

The New York Jewish Week/end

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Two men wear Israeli flags at a pro-Israel rally in lower Manhattan on May 23, 2021. (Ben Sales)

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● NEWS

Some American Jews are taking off their kippahs and Stars of David amid a wave of antisemitic incidents

By Shira Hanau and Ben Sales

When Ricki moved into her new ground floor apartment in New York City less than a year ago, she felt perfectly comfortable placing a mezuzah on the front door for all who passed through the lobby to see.

Today she feels less sanguine about that choice.

Ricki hasn't removed the mezuzah, but she has asked the building's management to put bars on her windows. And she's still considering taking down the Jewish symbol.

"When I put it up I was really proud of it," Ricki said, declining to use her last

NEW YORK STANDS AGAINST ANTISEMITISM.

Over the past two weeks, we've seen a frightening rise in physical and verbal assaults against members of the Jewish community here in New York.

We unequivocally condemn these attacks and all acts of antisemitism and hate in any form. We stand in solidarity with the Jewish community and call on all community leaders to join us.

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name due to privacy concerns. "I'm not embarrassed of being Jewish, I knew when I put it up that people would see it. But I really didn't think twice about it."

She's not alone in having second thoughts now.

This week, Jews across the United States have been attacked because of the fighting in Israel and Gaza. In Los Angeles, pro-Palestinian attackers threw punches and bottles at diners at a sushi restaurant. In New York's heavily Jewish Diamond District, protesters of Israel threw fireworks from a car amid a violent street altercation.

As footage of those attacks and others spreads online, American Jews say they are feeling a renewed anxiety around identifying themselves publicly as Jews. Some are taking off their kippahs or Star of David necklaces. Others, like Ricki, are considering the removal of their mezuzahs. Some are mulling whether it's safe to walk into synagogue.

That anxiety has long been familiar to Jews in Europe and elsewhere in the world. At times it has reared its head in the United States, like in 2018 following the massacre at the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh. A survey last year by the American Jewish Committee found that nearly a quarter of Jewish respondents avoided wearing or displaying something that would mark them as Jewish at some point in the previous two years.

This week, American Jews feared they could be targeted due to an association, real or imagined, with Israel and its actions regarding the Palestinians. For some American Jews, that fear is manifesting in decisions to tamp down their public displays of Jewishness as a way to protect themselves.

"On the one hand I want to be a proud Jew and express to the world that that's something I'm passionate about," said Drew Feldman, a theater director and writer who has taken to wearing a baseball cap more often in recent days rather than his kippah due to the tension he feels around the conflict in Israel. "On the other hand, the Torah says we have to put life above all else."

Feldman, who spent the past several months living in Tennessee, first started wearing a kippah regularly in 2015 as he became more interested in his Judaism and more observant. He recently called his rabbi to discuss whether it would be appropriate to stop wearing it for a while.

"When I've traveled to Europe, I've done that because I've been told it's a safer thing to do in places like France," Feldman said. "This is really the first time outside of traveling to Europe or elsewhere that I've put on a different hat or baseball cap and not done it simply for fashion, done it out of a sense of anxiety or maybe fear."

Rabbi Adir Yolkut of Temple Israel Center in White Plains, New York, said he had never seriously worried for his safety walking to synagogue on Shabbat morning wearing a kippah.

"I just sort of had a fleeting thought that was not so fleeting, is this something I should be nervous about?" he said. "Should I take more precautions than I usually need to? Because it feels like you don't know where it's coming from."

On Friday, the Diamond District was calm and host to a typical range of Jewish characters: Men in kippahs stood on every corner, a group of haredi Orthodox boys fist bumped a store owner dressed in jeans and a T shirt, a group of Chabad-Lubavitch emissaries approached bystanders asking "Are you Jewish?"

But there was a smattering of police throughout the neighborhood's few blocks, and some Jewish store employees were wary.

Emanuel Shimunov had witnessed the previous day's violence through his store window. According to Shimunov, it started when a Jewish boy said "Peace in Israel" to the pro-Palestinian protesters driving through the street. They began cursing at him, then fought with a man who came out to protect the boy.

