hate has to start from somewhere. And while role models and teachers and friends and family play a role in influencing people for good or for bad – I think, in a very basic way, hate starts from a desire for affirmation and attention. It's a form of bullying. Somehow picking on someone else makes you feel better about your circumstances or at least have someone to blame. And certain strains, like antisemitism, are particularly persistent. Just listen to Tucker Carlson and Candace Owens and you'll hear. (But...please don't.)

In a way, this desire to please is what we have seen with AI. And so, the question is what to do about it.

On a personal level with my AI, I have learned to question most of the claims he makes. I ask for clarifications and sources and underlying arguments and data. I need to be a critical listener and thinker – especially with an AI that supposedly

has greater access to information than I do. This is something we all need to do when we hear claims or conspiracy theories that are novel and don't make sense.

Social media algorithms and talk show hosts are gamed or incentivized to maximize eyeballs and attention, which means hyping claims that otherwise would lack credibility. We shouldn't take these things at face value and we should instill/encourage this in others as well.

On a communal or societal level, we need guardrails that hold individuals and organizations/platforms accountable. This is akin to yelling fire in a crowded theater; unfortunately, we've passed the point where social norms might stay people. We also need ways to call out and penalize those who casually play with bias, exaggeration, and falsehoods.

That is what is being done in the world of AI and there are image lessons to be learned here about fighting antisemitism as well. Can AI be of great benefit? Sure – as long as we address its serious pitfalls. We need to have the same diligence when it comes to antisemitism.

B"H

Encourage Children to Ask Questions, and Be Prepared to Answer Them



By Rabbi Shmuel Naparstek
Chabad Jewish Center of Jackson
www.ChabadofJackson.com

My children are an inquisitive bunch, and as they grow older their questions get deeper and tougher to answer. Most information I can find on the internet, but often their questions demand answers beyond facts and figures. That's what makes the annual celebration of Passover so interesting for us.

Passover Seder is the longest-running annual family dinner in history. 3,338 years ago, G-d instructed the Israelites to have a feast of roasted sacrificial meat, unleavened bread called Matzah, and bi-

tter herbs on the eve of their redemption from Egyptian slavery. This marked the birth of the Jewish nation, and the anniversary has been observed ever since with a choreographed festive dinner packed with many rules and traditions.

Storytelling is a major component of the seder schedule and, as biblically prescribed, the story of our exodus is meant to be told as a response to questions asked by children. "And it will come to pass if your child asks you in the future, saying, 'What is this?' you shall say, 'With a mighty hand G-d took us out of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.'" (Exodus 13:14)

This question-and-answer format is so integral to the Passover observance that our sages composed a text of four questions famously known as the "Ma Nishtana" recorded in every Haggadah (Passover seder guidebook). Children have been asking these questions to their parents during the seder for thousands of years: What makes this night different from all other nights? Why do we dip vegetables twice, eat unleavened bread ex-

A time to pause and reflect on our duty and opportunity to enhance the moral and ethical education of all our children.

clusively, have bitter herbs, and eat and drink while reclining?

Placing the spotlight on the children during the most important religious family ceremony of the year has had profound positive ramifications in ensuring our heritage continues through the ages. Preparing them to perform that night is an educational priority as Passover approaches.

Four days before Passover in 1989 the Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson celebrated his 87th birthday. It was Sunday, and following his long-standing weekly tradition, he greeted the thousands of people who came to receive his blessing by handing each one a dollar bill to be given to charity. I recently wat-

ched a compilation of six conversations he had with parents and children that Sunday afternoon.

The Rebbe asked whether the children were prepared to ask the Four Questions at the seder – a standard pre-Passover inquiry – but then asked whether the parents had already prepared the answers. It struck me that with this follow-up question, the Rebbe was teaching us all an important lesson in education and parenting. If you encourage the children to ask questions you must be prepared to answer them. Although our children are trained to ask a boilerplate text of questions and we will recite the traditional text from the Haggadah in response, we must appreciate that each child is asking something unique, and as their elders, we must be prepared to answer the child and not the question.

When we celebrate liberty children want to understand what liberty is all about, not only through historical facts and figures but through learning from the example of

Continued on page 3

Am Yisrael Chai - The Nation of Israel LIVES ON!



**Pesach begins on 15 Nisan
this year on Wednesday night, April 1
See page 5.**



**Yom Hashoah / Holocaust Memorial Day
27 Nisan, this year Monday night-Tuesday, April 13-14
See page 30.**



**Yom Hazikaron / Israel Memorial Day
One day before Israel Independence Day,
this year Monday night-Tuesday, April 20-21
See page 31.**



**Yom Haatzmaut / Israel Independence Day
5 Iyar, this year Tuesday night-Wednesday, April 21-22
See page 31.**

Encourage Children

Continued from page 2

their parents and educators. We must be prepared to answer their questions about living moral and ethical lives, anchored in divine truths and faith in G-d, dedicated to the betterment of society and the entire world.

This is why the Rebbe's birthday is observed each year as Education and Sharing Day, in tribute to his outstanding dedication to education. A time to pause and reflect on our duty and opportunity to enhance the moral and ethical education of all our children. It's about creating

conversations that matter around dinner tables, in classrooms, and wherever we interact with our young ones.

Very soon we will have a time when all our questions will be answered with the coming of Moshiach speedily!

Chag Sameach.

The Jewish Journal is pleased to host a monthly Rabbi Column, rotating among our community's pulpit rabbis. The views and opinions expressed are those of the writer, and do not necessarily reflect those of The Jewish Journal, the Jewish Federation of Ocean County or the author's Congregation.

From Israel Emergency to Israel Recover

The challenges facing the Jewish community demand decisive action. Antisemitism rises, Israel rebuilds and recovers, and the future of our communities is at stake. Now is the time for us to choose action, unity, and strength. Your gift fuels our efforts to build a thriving Jewish future for generations to come. Donate now: www.jewishocean-county.org/IsraelRecover.



Jewish Federation of Ocean County is now on Facebook

Like us at: www.facebook.com/jewishocean

Local News

Temple Beth Or, Brick, Update of Activities



It may be cold outside, but our hearts are always warm at TBO. Our Sisterhood organized a food pantry donation and will be holding their annual Women's Seder event. Our Adult Education and Men's Club are chairing a lunch and learn event called Mitzvahs and Mozart to be held in March with VP of Marketing, Geoff Cohen, from the Philadelphia Orchestra. Not to be forgotten we were excited to be in our own building for our Purim celebration on the evening of March 2. For information about these and other events, call the TBO Office at 732-458-4700.

Get to Know Jewish Geniuses at Congregation B'nai Israel, Toms River

In the 100 years after 1847, Jews emerged from the medieval ghettos of Europe and became ground-breakers in politics, art, music, literature and science. That century of breakthroughs by now-prominent Jewish scientists and artists will be the subject of a talk at Congregation B'nai Israel on Thursday, April 23. All are invited, with pre-registration required.

The event is presented by the Adult Education Committee of CBI. It is another in a series of opportunities for Jewish learning being offered by the newly reconstituted committee, chaired by Daniel Hertz-Kintish. In March, a lecture on "The Kaifeng Jews of China" was given by Andrew Meyer, a history professor at Brooklyn College, and the committee is

planning to offer a Hebrew reading course and other events in the coming months.

The talk on "100 Years of Jewish Genius (1847-1947): How Jews Changed the World," will be presented by the teacher and popular local lecturer Susan Addelston. After the Napoleonic era, an explosion of Jewish talent significantly advanced world progress. Addelston will speak about several of the leading intellectuals of that era, bringing to life the geniuses that are now ingrained in world history.

The talk, at 7:00 PM at the synagogue at 1488 Old Freehold Road, is \$5 for CBI members and \$10 for non-members. Registration is required at cbitr.org. For more information, call the synagogue office at 732-349-1244.

Super Soul Party – For Those in Need Jewish Federation of Ocean County IMPACT

The Jewish Federation of Ocean County on Super Bowl Sunday (February 8) once again sponsored a fantastic program in conjunction with One Ocean County to help our unhoused neighbors. Over 100 guests were provided hot meals, haircuts, clothing, supplies, and gift cards; as well as watching the Seattle Seahawks dominate the Super Bowl game.

Others who helped support the program this year were the Rotary of Toms River, Chabad of Toms River, Salvation Army, Herr's, and Urban Air who hosted and lets kids bounce during the game. A big thank you to JFOC board member Avi Kotler, who does the work putting this together.