"There are a lot of people who will be affected," said Shimunov, a descendant of Bukharan Jews. "There are a lot of people like that."

Ian Steiner, who lives on Manhattan's Upper West Side, which has a large Jewish population, doesn't attend synagogue frequently. But after seeing the news about attacks on Jews in New York City and Los Angeles, he decided to offer to escort other Jews to and from synagogue if they felt unsafe walking alone.

"I'm a bigger guy and I'm not scared," he said. "I know I'm strong and I'm young and agile, and if an older person or someone is afraid to go to shul or to practice their

religion, I have the duty to do something to make sure they feel safe."

The Secure Community Network, which coordinates security for Jewish institutions nationwide, has received dozens of reports of antisemitic incidents over the past week, said its CEO, Michael Masters. He said a big difference between what happened this week and during the last Gaza War in 2014 is that social media is playing a larger role in fueling discord regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the United States.

"We've seen an incredible surge in online incidents and events, online acts of targeting or hate speech, as well as the ability of the [Jewish] community to share information about incidents and events," he said. "If we look at the process by which people are motivated to violence, whether they are someone who follows supremacist ideology or they support Hamas, there's absolutely no doubt that the proliferation of messaging on social media plays a role."

The spate of attacks on Jews has given Jewish security officials *deja vu* to 2019, when antisemitism spiked in and around New York City and Jews suffered two lethal attacks.

Evan Bernstein, who runs the Community Security Service, a volunteer synagogue security organization, said when it comes to attacking Jews, the incidents in New York this week make it seem like the city has picked up from where it left off before last year's pandemic restrictions took people off the streets. The attacks also come as many synagogues are transitioning back into holding services inside their buildings following a year of worshipping outdoors or virtually.

"So many people in the Jewish community thought that we just didn't have to deal with this kind of antisemitism," said Bernstein, whose organization is based in New York. "I kind of knew COVID was going to be the pause button on that. I'm sad that I'm right."

Regarding antisemitism, while Bernstein said "the climate around us is very different" than it was a couple weeks ago, he isn't giving his volunteer security patrols any special instructions for the coming Shabbat. Nor does he think New York has reached a point where people necessarily need to take off their kippahs in public, as many Jews do in Europe.

"I don't think we should stop being openly Jewish," he said. "If we get to that point in the United States where we can't wear our yarmulkes comfortably and openly, we're at a whole different level, and I hope that's a conversation we don't have to have."

To Ricki, the fear that she may have to take down her mezuzah feels ironically painful. Grappling with the decision this week, she thought of her grandparents, who were Holocaust survivors. Growing up, she had felt safe as a Jew in America. Antisemitism had never felt like such an immediate threat as it did to her now in downtown Manhattan.

"I was always told that antisemitism is really real, but as someone in the millennial generation, maybe I was blind to it," she said. "But now I'm like wow, I see it."

Gabe Friedman contributed reporting.

● NEWS

Hundreds Rally for Israel in NYC Following Spate of Antisemitic Attacks

The rally in lower Manhattan was devoid of the physical clashes that occurred at rallies the week before.

By Ben Sales

NEW YORK — Hundreds of people rallied for Israel in New York City days after a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas in Gaza, and following a string of antisemitic assaults and harassment in the United States.

The demonstration on Sunday in lower Manhattan, organized by the Israeli-American Council and other pro-Israel organizations, principally featured traditional messages of supporting Israel. Speakers asserted that Israel and Jews in New York City faced a common enemy.

"We are here today against terror, united against terror-

ism,” said Tal Shuster, one of the event’s organizers, in a speech. “We do not accept any type of terror, not in New York, not in Israel, not anywhere in the world.”

The rally, one of 15 similar demonstrations organized nationwide, came after weeks in which Jewish communities across the country experienced antisemitism during and after the conflict in Gaza and Israel. In New York City, amid dueling pro-Israel and pro-Palestinian rallies on Thursday, multiple Jews were assaulted in the street.

In the days following, Jews across New York posted on social media about being threatened, harassed or otherwise attacked for being Jewish. The reports were reminiscent of a string of antisemitic incidents in New York in the months before the pandemic shut down street life globally. Nationwide, the Anti-Defamation League recorded an increase in antisemitic incidents in the first week of the Israel-Hamas fighting.

There were attacks on synagogues and individual Jews in other cities as well. Synagogues in Florida, Illinois and Arizona were targeted. Earlier in the week, two antisemitic incidents were caught on video in Los Angeles.

The antisemitic incidents have led some to refrain from wearing Jewish symbols publicly out of fear of being attacked. But people at the New York rally said that even though the news of the recent attacks concerned them, they hadn’t gotten to the point of taking off their kippahs or jewelry featuring Stars of David.

“I want to show the world that the Jewish nation is strong and will not give up, and to show that, walking with a kippa, I don’t need to be afraid,” said Gershon Abergel, an Israel who has lived in New York for 18 years and who wears a kippa. “It’s strange but it will pass. I’m trying to be strong.”

Speakers at the rally, held near the National September 11 Memorial & Museum, condemned the antisemitism amid an event that, mostly, was focused on Israel. Upbeat Israeli music blasted before the event agenda got underway, and demonstrators wore shirts that said “I stand with Israel” and, in Hebrew, “Israel is in my heart.” The backdrop to the dais featured two signs that said “Hamas = Terrorists” and “Stop supporting Hamas.” The crowd cheered for the NYPD near the beginning of the event.

Curtis Sliwa, a Republican candidate for New York City mayor and the founder of the Guardian Angels, a volunteer crime prevention organization, showed up wearing his trademark red beret. On the sides of the crowd, Chabad emissaries wrapped tefillin on men’s arms. Across a barricade far from the crowd, a small group of anti-Zionist haredi Orthodox Jews, from the Neturei Karta movement, protested the rally. But the rally was devoid of the physical fighting that occurred at the rallies on Thursday.

Speakers included Israel’s acting consul general in New York, Israel Nitzan, as well as Rabbi Shmuley Boteach, the pro-Israel and conservative activist.

Peter Fox, a writer and pro-Israel activist, condemned Jewish extremists who assaulted Arabs in Israel in recent weeks at a speech at the rally. Elisha Wiesel, the son of Holocaust survivor and Nobel Peace Prize laureate Elie Wiesel, condemned “antisemitic Marxists” before saying that Israel and the Palestinians deserve to live in peace, and leading a chant of “Salaam Aleikum” — peace be with you, in Arabic — to emphasize the quest for peace.

“Jews are the oldest tribe but we cannot allow ourselves to be tribal,” Fox said. “Israelis and Palestinians alike deserve much better.”

● NEWS

For progressive Democrats, the condemnation of antisemitism is lumped in with other forms of hate

By Ron Kampeas

As reports of attacks on Jews broke into the news late last week, Democratic lawmakers moved quickly to condemn antisemitism — but they didn’t stop there.

"We've recently seen disturbing antisemitic attacks and a troubling rise in Islamophobia," Bernie Sanders, the Jewish Vermont senator who is a leader of American progressives, tweeted Friday. "If you are committed to a future of equality and peaceful coexistence, please stand united against anyone who promotes hatred of any kind."

Numerous other progressives soon followed suit, including multiple members of "The Squad" in the U.S. House of Representatives.

"The work of dismantling antisemitism, anti-Blackness, Islamophobia, anti-Palestinian racism, and every other form of hate is OUR work," Rep. Cori Bush of Missouri tweeted.

Rep. Jamaal Bowman of New York wrote, "We've seen an increase in antisemitic and Islamophobic hate, in NYC and nationwide — hateful words, hate crimes, and other forms of violence." And Rep. Ayanna Pressley of Massachusetts tweeted, "I strongly condemn the rise in anti-Semitism and islamophobia we're seeing across the country."

The pattern continued through the weekend and into this week.

"Antisemitism has no place in our country or world. Neither does Islamophobia," Sen. Elizabeth Warren of Massachusetts tweeted late Tuesday. "That means standing together and condemning all forms of bigotry and hate."

The messages all took aim at attacks reported while Israel and Hamas in Gaza fought a conflict in which more than 250 Palestinians and a dozen Israelis were killed. In New York, Los Angeles and elsewhere, violent attacks on Jews were caught on camera. Meanwhile, mosques in Brooklyn and on Long Island were vandalized.