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Call us at 732-458-4700 or email us at templebethorbrick@gmail.com.

Chaim Respes, Rabbi

Dr. Sharon Monter, President

Local News

Congregation B'nai Israel, Toms River, had a Fun Celebration of Purim

Lady Liberty was there. So was a pirate. At least two members of the press showed up. And two cowgirls stopped by to see what all the fuss was about. The excitement was about Queen Esther, Mordechai, King Ahasuerus and the dreaded Haman, as Congregation B'nai Israel celebrated Purim in the evening of March 2 with a reenactment of the Megillah by its Talmud Torah students and a few of its hammy grown-ups, followed by festivities for both children and adults.



(photo credits: Teri Abramson)



Guests walked in on a red carpet, under the theme of “CBI’s Oscars Purim Extravaganza.” Barbie and other movie stars and celebrities were there, and Rabbi William Gershon dressed up in his best Oscar-like attire for the evening. Cantor Vadim Yucht, who played the piano for the Megillah reading and the accordion at the celebration, was the pirate.



Two high school students from Toms River wore cowboy hats, fitting in perfectly in a room with a multitude of head gear, masks and other costumes. A well-dressed U.S. Naval officer and characters from the Purim story were also among the guests.



Students had their own Oscar-themed party while adults lingered in the social hall for a dinner of foods from Israel, France, Japan, Italy and Ireland, as well as wine and hamantaschen. Altogether, nearly 100 congregants and visitors turned out for the event at 1488 Old Freehold Road. For information about future events, call the synagogue office at 732-349-1244.



Setting the Seder Table

Jewish Treats by NJOP
njop.org

Before beginning the Seder, it is important to make certain that everything necessary is available. No Seder table is complete without the following:

1) Three Unbroken Matzot (Kosher for Passover) – Many have the custom to use shmura (specially supervised) matzah for the Seders.

2) Wine/Grape Juice (Kosher for Passover) and Wine Glasses – All participants should be given a glass or cup (minimum size of 3.3 ounces) from which to drink

the required four cups of Wine/Grape Juice.

3) The Seder Plate – It is traditional to place the following items on a special Seder plate:

Bay'tza / Roasted (hard-boiled) Egg, symbolic of the cycle of life because of its round shape and representative of the Jewish character - the more you boil them, the harder they get. The egg also represents the missing chagiga sacrifice that was offered on Passover, Sukkot and Shavuot.

Z'roa / Shank Bone (of a lamb or the bone of another kosher animal or fowl), representing the Passover lamb offering that we cannot bring today because of the

absence of the Temple.

Maror / Bitter Herbs (often horseradish), reminding participants of the bitterness and pain of slavery.

Karpas / Vegetable (usually a piece of celery, parsley or potato), which is dipped in salt water as part of the Seder ritual.

Charoset, a tasty mixture of chopped walnuts, wine, cinnamon and apples, representing the mortar the Jewish slaves used to build Pharaoh's cities (recipes may vary by community).

Chazeret / Bitter Vegetable (like romaine lettuce), which starts out sweet but becomes more bitter the longer it stays in the ground.

4) Salt Water -- The *karpas* (vegetable) is dipped in salt water as a reminder of

the tears of the Jewish slaves. Usually, the salt water is not placed on the Seder Plate, but near it.

5) Elijah's Cup -- This cup, filled with wine, is used to invite Elijah the Prophet, the harbinger of the Messianic age, to come to the Seder, and hopefully, begin our final redemption.

Editor's Note: This year, the first Seder of Pesach will be celebrated on Wednesday night, April 1. Also, many now add Miriam's Cup filled with water to reflect on the legacy of Miriam, sister of Aaron and Moses, by whose merit, according to rabbinic tradition, the Israelites had water in the desert.

Local News

Jewish War Veterans of the USA Update

“A Jewish Voice for Veterans, A Veterans Voice for Jews since 1896”

By Al Adler
March 2, 2026

Last month I mentioned the snowstorm that was blowing as I wrote my article. Well, today I am looking at 24 inches of snow piled high on my lawn. Spring can't come soon enough.

Despite the miserable weather, JWV and our Ladies Auxiliary were very busy on February 3 and February 4. Both JWV and JWV Ladies Auxiliary participated in our Capitol Hill Action Days. We visited our federal legislators and discussed our Agenda of Concerns and legislation of interest to our veterans. We met personally with Senator Andy Kim, and Congressmen Josh Gottheimer and Dr. Herb Conaway, Jr. One thing I did notice is that age has caught up with me and I need to give the job of running Capitol Hill Action Days to someone younger.

On Sunday, March 1, members of the JWV Ladies Auxiliary 178 hosted a Purim party at the Menlo Park Veterans Home. Jolie Fromm read the story of Esther and illustrated it with pictures. Refreshments were served to the residents, and each one received a bag of goodies containing hamantaschen, pretzels, candy, corn pops and fruit. A great time was had by all. Thank you to Sandra Fritts, Maxine Berger, Carol Adler, Tracey Adler, Bonnie Stein, Susan Karsh, Jolie Fromm, Nancy Weinberger and Tammy Gincel.

Later that morning the JWV Ladies Auxiliary Department of New Jersey hosted a Grant A Wish as part of National President Carol Adler's visitation to New Jersey. The resident who is terminally ill requested a portable video player. He was touched when he received this special gift.

On March 3, JWV Ladies Auxiliary National President Carol Adler, JWV National Vice Commander Selina Kanowitz, Merci Silverman and I will be going to Capitol Hill to hear our JWV National Commander Scott Stevens give his testimony before Congress. I will speak more about this event and have pictures in next month's article.

PLEASE MARK YOUR CALENDAR

The Jewish War Veterans Department of New Jersey and the JWV Ladies Au-

xiliary will be hosting the 44th Annual Legislative Breakfast on Sunday, May 3, 2026, at 9:30 AM at the Clarion Hotel and Conference Center on Route 37 East in Toms River.

This year we will be honoring Assemblywoman Melinda Kane of the 6th legislative district. Assemblywoman Kane is very active in veterans affairs, is a member of the JWV Ladies Auxiliary 126 and a gold star mother.

Our organization of the year is the Bob Woodruff Foundation. Bob Woodruff is a reporter for ABC News and was seriously injured by a roadside bomb in Iraq. The Bob Woodruff Foundation supports and helps veterans and their families.

Please come and support our honorees. The cost is only \$25 per person and checks may be sent to Bob Jacobs, 929 A Liverpool Circle, Manchester, NJ 08759; 732-691-6839. Please indicate if you require a kosher breakfast.

God bless our troops in harms way, our veterans and the United States of America.



JWVA National President Carol Adler giving greetings to members of the JWV at their National Meeting in Washington, DC



Members of the JWV Ladies Auxiliary Department of New Jersey presenting the Grant A Wish recipient his portable video player



JWV Auxiliary 178 Senior Vice-President Jolie Fromm telling the story of Purim at the Menlo Park Veterans Home



Members of the JWV and JWV Ladies Auxiliary Department of New Jersey on Capitol Hill



Members of the JWV and JWVA Department of New Jersey with Senator Andy Kim on Capitol Hill



Members of the JWV and JWVA Department of New Jersey with Assemblyman Herb Conaway, Jr. on Capitol Hill

Many congregations are conducting prayer services and classes online which may be accessible from a computer or a telephone. Contact each congregation for further information to access these events.

Jewish Federation of Ocean County Impact

YOU Made an Impact through the Jewish Federation of Ocean County – Crossroads



From Robbie Sassoon, Director of Crossroads, to the Jewish Federation of Ocean County:

I wanted to share a glimpse with you of 72 hours at Crossroads.

During this time our hotline received two high-risk calls. One was from a young woman experiencing active suicidal ideation. We worked quickly to ensure she was safely brought to the hospital. The other was a 16-year-old boy struggling with self-harm and we connected him to immediate and ongoing therapeutic support.

Simultaneously, we launched EMDR trauma training for our entire clinical team, strengthening our capacity to treat acute and complex trauma with the most effective tools available.

That same night, I attended the Crossroads Theater Shed festival which in-

cluded six plays that were written, directed, and performed by Crossroads participants. Some came with no friends or supportive community around them; others had never acted before. On that stage, they found safety, belonging, community, and a meaningful way to express themselves to a sold-out audience.

Additionally, we helped a young girl who had been expelled from school enrollment in a new school after months without structure or support. Step by step, she is regaining stability.