Halie Soifer, who directs the Jewish Democratic Council of America, said she understood the impetus to condemn all kinds of bigotries, but cautioned that doing so can have the effect of diminishing the threat posed by one type of bigotry such as antisemitism.

"There should be no tolerance for hatred in any form, and Jewish Democrats strongly condemn intolerance targeting any racial ethnic or religious minority," Soifer told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency. "At the same time, there are unique root causes of antisemitism that must

be addressed, and for that reason we would caution against conflating or grouping this distinct form of hate with any other."

Why Sanders chose to frame his tweet the way he did and whether the Democrats' messages were coordinated is unclear. His office did not respond to a request for comment.

But his approach is not unusual among progressives, who see bigotries not as distinct but as stemming from the same toxic trends, and Sanders has explained his thinking in the past.

"Like other forms of bigotry — racism, sexism, homophobia — antisemitism is used by the right to divide people from one another and prevent us from fighting together for a shared future of equality, peace, prosperity and environmental justice," Sanders wrote in 2019 in *Jewish Currents*, a left-wing magazine.

Some Jewish commentators expressed unhappiness about seeing antisemitism lumped with other bigotries, likening it to the "All Lives Matter" pushback among conservatives against the Black Lives Matter movement, a posture progressives revile.

"@SenSanders just all lives mattered Jews," Anne Herzberg, a human rights lawyer with NGO Monitor, said on Twitter this week.

A number of Democrats, including Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, the progressive leader who sharply criticized Israel this month, issued statements that exclusively condemned antisemitism. Ocasio-Cortez also offered practical advice for how New Yorkers can support their Jewish neighbors.

"We will never, ever tolerate antisemitism here in NY or anywhere in the world," she said on Twitter. "The recent surge in attacks is horrifying. We stand with our Jewish communities in condemning this violence. You can help. Take NYC's free, 1hr bystander intervention course."

But some said they wanted more. Rep. Dean Phillips, a Jewish Democrat from Minnesota, had some advice for his fellow progressives: Don't equivocate when it comes to attacks on Jews.

"I'll say the quiet part out loud; it's time for 'progressives'

to start condemning antisemitism and violent attacks on Jewish people with the same intention and vigor demonstrated in other areas of activism," he tweeted Monday. "The silence has been deafening."

● FIRST PERSON

A Rabbi's Accuser Wanted Me to Tell Her Story. Here's Why It Took 20 Years.

When the Reform movement suspended Sheldon Zimmerman in 2000, a woman wanted the details known but feared retribution.

By Gary Rosenblatt

In March 2005, I was on the verge of publishing an article that I knew would have a major impact. As the editor and publisher of The Jewish Week, I would be describing — for the first time — the true nature of the sexual misconduct that led one of the most prominent Reform rabbis in America to resign from his role as president of Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, the movement's seminary.

Rabbi Sheldon Zimmerman had resigned from HUC in 2000 and been suspended for two years from the Central Conference of American Rabbis, the movement's rabbinic organization. The group had said only that Zimmerman had engaged in unspecified "personal relationships" that violated its ethical code, and many believed that he had a long-ago consensual affair with an adult woman in his congregation.

I found out that the allegations were far more significant. I had spoken to one of Zimmerman's accusers, who told me that he had begun behaving inappropriately toward her when she was a teenage congregant. She told me that their intimate contact, which recent reports indicated included touching and kissing, began when she was

17 and was consummated when she was 20.

Some of those details were revealed recently in an investigation by Manhattan's Central Synagogue — Zimmerman served there as senior rabbi from 1972 to 1985. On April 27, the synagogue revealed the damaging findings of an independent study it commissioned last fall, providing details of the behavior that the CCAR had described only vaguely.

Why didn't I publish the story more than 15 years ago? I knew that I had important information — information that could protect others as Zimmerman regained influence in his movement. But I did not have the full permission of my source, whom the CCAR had determined was trustworthy.

The following story explains why the facts remained a secret for all these years.