This is just a glimpse of 72 hours of life-saving work at Crossroads.

With gratitude.



Donate now: www.jewishoceancounty.org/IsraelRecover.

YOU Made an Impact through the Jewish Federation of Ocean County – Jewish Relief Network Ukraine

Over the past four years, the people of Ukraine have struggled to survive the ongoing conflict. The past few months have been especially challenging with brutal attacks, an historically cold winter, and widespread prolonged power outages. More and more people are without food, shelter, medicine, medical care, and other essentials. The requests for help continue to increase.

We feed tens of thousands of Jews in Ukraine on a regular basis, through distribution of food packages, operation of soup kitchens, and making home delive-

ries. Over the past couple of weeks, we delivered special food parcels that included treats for the children in honor of the Purim holiday, along with nutritious items and staple foods. In many community centers and synagogues, boxes filled rooms and lined hallways; people came by the hundreds and even thousands to claim their much awaited package. Staff and volunteers travelled to remote areas to deliver the food, sometimes on foot where the roads were impassable. Others traveled to the homes of the elderly and infirm to deliver boxes of food along with words of comfort and encouragement.

Jewish Community Calendar April 2026

Compiled by the Jewish Federation of Ocean County based on submissions from the event hosts – Events can be submitted at www.jewishoceancounty.org/calendar. Most of the Jewish Virtual University webinars are emergent with only a few days' notice and are updated on the page www.jewishoceancounty.org/jvu and our facebook page facebook.com/jewishocean.

Tuesday, March 31 and April 7, 1:00 PM (and every Tuesday) – **Grief After Loss Group** led by Rita Sason, Jewish Family and Children's Service, virtual online, 732-363-8010

Wednesday evening, April 1 – Passover begins, see page 5

Thursday, April 9, 7:00 PM – Kwibuka 32, International Day of Reflection on 1994 Genocide Against the Tutsi in Rwanda, see www.jewishoceancounty.org/jvu for details

Monday night-Tuesday, April 13-14 – Yom Hashoah / Holocaust Memorial Day, see page 30

Tuesday, April 14, 6:30 PM – Community-wide Yom Hashoah Commemoration, registration required at www.jewishoceancounty.org/yomhashoah, see ad on page 1

Thursday, April 16, 12:15 PM (and every Thursday) – **Torah with the Times: Timeless Torah, Timely Wisdom**; study and discussion of the weekly Torah portion with Rabbi Isaiah Rothstein, see www.jewishoceancounty.org/jvu for details

Thursday, April 16, 1:15 PM (and every Thursday) – **Queering the Parsha: A Weekly Study Group toward an LGBTQ+ Perspective on the Weekly Torah Portion**, with Rabbi Nikki DeBlosi, Ph.D., a Laasok program cosponsored by Keshet and A Wider Bridge, see www.jewishoceancounty.org/jvu for details

Saturday, April 18, 7:00 PM – An Evening of Music with Noah Aronson, Beth Am Shalom, 1235 Route 70, Lakewood, General Admission \$36, sponsorship opportunities available, call for reservations, 732-363-2800, see ad on page 10

Monday night-Tuesday, April 20-21 – Yom Hazikaron / Israel Memorial Day, see page 31


Tuesday night-Wednesday, April 21-22 – Yom Haatzmaut / Israel Independence Day, see page 31

Thursday, April 23, 12:00 Noon – Jewish Aid Organizations and Musical Community Building in Wartime and Postwar Shanghai – JDC Postwar Shanghai, with 2025 Fred and Ellen Lewis JDC Archive Fellow Brenna Miller, see www.jewishoceancounty.org/jvu for details

For information, contact the event host or see related publicity in this issue of The Jewish Journal.

Dr. Irit Cohen L.Ac.

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Securing Our Community

Secure Community Network Update – February Report

By Michael G. Masters
National Director & CEO
March 2, 2026

In the last several days, we have borne witness to the strength and enduring promise of liberty through the actions of the United States and Israel; we recognize the brave efforts of the members of the United States Armed Forces, the Israel Defense Forces, the intelligence agencies, and allies as they have all courageously come together to eliminate a regime of terror and those who have led it. We pray that they will return home safely as well as recognize the spirit and resiliency of all of those – to include in Iran, Israel, our allies in the Middle East, and other nations – who were, and continue to be, targeted, persecuted, and tortured by the terrorist regime of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

As we enter Purim, the story of Esther and Mordechai reminds us that communal strength rests on vigilance and the courage to act. Our history teaches that while challenges may arise suddenly, preparation and unity shape the outcome. Over the last several days and, no doubt, into the future, we will see the power of preparation and unity as we pray for an outcome that leads to a more safe, just world.

SCN had spent the last several weeks preparing for the potential of strikes on Iran by the United States and Israel. This

past weekend of February 28-March 1, that potential outcome became a reality.

As always, SCN’s team of professionals was working in real time to secure the community – from the intelligence analysts in our Jewish Security Operations Command Center™ (JSOCC™), who were monitoring the events overseas and their impact across North America, to the security professionals working to ensure Jewish life in communities across the United States and Canada could continue.

Within 24 hours of the strikes, we partnered with the Department of Homeland Security’s Office of Intelligence and Analysis and the National Fusion Center Association to co-host a briefing for nearly 1,000 federal, state, and local law enforcement professionals nationwide. In parallel, SCN and national partners issued a joint statement outlining eight practical recommendations, including our Community Guide for Event Security, to ensure local readiness, particularly for Shabbat services and upcoming Purim gatherings.

Our JSOCC™ continues to monitor and analyze threat streams in real time, coordinating closely with law enforcement partners at every level and providing timely, actionable information to community leaders nationwide.

Just days before the operation, I publi-

shed an op-ed in Jewish News Syndicate noting that when tensions escalate in the Middle East, Jewish Diaspora communities often find themselves on the front lines. Past events, such as the June 2025 U.S. airstrike on Iran’s nuclear facility, illustrate this reality. In the first hours of the 2025 strike, our JSOCC™ tracked 1,680 violent online posts directed at our community.

In this moment, our collective efforts demonstrate the power of preparedness and partnership. We are not being reactive or reflexive: SCN is leading a proactive, sustained, standards-based approach, keeping the community ahead of emerging risks and strengthening resilience so that Jewish life can continue openly and confidently.

Together, through awareness, partnership, and resolve, we will continue to meet this moment and those ahead with steadiness and purpose.

Stay safe.

The Jewish Federations of North America (JFNA) established the Secure Community Network (SCN) in 2004. The SCN is a nonprofit organization that works to ensure the safety and security of the Jewish community in North America. The SCN's mission is to help individuals and organizations develop a culture of awareness, preparedness, and resilience through training, consultation, and information sharing. The SCN works with over 300 independent communities, 146 federations, and 50 partner organizations, as well as with partners in the public, private, academic, and non-profit sectors.



War with Iran - Daily updates are available

at www.jewishoceancounty.org/israelupdate.

Donate now: www.jewishoceancounty.org/IsraelEmergency.

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What's the Recipe for Vibrant Jewish Life?

By Heather Morgan, Managing Director
JDC Global Marketing & Communications

At JDC (Joint Distribution Committee), this question is at the heart of our 111-year mission – lifting lives and strengthening communities in 70 countries. Though the ingredients for cultivating a proud Jewish future differ from place to place, the timeless value of arevut – the Talmudic notion that all Jews are responsible for each other – is always part of the mix. For the many Jews we serve around the globe, food is a crucial way they put this value into action. From JDC volunteers delivering challah to elderly, isolated Jews in Ukraine to a young leader in India making her grandmother's fish curry, Jews everywhere draw physical, spiritual, and emotional sustenance from dishes passed down generation to generation. I want to give you a taste of this dynamic Jewish world – as well as some much-needed joy – with this delicious cuisine. I hope you find the recipes as delightful as I do. Let's take inspiration from the rich and diverse culinary traditions that unite Jews everywhere.

Editor's Note: Here is one of the recipes – Anastasia's Authentic Ukrainian Pancakes. Watch future issues of the Jewish Journal for more recipes or check them all out at www.jdc.org/learn/recipe.



“My parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents taught me that if you have something to share, you should!”
~ Anastasia Agafonova, Volunteer at the JDC-supported Hesed Menachem social welfare center in Dnipro, Ukraine

- Ingredients:
- 1 medium zucchini
 - 1 onion
 - 1 carrot
 - 1 bunch dill
 - 2 tbsp. sour cream
 - 2 eggs
 - 3–4 tbsp. flour
 - 3–4 tbsp. semolina
 - Salt, to taste
 - Pepper, to taste
 - Vegetable oil, for frying



Instructions:
Grate the zucchini and carrot. Finely chop the onion and dill and add to the vegetable mixture. Add sour cream, eggs, salt, pepper, flour, and semolina. Mix everything together. Make small patties and fry them over medium heat until they're golden-brown.



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BethAmShalomLakewood

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Everything We Know About the Ethan Slater-Led Play “Marcel on the Train”

An entirely Jewish cast tells the story of Marcel Marceau, before he was a famed mime, saving Jewish children during the Holocaust.



Photo by Jamie McCarthy/Getty Images)

By Evelyn Frick
February 2, 2026
heyalma.com

For the last year and a half, there’s been a relative mime-like silence surrounding the Ethan Slater and Marshall Paillet co-written play “Marcel on the Train.” The play was first in workshop at the Williamstown Theatre Festival in July 2024, where it was revealed that the show was based upon the true history of young Marcel Marceau rescuing Jewish orphans during the Holocaust. Now, however, as the play prepares to debut Off-Broadway at the Classic Stage Company, Slater, Paillet and the

cast recently opened up at a press event. They talked about their characters, how the show came to be and why it’s like a spiritual bar mitzvah.

Here’s everything they shared:

Slater first came to the idea about four years ago when he learned there had been discussion in the 20th century of whether or not silent film star Charlie Chaplin was Jewish. He googled “Charlie Chaplin Jewish” – stars, they’re just like us – and discovered that he wasn’t. Yet, he also gathered that Marcel Marceau was, and that before Marceau was a famous mime, he was a member of the Jewish resistance during the Holocaust. This was news to Slater, who attended Jewish day school and Jewish summer camp and prides himself on knowing notable Jews. And so, Slater called Marshall Paillet, who himself has French and Jewish ancestry. It just so happened that he did this the day after Paillet’s son was born. “I called Marshall – I’m sure he told this story – I said, Marshall, how’s Kellie? How’s the baby?” He relayed to me, with a grin. “He said, they’re great.



Photo by Andrew Patino/Regular People

I said, wonderful. This is not the time ... But I have an idea.”

The result is “Marcel on the Train.” The show is a fictionalized account of a train ride that the young Marcel (Ethan Slater) takes in 1943. The play is a bit of a thriller, Slater told me. But it’s also filled with joy and diversion in the face of fear, thanks to moments of miming. “So the kind of legend goes, to keep [the children] quiet and comfortable, [Marcel] would do bits and those bits would become the foundation of what would become his act,” said Paillet, who also serves as the show’s director.

For Slater’s part, he has what he called “very casual” mime training. “I feel like I have a lot of the tools,” he explained. “Over the course of this development process, I worked with movement consultants and students of Marcel Marceau who worked with him directly. I just sort of glean what I can and make sure it’s embodied and true. Mime is an art form that people devote their lives to. And so I’ve tried to devote the last four years of development to doing it justice.”

Marcel’s compatriots on the train ride are a gaggle of Jewish 12-year-olds, played by adult actors: Tedra Milan as Berthe, Maddie Corman as Etienne, Alex Wyse as Henri and Max Gordon Moore as Adolphe. Milan, who you might know as adult Nellie in “Leopoldstadt,” Fraidy in “Becoming Eve” or Dr. Walsh in season one of “The Pitt,” elucidated that Berthe is the “new girl” of the group and thinks Marcel is deeply unfunny. “She’s also a realist. She’s also really angry, for really good reasons,” she noted. Milan took over the role from Julie Benko, who por-

Continued on page 19

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The Haggadah instructs us: In every generation, each person must see themselves as having personally left Egypt. This Passover, that ancient text summons us to action. We must embrace the responsibility to strengthen Jewish life for future generations, stand with Israel as it heals and grows stronger, and protect our communities amidst the rise in antisemitism. Our ancestors dreamed of a future where Jewish life could flourish freely. We're building that future together—As One.

As One, We Inspire Jewish Connection

Every year, we gather around the Seder table as the youngest child asks the Four Questions. This sacred ritual ensures our traditions are passed down to our children and grandchildren. With your partnership, we cultivate these moments of connection and belonging by supporting Jewish day schools, summer camps, Israel travel experiences, and inclusive spaces for Jews of all backgrounds. By deepening Jewish identity and belonging, we ensure Jewish life flourishes for generations—As One.

As One, We Stand United Against Hate

The Seder calls us to taste bitterness so we never forget the dangers our people have faced. That ancient warning echoes today amidst rising antisemitism. Our collective response has been powerful but antisemitism persists on campuses, online, and in our streets. With your generosity, we can strengthen security, fiercely advocate for our people's safety, and empower our communities to protect themselves.

By combating antisemitism and protecting Jewish institutions, we uphold our sacred responsibility to safeguard Jewish life—As One.

As One, We Rebuild Israel

Just as our ancestors found the courage to start anew after their liberation from Egypt, we offer unwavering support to Israel as it recovers and rebuilds from the devastation of October 7th. Your continued support helps build houses for displaced families, launch trauma care centers nationwide, and deploy volunteers across Israel to serve communities in need. The story of Exodus teaches us that we can transform devastation into possibility and despair into hope when we stand together—As One.

FedBeat from JFNA – Jewish Federations of North America

jewishfederations.org

Four Years On, Federations' Commitment to Ukraine is Unwavering



From JFNA
February 24, 2026

As the world marks the fourth anniversary of the full-scale war in Ukraine – and the beginning of what continues to be the largest refugee crisis in Europe since World War II – Jewish Federations reflect on the unbelievable reality that the Ukrainian people have suffered four years of unimaginable loss, displacement, and death.

Our hearts continue to ache alongside theirs, but we also marvel at the resilience they've shown both at home, amidst continuous Russian bombardment, and abroad, as strangers in foreign lands. From the very beginning, Jewish Federations of North America vowed to stand with the Ukrainian people for as long as it took, and that work continues today – as shown in the February 2026 impact report.

All 141 Federations, as well as our partners, the Jewish Agency, the Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), and World ORT, have collectively raised and allocated over \$100 million in humanitarian aid to meet the urgent needs of Ukrainians. In 2025, Federations allocated just over \$5.2 million in emergency funds for Ukraine. This aid was distributed to the Jewish Agency and JDC for ongoing work, and in smaller amounts to organizations such as Chabad to support the celebration of Passover and the High Holy Days.

Utilizing the existing strong communal infrastructure on the ground, which has been built over time since the fall of the Soviet Union, and decades of global Jewish experience in crisis management, Jewish Federations significantly boosted Ukrainians' abilities to survive the difficult war with Russia. Together, we've focused our efforts on six key areas, including volunteerism and humanitarian aid.

By April 2025, Federations' humanita-

rian support made a significant impact:

- Over 507,000 people have received assistance.
- 55,500+ vulnerable Ukrainian Jews have received support from JDC, including food, medicine, and home-care.
- 1.6+ million pounds of humanitarian aid – including food, coal, heaters, and cooking stoves – has been delivered to Jewish communities in Ukraine and Moldova.
- Eight Trauma Support Centers have enabled over 3,700 individuals to cope with war-related stress and psychological trauma.
- 13,000+ refugees were safely evacuated through coordinated efforts, including specialized transport for elderly and disabled individuals.

This work has touched all aspects of Ukrainians' lives. Through Federations' partnership with the Jewish Agency, hundreds of Ukrainian children have been able to learn, connect, and celebrate Jewish life at summer and seasonal camps. In the summer of 2025, Jewish Agency camps served 245 participants with 37 local and Israeli counsellors, while seasonal day camps served 264 campers with 48 counsellors. Partner summer camps in Ukraine served an additional 352 campers with 42 counsellors.

ORT Ukraine, another Federation core partner, has helped fill the gaps in education for children throughout the country. During the 2025-2026 school year, it served 8,258 students across 20 institutions, including 3,906 students attending Jewish ORT and ORT-affiliated schools. Despite the constant disruption of war, ORT provides safe learning environments that ensure that Jewish education and community life remain possible.

Jewish Federations' Global Volunteer Hub (GVH), launched in 2022 with initial core anchor partners the Jewish Agency and JDC, has also played a pivotal role in supporting Ukrainian refugees in the initial rapid response phase and in mental health crisis needs. Over the past four years, the GVH has coordinated over 300 volunteer placements with 21 partner organizations in 9 countries. GVH volunteers are on a different "front line," far from the battlefield, but close to the emotional anguish and suffering that Ukrainian refugees experience.