CREDIBLE ALLEGATIONS

Last month, Central Synagogue sent a letter to its community containing the results of an investigation into the events that led to Zimmerman's suspension 20 years earlier. The investigation was prompted by a woman's disclosure after last Rosh Hashanah that Zimmerman, now 79, "initiated an inappropriate relationship with her while she was a young religious schoolteacher and congregant at Central" in the 1970s.

The investigators found credible the allegations by this former teacher, as well as those of one woman who came forward in 2000 and a third in 2020, of "sexually predatory behavior by Rabbi Zimmerman in the 1970s and 1980s."

The current leadership of the congregation said it was never informed by the CCAR of the events that led to Zimmerman's suspension in 2000. The leadership said it was "devastated" by the news and condemned Zimmerman for "a gross manipulation of his spiritual authority."

My involvement and knowledge of these allegations began 20 years ago. I received a call in the spring of 2001 from a woman who identified herself at the time only as "Debbie." She said she was the one who had approached the CCAR a year earlier with allegations about Zimmerman, dating back to her teenage years, that led to his resignation and suspension. She was calling me

because she was upset that only a few months later, the rabbi had been named executive vice president of Birthright Israel, a move that was starting to cause controversy because of his recent misconduct.

She said she was torn between speaking out through a Jewish Week article or maintaining her public silence, but she clearly wanted to talk.

The woman asked if she could speak to me anonymously, and I agreed — an agreement that still holds today, though over time, and after extensive phone conversations, she revealed her true identity to me. Then as now, I also said I would not publish her story without her permission and would not reveal her identity.

The article I came close to publishing in 2005 would have included details of Zimmerman's years-long relationship with Debbie, who first met him in the spring of 1970 when she was 15. As she described it to me, Zimmerman became her rabbi and teacher the following year when he was appointed assistant rabbi at Central Synagogue, and he soon began to relate to her in an inappropriate manner.

The article would have revealed that when she was 17 and studying privately with Zimmerman, who was 30 and married, he used Martin Buber's "I and Thou" theology as a framework to explain or justify their intimate contact.

For the next decade, the nature of their relationship was a secret, given that their families were friendly and that she and her family viewed him as their rabbi, teacher and confidant.

The article also would have noted, for the first time and based on a copy of the committee's never-released report obtained by The Jewish Week, that Zimmerman had an affair with at least one other woman, and that a CCAR investigative panel of its ethics and appeals committee found both women fully credible — and the rabbi far less so.

A 'PROFOUND' BETRAYAL

I found Debbie thoughtful and articulate. She clearly had given much thought over the years to the unhealthy nature of the relationship that took place decades ago.

"What was so damaging is that this was the formative romantic relationship of my life," she said at the time,

adding that "the betrayal to me and my family was profound." (Her parents were friends with Zimmerman and his wife.)

The story Debbie told me back then reflected her disappointment, frustration and anger with Zimmerman for being "manipulative — taking advantage of me and my being young and vulnerable — and for being untruthful."

She also was upset with leadership in the organized Jewish community for focusing exclusively on the rabbi's rehabilitation and reentry into Jewish public life without concern for the psychological and emotional damage done to her as a victim.

Debbie praised the CCAR investigating panel for its diligence in pursuing her allegations and, in effect, bringing down a major leader of the Reform movement. But she questioned why the gravity of Zimmerman's violation of ethical and sexual boundaries did not seem to have been shared at least with other leaders within the Reform movement, which, it turned out, included HUC, Central Synagogue and the central body, now known as the Union for Reform Judaism, so others could be protected.

(In the wake of the 2021 Central Synagogue announcement, those other groups are launching their own investigations.)

Debbie first called me a few days after the announcement of the Birthright Israel appointment. She felt it was improper for the rabbi to be given a top position in an organization involving 18- to 26-year-olds. But she was wary of making her complaints public, concerned about "appearing vindictive" and fearful that her identity would become known.

Philanthropists Michael Steinhardt and Charles Bronfman, the co-founders of Birthright Israel, played a key role in hiring Zimmerman to help lead the organization professionally. In a news release announcing the appointment on April 5, 2001, Bronfman praised the rabbi as a "dynamic educator and leader whose talents will be a great blessing for Birthright Israel."