Volunteers with the GVH have shown incredible dedication, often returning to volunteer with Ukrainian refugees multiple times. Lidia Zambilovici, a volunteer with roots in Moldova, has worked with Ukrainians of all ages; most notably, teenagers at summer camps in her home country. Mother-daughter duo Inna and

Sophia Muntyan utilizes Hibuki therapy to help young children and their parents cope with trauma, addressing their widespread mental health needs.

Despite the unprecedented work we've done so far, the need remains. We cannot afford to stop.

Joint Security Guidance for Jewish Institutions Following Strikes on Iran



From JFNA
February 28, 2026

Following strikes by the United States and Israel on the Islamic Republic of Iran, Jewish Federations of North America, Secure Community Network (SCN), ADL (Anti-Defamation League), Community Security Service (CSS), and Community Security Initiative (CSI) of New York, recommend that Jewish communities across North America remain vigilant and maintain heightened security measures.

Tensions involving Iran contribute to an already elevated threat environment driven in part by state-sponsored actors, foreign terrorist organizations, violent extremists, and opportunist groups. Moreover, Iran has threatened, both directly and through its proxies, to target the Jewish community, Israel, and the United States should they be attacked.

All parties remain in close contact with national partners and key stakeholders, including working with federal, state, and local law enforcement partners and Jewish communal organizations to monitor developments, share information, and ensure appropriate security measures are implemented as circumstances require.

We will continue to actively monitor events and proactively share any relevant information. To report incidents or suspicious activity, please contact your local law enforcement agency, local reporting authority, and security professional.

This group recommends that communities reemphasize the previously released Eight Best Practice Recommendations (below).

Eight Best Practice Recommendations:

1. Ensure awareness and coordination with law enforcement and the Jewish Community Security Initiative and/or security professionals servicing your community or region.
2. Extend the protections or security of your event's/facility's perimeter as far as possible.
3. Open events only to identifiable individuals and pre-screened invitation lists (e.g., no mass emails to the broad public).
4. Require registration and verification of registrants for events open to the public.
5. Provide details of location, time, and other information only upon confirmed registration.
6. Allow access control (locks and entrance procedures) to known, confirmed registrants/attendees into the facility/event.
7. Remain vigilant and report suspicious activity.
8. Add armed on-duty or off-duty law enforcement, private security, and/or volunteer teams as additional layers of protection wherever possible.

FedBeat from JFNA – Jewish Federations of North America

jewishfederations.org

Federations Study: 1 in 4 Jewish Adults Struggle Financially



From JFNA
February 25, 2026

Nearly 1 in 4 Jewish adults (23%) are financially vulnerable – meaning they rely on government benefits, struggle to pay their bills, or have less than \$1,000 in savings – while an additional 12% say they are just managing to make ends meet, according to a new study by Jewish Federations of North America, with support from TEN: Together Ending Need and The Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation.

“Many people don’t realize the extent to which members of our Jewish community face financial issues, but this eye-opening data tells an important story that we all need to be attuned to,” said Jessica Mehlman, Jewish Federations’ Associate Vice President of Impact & Planning. “When nearly a quarter of our community is struggling, we cannot look away. These numbers underscore the urgent need to strengthen the safety net and ensure that every Jew, regardless of income, feels welcomed, valued, and connected.”

There are some segments of the Jewish community that face more financial challenges than others. For example:

- a) 68% of low-income Jews lack a college degree.
- b) 27% of low-income Jews are divorced or separated women.

The study also found that:

- a) 57% of financially vulnerable Jews have no emergency savings.
- b) 87% of financially vulnerable Jews could not cover more than three months of expenses with their savings.
- c) 88% of financially vulnerable Jews rely on Medicaid.

The report makes clear that financial pressures affect how Jewish adults access, participate in, and experience Jewish life. While respondents consistently say they highly value their Jewish identity and strive to live according to Jewish values, many cite cost as a prohibitive barrier to engaging in activities.

The survey highlights a “belonging gap,” in which 48% of financially vulnerable Jews felt their local Jewish community cares for people who are in need. This, in turn, makes them feel less connected and less positive about their community and less cared for. The Jewish community prides itself on giving tzedakah, but with growing affordability challenges, those in need still report that they do not feel supported. This gap, leaders warn, threatens long-term communal cohesion.

The release of this data comes as Jewish Federations continue to expand programs that support economic security, mental health, food access, and pathways to community participation, including strong support for Jewish Human Service organizations. In addition, Jewish Federations are working with a pilot cohort of federations to strengthen and expand their strategies on financial security. With one in four struggling financially and one in ten relying on government benefits, Jewish Federations’ public affairs team is committed to ensuring that all members of the Jewish community can live dignified lives, advocating for policies that provide financial security for the vulnerable.

Federation leaders say the findings will help guide future investments and encourage philanthropists and community organizations to strengthen the social safety net. “Financial vulnerability is shaping Jewish life in profound ways. From participation to long-term communal resilience,” said Rachel Sumekh, CEO of TEN: Together Ending Need, which organizes funders on the issue. “This is a moment for funders, Federations, and lay leaders to strengthen our communal safety nets and invest in the infrastructure that allows every Jew and American to live with dignity.”

Federations’ Impact – Israel and Overseas

From Jewish Federations of North America (JFNA)
March 2026

Since the outbreak of war with Iran on Saturday, February 28, we have seen an extraordinary return on Jewish Federation investments in the ongoing work of our core partners, the Jewish Agency for Israel and JDC, and through emergency funding. In this moment, rather than looking to implement critical new systems in real time – they are in place and being activated. Thanks to you, Israel is much better prepared to manage this new crisis because of the capacity and heightened response capabilities Federations helped establish.

From rapid financial relief for victims, to an enhanced national mental health infrastructure and coordinated local support for tens of thousands of IDF reservists and their families, these investments are delivering measurable impact exactly when Israel needs them most.

The programs below are a small sample of the incredible breadth of our communities’ philanthropic impact and demonstrate what true ROI (Return on Investment) looks like in emergency philanthropy: systems that scale, partnerships that activate instantly, and platforms flexible enough to meet needs we could not have predicted. Jewish Federations’ investments are not only responding to today’s war with Iran – they are strengthening Israel’s resilience for whatever comes next.

Despite these important advances, millions of Israelis continue to run to shelter multiple times a day, the conflict is widening regionally, and the path ahead remains uncertain. As Federations again

respond in real time, we are identifying new and emerging needs – alongside evolving longer term recovery priorities that will ultimately fall under Rebuild Israel.

The Jewish Agency’s Fund for Victims of Terror – Created in 2002, the Jewish Agency’s Fund for Victims of Terror (FVOT) is a cornerstone of Israel’s emergency response. Within 48 hours of a direct missile strike, families whose homes have been hit receive immediate financial grants enabling them to buy basic supplies and begin rebuilding their lives. Because we invested in this scalable platform years ago, assistance today is delivered with speed, professionalism, and compassion – offering not only financial relief, but the powerful reassurance that world Jewry stands with every victim.

JDC’s Mental Health and Wellbeing Initiative – This national initiative has placed mental health specialists in 200 municipalities and provided accredited mental wellness interventions countrywide. Dedicated coordinators oversee these efforts and help align the work of municipal departments, civil society and nonprofit organizations. In parallel, a national response database provides ready-to-use, evidence-based solutions – ranging from healthylifestyle programs and mental health support to innovative remote care technologies – that municipalities can quickly adapt to local needs. Experience has shown that these interventions are heavily used in moments of crisis. Today they stand ready for implementation.

Editor’s Note: The Jewish Federation of Ocean County is part of these achievements through its support of and participation in the JFNA system.



HELP WANTED

Volunteer Opportunities – You can make an IMPACT!

ENGAGING ADULT COMMUNITIES

The goal here is to find ways to engage the Jewish populations in adult communities/Shalom Clubs with the Jewish Federation and to connect them to other Jewish activities/opportunities.

- Identify contacts and key “network nodes” in these communities to serve as influencers, networkers, and communicators
- Manage and follow through on ongoing communications and sharing opportunities with these networks
- Help identify/explore/shape opportunities that can be offered/delivered to these communities to help strengthen ties with the Federation/Jewish community
 - Films
 - Speakers
 - Topics
 - Sponsorships of programs

IDENTIFYING/EVALUATING GRANT OPPORTUNITIES

Identify and vet possible grant opportunities for the Federation.

- Explore opportunities for Israel, overseas grantmaking that fall within the Federation’s priority/focus areas
- Help evaluate effectiveness and impact of grants through these possible partners
- Can also include identifying opportunities locally for the Federation to have an impact...beyond our current partners/grantees – what would enable us to maximize impact?

HELPING PROMOTE FEDERATION ACTIVITIES/EVENTS

We can always do a better job promoting our activities and impact, through media, email/other engagement, and delivery of promotional materials.

- Identification of new places to deliver materials
- Ongoing updates/communications to local papers and adult community newsletters
- Ongoing updates/communications/promotions through local synagogues/Chabads

PLANNING EVENTS

We organize approximately 3 in-person events a year, to enable our community to come together, connect, and celebrate (hopefully) with each other.

- We are looking for people to help spearhead the framing and organizing of these events
- While this can include logistics and actual set-up, prep...this ideally includes positioning, promotion, and framing of these events
- This also can include volunteering on-site and engaging with guests/others at these events... ideally to help build affinity and connection to the Federation and Jewish community

HEROES AGAINST HATE

The opportunity for this program goes beyond just event promotion and set-up. This can be a platform for expanding reach in the broader community and engaging other groups/individuals in the mechanism of countering hate, spearheaded by the Federation.

- Sticking with the framework for Heroes awards discussed thus far...help identify other groups, organizations, places to look for and nominate Heroes
- Explore ways to expand awareness of the awards and the event
- Expand recruitment of participants and sponsors for the event/program

PJ PARENT AMBASSADOR

We now have over 1700 kids participating in our PJ Library program. We’re looking for some parents who can commit to:

- Identify the needs of families, and develop engagement opportunities that meet their needs
- Develop, plan and organize intimate small-scale engagement opportunities at family friendly destinations or home-based gatherings
- Encourage parents to be involved in planning and organizing programs and gatherings

Contact Avi at kotleram@gmail.com for more information and to get started!



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Get to know Iris Bahr before she comes to our community!

If you are planning to see one of her upcoming shows, contact the Jewish Federation of Ocean County office for a \$10 discount link.

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IRIS BAHR

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Scam Alert from the Social Security Administration

SSA Office of the Inspector General Warns Public of Surge in Fraudulent "Social Security Statement" Emails.



<https://oig.ssa.gov>
February 19, 2026

The Social Security Administration (SSA) Office of the Inspector General (OIG) is warning the public about a significant increase in government imposter scam emails that falsely claim to provide access to a recipient's Social Security statement. Clicking links within the email may lead to identity theft, financial loss, or compromised data. "We are seeing a sharp increase in fraudulent emails designed to look like official Social Security Administration communications," said Michelle L. Anderson, Assistant Inspector General for Audit as First Assistant. "These messages are not from Social Security. Anyone who receives one should delete it immediately and report it."

Official SSA communications originate from email addresses ending in ".gov." These scam emails are designed to appear legitimate and often use official-looking language, logos, colors, and formatting to mislead recipients into clicking links or downloading attachments. Once clicked, the links may install malware or direct victims to fake websites intended to steal personal and financial information.

These emails are not from the Social Security Administration. Common warning signs include:

- Messages claiming your Social Security statement is ready to download
- Embedded links or attachments labeled as statements or documents
- Messages creating urgency or pressure to act immediately
- Sender addresses that do not end in ".gov"

What the public should do:

- Do not click links or open attachments in unsolicited messages.
- Do not respond or provide personal information.
- To access or set up your Social Security account, go directly to ssa.gov/myaccount.
- Report suspicious emails immediately.

If You are a Victim – Individuals who clicked a link, downloaded an attachment, or provided personal information should take immediate action:

- Stop all communication with the suspected scammer.
- Contact financial institutions to protect accounts.
- Report the incident to the SSA OIG at oig.ssa.gov/report.
- File a complaint with the FBI's Internet Crime Complaint Center at ic3.gov.
- Report the scam to the Federal Trade Commission at ftc.gov.
- If financial loss occurs, contact local law enforcement.

Reminder – The SSA and SSA OIG will never:

- Demand immediate payment
- Send unsolicited attachments or direct download links
- Threaten legal action, arrest, or benefit suspension because you don't agree to pay immediately
- Ask you to pay with gift cards, prepaid debit cards, wire transfers, cryptocurrency, cash, or gold bars
- Offer to move your money to protect it

SSA OIG urges the public to remain vigilant and share this information with friends, family, and community members, particularly older adults, who are frequently targeted by these scams. For more information on Social Security-related scams or to report suspected fraud, visit ssa.gov/scam.

New Jersey Government Warnings about Scams



From nj.gov

Don't Fall for Fake State Pension Consultation Emails

Scammers are impersonating the New Jersey Division of Pensions and Benefits, sending emails offering free pension consultations. The emails are sent from .com addresses instead of .gov and direct you to schedule Zoom appointments through fraudulent websites. They want to steal your information, compromise your pension account, or redirect your payments. The real Division of Pensions and Benefits does not use Zoom for appointments or send unsolicited consultation offers. If you get an email offering pension help, don't click any links. Go directly to the official NJDPB website or call using the number listed on their official site.



Scammers Are Sending Fake Toll Payment Texts

Scammers are texting New Jersey residents claiming they have unpaid tolls and threatening late fees. The messages link to fake websites designed to look like the Motor Vehicle Commission and steal your payment information. The fraudulent sites use URLs ending in .help instead of .gov. The NJ Motor Vehicle Commission does not send texts about toll payments – only appointment reminders. If you get a text about unpaid tolls, forward it to 7726 (SPAM) and delete it. Don't click the link or provide any information. To check your toll account, manually type your toll service's official website into your browser.

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If you or someone you know is a veteran and requires transportation services, contact the Ocean Inc. Veterans Transportation Coordinator, Carmine Czapla at (732) 496-3704 or via email at cczapla@oceaninc.org. During the registration process, be sure to have available a Drivers License, Military ID or Veterans VA ID and a copy of your DD214 Form.

Ethan Slater

Continued from page 10

trayed Berthe in Williamstown and was originally cast in the CSC production. (Benko left to fill in for Shaina Taub as Emma Goldman in “Ragtime.”)

Etienne is in hiding in a Catholic orphanage before the train ride. “She is scared, and she has seen way too much loss for a young woman,” Corman said. “And meeting up with Marcel opens her up to some hope and some light and some magic.” Conversely, Wyse’s Henri is the brash and bold one with some class-clown energy. He’s a dash fatalistic too, according to Wyse, but that balances out with the much-needed laughs he brings to the show.

Finally, Adolphe, an admittedly tough name for a Jewish tween, is in a hurry to grow up and be a man. But as Gordon Moore relayed, he’s not quite there yet. “He’s not a bully, but sometimes he might accidentally fall into it, and at the same time be incredibly sensitive,” he revealed. “The spirit of all the kids is that they’re in this impossible situation.

They’re orphaned, they’re in the middle of a war, they’re running for their lives, and all the circumstances of the story conspire to make them want to not be kids anymore.”

Meanwhile, Actor Alex Serotsky plays all the true adult roles in the show. This includes benevolent characters like Marcel’s father, but he also portrays “The Man,” a mysterious, antagonistic character called who stops the train. For Serotsky, whose grandfather escaped pogroms in Eastern Europe and later passed down recollections of family who did not, this particular character evokes complex emotions. “In some ways, I’m trying very hard not to lean into the clichés of it, because we have seen so many of that scene in plays, in movies over the years,” Serotsky described. “The beauty of the scene is that we learn even this man who has boarded the train is complicated.”

Notably, the entire company is composed of Jewish actors. When I asked Marshall Paillet if this was intentional on his and Slater’s part, the answer was a quick yes. “We decided early on we were interested in a Jewish cast,” he offered, also poin-



Photo by Andrew Patino/Regular People

ting out that nearly the entire rehearsal room, including designers and stage managers, is Jewish. “The point of it wasn’t so we could have conversations about Jewishness or Judaism [in the rehearsal room]. That isn’t the point. But the point is that we could if we wanted to, because everyone has a stake in it.”

In my conversations with the cast, the thing that perhaps stuck with this writer the most was an assertion of Max Gordon Moore’s that “The main thrust [of the play] is that these children and this young man got on a train together and that train car, that trip, is what turned them each into the person they became.” In other words, the play is “spiritually” a

bar or bat mitzvah for the characters.