Several years later Marlene Post, a lay leader of Birthright Israel who was one of several people who interviewed Zimmerman for the position, told me that "at that time we were unaware of the specifics" of his relationship. Post said she believed that the rabbi would not have been hired had the details been known.

All of this transpired at a different time. There was no #MeToo movement, and investigators habitually sought to protect the privacy of the accused as well as victims, and behaviors like “grooming” — in which someone in a position of trust and authority manipulates a minor for sexual purposes — were not part of the public vocabulary.

That put the burden on accusers like Debbie to convince the public that abuse had taken place. They also had a reasonable expectation that their accounts and character would be questioned. Meanwhile, Zimmerman was not only a leader of the Reform movement but a beloved spiritual leader and educator of great charm and charisma with a large and loyal following.

“I was single, I was very involved in my work and it seemed too risky to challenge him [the rabbi] publicly,” Debbie told me.

In the end, after much deliberation, she decided not to go public, and so did I. I agreed with Debbie that even revealing the contents of the CCAR committee report would have compromised her privacy, so I did not.

READMITTED TO THE CCAR

Four years later, Zimmerman was back in the news. After a brief stint at Birthright Israel, he had stepped down and held several non-pulpit posts, including two years as vice president of what is now the Jewish Federations of North America.

In 2005, after four years of suspension from the CCAR (two more than the original two years), the rabbi was readmitted to the Reform rabbinic group he once served as president.

Rabbi Janet Marder, then president of the CCAR, announced that following a “rigorous process” of counseling and mentoring, Zimmerman met all the requirements outlined and was reinstated to full membership. She said the CCAR board made the decision based on the recommendation of the committee on ethics and appeals.

That decision prompted Debbie to be back in touch with me. She felt his reinstatement was unearned, and she blamed the CCAR for not living up to the rules of its own ethics and appeals committee. These include “the making of restitution” and offering “an acceptable expres-

sion of remorse” with specificity of wrongdoings to all of those harmed, according to the guidelines.

“He should have been expelled, not suspended” by the CCAR, Debbie told me at that time, asserting, as is clear from the committee’s private report, that the rabbi did not admit to the nature of their relationship or the fact that he had relations with another woman until he learned that the CCAR committee already knew the facts.

“What kind of teshuva [repentance] is it,” she asked, “when he has advanced his career by lying about what he did?”

Debbie said she received no compensation for the therapy she underwent — only airfare to attend a meeting with the ethics committee. Zimmerman wrote an apology to her that she said was impersonal and did not take full responsibility for his actions. She felt he should have apologized to her family and others who were hurt or misled, and should have initiated a personal meeting with her without being prompted.

“That’s what a wrongdoer has to do,” Debbie told me. “It’s easy to say ‘I made a mistake,’ but it’s hard to say that directly to the victim.”

She criticized the ethics committee for allowing the rabbi to make his apology in writing rather than face to face.

“The process of teshuva should be a dynamic between people,” she told me, “but it’s been between the CCAR and him.” Debbie said she resented being left out of the process.

In a response to my queries in 2005, Zimmerman emailed me to say that an expert who was counseling him as part of the reinstatement process warned him against having any personal contact with Debbie. He maintained that his letter was “an act of teshuva,” and went on to point out that he had more than fulfilled the CCAR requirements for readmission.

Accusing Debbie of seeking revenge, he stated: “My career has been seriously damaged. This is about destroying me and my family. I have met every teshuva requirement, both of the CCAR and the tradition itself. She has made none to my wife and family, and in fact quite the opposite.”

Zimmerman threatened to out Debbie without her consent, telling me, “She may leave us no recourse but to respond to her in public and by name, and to lift the veil that has protected her and her actions.”

(On May 11, I sent an email to Zimmerman telling him I was working on this follow-up to Central Synagogue’s investigation, and that I would like to speak with him or get a statement from him with his response to the investigation and its findings. He has not replied.)

Soon after contacting me again, Debbie again decided, reluctantly, not to go public, fearful of public exposure and a possible lawsuit.

So the matter remained until it boiled up again last month with the Central Synagogue letter to its congregants and a report in the Forward.