When I asked Ethan what he thought of this, he became reflective. He told me he often said that at its heart, “Marcel on the Train” is about how children have the right to grow up without the fear of being hunted or killed. From there, as our interview wound down, it was hard for the conversation to not drift towards the violence tearing apart families from Israel and Palestine to Minneapolis. “Now we are seeing soldiers, and we are seeing police separating families. Children are in the crosshairs. And it is horrifying. I grew up with the credo ‘Never again’ repeated over and over and over again,” Slater expressed somberly. “Not to take it back to the play, but in some ways this play is: What do you do in the face of powerlessness? And [the answer] is you help in the ways that you can.”

Evelyn Frick (she/they) is a writer and associate editor at Hey Alma. She graduated from Vassar College in 2019 with a Bachelor of Arts in English Literature. In her spare time, she’s a comedian and contributor for Reductress and The Onion.



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Deuteronomy/Devarim 8:7-8

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“This connected them to their identities as human beings.”

Counting the Days: How Jews Clung to the Hebrew Calendar as Nazis Tried to Erase It

A new exhibition at Yad Vashem highlights the extraordinary efforts made, often at risk of death, to preserve and mark the Jewish holidays during the darkest of times.



This photo, taken just after the liberation by the Soviet army in January 1945, shows a group of children behind barbed wire fencing in the Oswiecim (Auschwitz) Nazi concentration camp. (AP Photo)



A Purim grogger (noisemaker) that Kalmen Micenmacher made his son Marcel while he was in a French transit camp, before he and his wife were murdered in Auschwitz (Yad Vashem)



A High Holiday prayer book, entitled “The Cry of Captivity,” written from memory by Jewish prisoners at a POW camp in Siberia during the Holocaust, using cardboard from soldiers’ tobacco packages (Yad Vashem)

By Zev Stub
January 28, 2026
timesofisrael.com

While hiding from the Nazis for more than two years, Israel Sheiner came up with a creative solution to ensure that his family would be able to observe Shabbat and the Jewish holidays properly: He calculated the dates from memory and wrote a makeshift Hebrew calendar.

Finding refuge in the home of Matjas Franciszek, a Polish farmer who agreed to take Sheiner in along with his wife and four children, Sheiner used paper and ink provided by Franciszek to design an ex-

quisite calendar that would guide them through the Hebrew years of 5703-5704 (1942-1944). His family would pray and say psalms using books that he had also handwritten from memory.

In October 1944, Sheiner suddenly felt unsure about whether his calculation for the day of the Yom Kippur fast was accurate or off by a day. After some consideration, he made a decision: His children would fast on the day he thought was more likely to be the “real” Yom Kippur, while he would fast for two days to cover both possibilities. “After the war, they were able to check, and it turned out that the day his family had fasted was correct,” said Michael Tal, head of artifacts at Yad Vashem, Israel’s national Holocaust museum and memorial. “Hiding in the home of this farmer, one of the Righteous Among the Nations, this was how the family survived and maintained its identity during this impossible time.”

Tal is the curator of a new exhibition in Yad Vashem’s synagogue that highlights some of the courageous and ingenious ways Jews were able to preserve the calendar and celebrate holidays as they endured Nazi persecution. “I’ve always been fascinated with the challenges that Jews in the ghettos and camps faced as they struggled to continue their religious existence,” Tal said. “Connecting to the Hebrew calendar is something that connected them to their families, to their identities as human beings, and to the long history of the Jewish people. It had the power to give them strength for a moment amidst all the chaos and difficulties.”

The new exhibition is designed to complement a display of synagogue artifacts from destroyed European communities that already exists in Yad Vashem’s synagogue. It bridges the story of Jewish life in Europe before the Holocaust – told through Torah ornaments, ark fragments and sacred vessels – with the tale of how religious life continued after those communities were annihilated, Tal said.

The exhibit follows a number of other installations that Yad Vashem has unveiled in recent months, including a new outdoor audiovisual show and a display of personal possessions from Holocaust survivors. Items were curated from Yad Vashem’s vast collections center, which includes a five-story building housing millions of pages of documentation



A calendar handwritten from memory by Shlomo Joseph Sheiner in Poland during the Holocaust (Yad Vashem)



Michael Tal, director of the Artifacts Department at Yad Vashem, January 11, 2026 (Zev Stub/Times of Israel)

and tens of thousands of artifacts gathered over the years, including artwork, photographs, and family heirlooms. “There’s a new energy here lately, after years when relatively few new exhibits were launched,” Tal noted.

Timeless artifacts

The exhibit opens with several calendars collected from ghettos and camps across Europe. One was written in the Theresienstadt Ghetto by Avraham Hellmann, a cantor who made extensive efforts to bury the dead according to Jewish law. Another, written by Mordechai Weiss in Siberia, tracks important events in Jewish history alongside the dates in 5705 (1944-1945). A third display shows the last calendar written from memory by Rabbi Yaakov Avigdor in the Buchenwald concentration camp, after SS guards repeatedly confiscated and destroyed previous versions.

Avigdor’s son later explained why his father put so much emphasis on maintaining the calendar. “Even the Muselmann on the verge of death would muster the strength to keep living when he was told in whispers about an approaching holiday, like Purim or Yom Kippur,” Rabbi Isaac Avigdor said, employing a term used among the prisoners for their fellow inmates. “Only a Holocaust survivor can appreciate that.”



A Rosh Hashanah machzor prayer book written from memory by Naftali Stern during the Holocaust (Yad Vashem)



The ‘Scroll of Hitler’ tells the story of Hitler’s rise to power in the style of the biblical Scroll of Esther. (Yad Vashem)

The exhibition moves on to document stories from the Jewish holidays. For Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year, Naftali Stern wrote a mahzor, or High Holiday prayer book, from memory on pieces of cement bags, which he acquired in exchange for valuable bread rations at the Wolfsberg labor camp. After he was liberated, he continued to use it for prayers every year until the pages crumbled, Tal said. He later donated it to Yad Vashem.

Other items from the High Holidays include a shofar sounded at great personal risk in the Theresienstadt ghetto, and a beautifully designed prayer book, entitled “The Cry of Captivity,” written from memory by Mordecai Glick and Shlomo Ullman at a POW camp in Siberia, using cardboard from soldiers’ tobacco packages.

For Sukkot, the exhibit gathers testimonies from Yad Vashem’s archives about Jews who risked their lives to perform the commandment to sit in a Sukkah

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Counting the Days

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booth during the holiday. In one case, the Talmudic prohibition against using a stolen Sukkah led to a question asked of a rabbi in the Kovno Ghetto: Could wood salvaged from Nazi builders be used to construct one? A leading authority in the ghetto, Rabbi Ephraim Oshry, ruled that it could.

Hanukkah, marking the victory of the Maccabees with the symbolism of light defeating darkness, was a particularly meaningful holiday for Jews during the war, Tal noted. Alongside several menorahs lit in the ghettos, a quote on the wall tells the story of what happened in one camp when Nazi guards didn't allow the Jews to light fires on the night of the holiday. "On the second day... a miracle happened, and there was a sudden power outage," the statement reads. "So we had to light candles."

For the Purim holiday, a seven-chapter "Scroll of Hitler," written by a teacher in Casablanca in 1944, told the story of Hitler's rise to power and the Final Solution in the style of the Scroll of Esther.

At the Passover exhibit, a quote on the wall by Rachel Auerbach describes how



An exhibit at Yad Vashem tells how Jews preserved the calendar as they endured Nazi persecution. (Yad Vashem)

Jews in the Warsaw Ghetto gathered for the Seder right before launching their famous uprising against the Nazis in April 1943. "She described how, just like the rabbis in the Haggadah gathered in Bnei Brak to discuss the Exodus from Egypt, they were gathering to discuss their rebellion, making the analogy of their story with the ancient Hebrews," Tal noted.

The exhibit, on permanent display at Yad Vashem, offers a glimpse into Holocaust life at a time when weeks and months lost their meaning amidst death and hunger, Tal said. "These efforts to hold on to time during the war were, in themselves, acts of preserving humanity," Tal said. "These stories show how Jewish life and tradition continued to endure even during those terrible times."

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JEWISH FAMILY AND *changing lives...*

Navigating Mental Health During Passover

By Avery Kannatt, MSW Intern
 Jewish Family & Children's Service

As families across the Jewish world prepare for Passover, kitchens are scrubbed and grocery lists grow longer by the day. The holiday that celebrates freedom can sometimes leave many of us feeling anything but free. Between the financial strain of hosting, the emotional weight of family dynamics, and the pressure to create a “perfect” Seder, Passover can become a significant source of stress.

In many Jewish homes, Passover preparation begins weeks in advance. The deep cleaning, menu planning, and ritual observance can carry practical and emotional demands. Traditions connect us to generations past, and with that connection can come a sense of responsibility. This can include honoring our ancestors, maintaining standards, and ensuring our children experience the holiday the right way. For those balancing work, parenting, and caregiving, the expectations can feel overwhelming.

Mental health professionals say that holidays often intensify existing stressors. Dr. Jonathan Haidt, a social psychologist known for his work on community and well-being, has spoken about how shared rituals can strengthen bonds, but also create pressure when expectations are rigid. While Passover rituals are deeply meaningful, the drive for perfection can overshadow the purpose of the holiday itself.

Family dynamics can add another layer of complexity. The Seder table brings to-

gether multiple generations, differing political views, varying levels of religious observance, and sometimes unresolved tensions. For individuals already managing anxiety or depression, this concentrated family time can be emotionally draining. Young adults returning home, interfaith couples navigating traditions, or those grieving the absence of a loved one may find the holiday emotionally upsetting at times.

There is also the financial stress. Kosher foods for Passover and hosting large gatherings can strain already tight budgets. In a time when many families are navigating economic uncertainty, the added expenses can fuel anxiety.

So how can we approach Passover in a way that protects our mental health while preserving its meaning?

First, redefine freedom for yourself. The story of the Exodus reminds us that liberation is not only physical, but emotional. Give yourself permission to simplify. Not every dish needs to be homemade. Not every custom must be observed perfectly. A meaningful Seder is built on presence, not perfection.

Second, communicate boundaries with compassion. If certain topics spark conflict at the table, consider setting gentle expectations in advance. It is okay to say, “I’d love for tonight to focus on being together.” Protecting your peace is not selfish, but is responsible.

Third, build in moments of rest. Step outside for fresh air. Take a short walk between courses. If you are hosting, ask for

Continued on page 27

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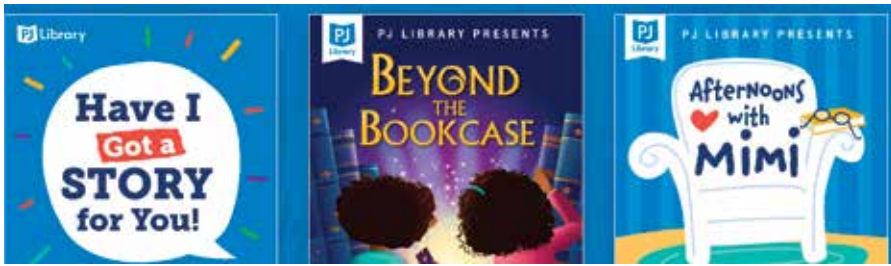


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Mental Health

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help. Delegating is not a sign of failure, but an act of community.

Finally, check in with yourself and others. This Passover, ask not only the Four Questions, but also: How am I really feeling? Who at this table might need extra support? A simple and genuine conversation can make someone feel less alone.

Passover is a celebration of resilience.

Jewish ancestors carried hope through unimaginable hardship. Honoring that legacy does not require exhausting ourselves. By approaching the holiday with flexibility, compassion, and awareness of our mental health, we can create Seders that feel not only traditional, but truly freeing.

This year, may we remember that freedom includes the freedom to care for our own well-being.

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Yom Hashoah, Holocaust Memorial Day

Jewish Treats by NJOP
njop.org

Yom Hashoah, is observed each year on the 27th of Nissan, unless that date falls adjacent to Shabbat (on Friday). This year, the 27th of Nissan occurs on Monday night-Tuesday, April 13-14.

Jews around the world will mark Yom Hashoah (Officially Yom Ha'zikaron La'shoah V'ha'g'vurah, which translates to "The Day of Memorial for the Holocaust and the Heroism," generally shortened to Yom Hashoah). In Israel, the day is marked by official ceremonies, flags at half-mast and, most famously, by a siren marking a moment of silence during

which traffic comes to a standstill.

When World War II ended and the world was finally clearly aware of the incredible devastation wrought in Europe, there were no words sufficient to properly express the Jewish people's grief. While mourning for their own nation's soldiers, the world was faced with accepting the fact that the Nazis had purposefully and systematically murdered six million Jewish men, women and children as well as several million others whom the Nazi's classified as "lesser human beings."

The term "Holocaust" is a word of Greek origin used to describe massacres. As it came to be applied to the events in Europe in the 1940s, the term emerged as

the name for this highly specific genocide. This was strengthened by the release of the 1978 NBC mini-series of the same title.

In Hebrew, the Holocaust is referred to as Shoah. Shoah means calamity. Similar to the term Holocaust, the term "Shoah" gained further usage after the release of the 1985 French documentary entitled "Shoah." The film condensed over 300 hours worth of interviews into 9.5 hours and brought the hard-hitting facts of the Holocaust into reality.

In traditional communities, the events of the Holocaust are referred to as "Churban Europe" or "The Churban," a term which parallels the destruction of the To-

rah learning centers in Europe with the destruction of the Holy Temple. Many of the more traditional communities mark a day of mourning for the victims of the Holocaust on already established traditional days of universal mourning, either the Tenth of Tevet or the Ninth of Av.



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Israel's Memorial Day and Independence Day

By Sarah Rochel Hewitt
Jewish Treats by NJOP

I) The State of Israel's independence, as well as its continued survival, is a modern day miracle. But, it has come at great cost in human lives to its citizens. Therefore, before Israel celebrates its independence, Israel honors the memory of those who gave their lives for their country. On the 4th of Iyar, *Yom Ha'zikaron*, Memorial Day is observed.

Memorial Day in Israel is not a day of picnics, fairs and fireworks. To honor the fallen soldiers, sirens are sounded simultaneously throughout the entire country for one minute, once in the morning and once in the afternoon. As the alarm pierces the air, all traffic comes to a halt and everyone stands for a moment of silence in honor of those who have fallen.

What is the purpose of silence? Speech is one of humankind's most powerful tools and is one of the traits that humanity "shares" with God. It was with the power of speech that God created the world ("And God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light."). People use their power of speech to connect with each other. Observing a minute of silence forces us to disconnect from those around us and to reflect on both the void created by these great losses, and the miracle of our own survival.

II) On the fifth day of the Hebrew month of Iyar, in the year 5708, corresponding to May 14, 1948, the State of Israel was born. On that day, the British Mandate was terminated and David Ben-Gurion declared:

...This right is the natural right of the Jewish people to be masters of their own fate, like all other nations, in their own sovereign State.

Accordingly, we, members of the people's council, representatives of the Jewish community of Eretz-Israel and of the Zionist movement, are here assembled on the day of the termination of the British

Mandate over Eretz-Israel and, by virtue of our natural and historic right and on the strength of the resolution of the United Nations General Assembly, hereby declare the establishment of a Jewish state in Eretz-Israel, to be known as the State of Israel.

Within minutes, U.S. President Harry Truman recognized the new Jewish state. The Soviet Union was the second nation to recognize Israel.

Within hours, five Arab countries (Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan, Syria and Iraq) declared war and launched an attack. Thus began Israel's War of Independence. Israel had no established army, no central command, no air force of which to speak and not enough weapons to arm its fighting force, which was composed of both sabras (native born Israelis) and refugees.

Miraculously, the Israelis gained the upper-hand in battle, and, in 1949, the attacking nations signed armistice agreements with Israel.

The celebration of Israel Independence Day, *Yom Ha'atzma'ut*, begins at sunset immediately following *Yom Ha'zikaron* (Memorial Day). *Yom Ha'atzma'ut* is marked in Israel by a special ceremony on Mount Herzl, a general atmosphere of celebration, and the bestowal of the Israel Prize upon Israeli citizens or organizations that have demonstrated excellence in their field(s) or have made vital contributions to Israeli culture.

Yom Ha'atzma'ut is celebrated on 5 Iyar (this year on Tuesday night-Wednesday, April 21-22) and *Yom Ha'zikaron* is observed the day before on 4 Iyar (this year on Monday night-Tuesday, April 20-12).

(For other "Jewish Treats: Juicy Bits of Judaism, Daily" and many other Jewish resources visit www.jewishtreats.org and www.njop.org.)

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