RETURNING TO THE STORY

Debbie texted me two days before the Central Synagogue letter was made public last month. She was under the impression that I was writing an article on the latest development, but that wasn’t the case. In fact, I was unaware of it until I spoke with her the next day and she brought me up to date. Now that the Zimmerman chapter had been reopened, she was committed to having her story known — under the same conditions we agreed to more than 20 years ago, that her identity remain private.

“I’ve wanted at least the basic fact of my youth and his predatory conduct to be known,” she told me. “But Zimmerman put a lid on it by threatening me with litigation and [with] revealing my identity.”

Central Synagogue and others are faulting the CCAR for not sharing the extent of its findings with colleagues, even within the movement, and the organization is undergoing its own reexamination of practices now. But the CCAR’s policies two decades ago on dealing with sexual impropriety among its clergy were praised at the time, and many saw its decision to take action against Zimmerman as courageous.

To me, the episode underscores the difficulty, if not impossibility, for any peer group to pass judgment on one of its own, and suggests why experts in the field recommend that outside investigators probe misconduct at

this level.

It also underscores the ways in which Jewish concepts about repentance may figure into #MeToo episodes in our communities.

Zimmerman insisted that he fulfilled more than the requirements for teshuva, including therapy, apology and time for self-reflection. But Debbie told me earlier this week that “at the heart of the issue” for her, even now, is whether the rabbi “could actually see the person he has wronged and understand how he harmed me.” That did not happen, she said.

In preparing this piece, I went back and found my “Zimmerman file,” a thick collection of printed out emails, notes of conversations with Debbie going back 21 years and a number of others, including Zimmerman. It took me nearly two hours to read through it all.

On the page that contained the rabbi’s email to me, cited above, I had written a note to myself: “Am I obligated to hold the story if she gets cold feet?”

That was the question I grappled with in 2001 and again in 2005. It seemed to pit journalistic responsibility against compassion for a self-described “damaged” victim of an abusive relationship. In the end, I felt that to tell Debbie’s story without her permission would be one more violation of her personal freedom.

Now, 21 years after we first spoke, I reviewed the contents of this article with her before publication to ensure its accuracy.

Gary Rosenblatt was editor and publisher of *The Jewish Week* from 1993 to 2019. Follow him at garyrosenblatt.substack.com.

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● NEWS

Elliot Resnick, Jewish Press editor who entered US Capitol on Jan. 6, to be replaced

By Shira Hanau

Elliot Resnick, the editor of a politically conservative Jewish newspaper who was identified among the crowd that breached the U.S. Capitol building on Jan. 6, is out of the job.

Shlomo Greenwald, a grandson of the founders of The Jewish Press who has worked at the weekly paper since 2004, announced in a Facebook post Wednesday morning that he would be assuming the role of senior editor at the paper, replacing Resnick.

"I am both exhilarated and daunted by the work ahead in building on the great things The Jewish Press has always done while making improvements," Greenwald said in a statement to the Jewish Telegraphic Agency, declining to comment on the paper's decision to replace Resnick. "The Orthodox Jewish community in the US is broad, and I hope to make a newspaper that will speak to and enlighten the community. The core interests of the community remain: fighting for a secure Israel and advocating for religious freedom at home, areas that The Jewish Press has always championed, and that I will continue to embrace in this role."

Greenwald did not respond immediately to questions about the future political direction The Jewish Press would take under his leadership. But he takes over at a time when the political identity of the newspaper — and its editor — has been the subject of widespread attention.

Resnick was identified in YouTube videos of the Capitol breach by a researcher and first reported on by Politico in April.

A video from Jan. 6 shows Resnick stumbling as he enters the Capitol building through a doorway while a Capitol police officer tries to keep out the intruders. His face is clearly

visible when he reappears a few minutes later, standing nearby as another person shouts at a Capitol police officer.

At the time Naomi Mauer, the publisher of The Jewish Press, appeared to stand behind Resnick.

"As we understand the facts, we believe that Mr. Resnick acted within the law," Mauer told Politico in an email, declining to respond to follow-up questions.

The paper's editorial board later published a statement online saying that Resnick was at the Capitol in a journalistic capacity on Jan. 6 but the paper decided not to publish anything about the Capitol breach "because of the heated atmosphere surrounding the day's events, especially within New York's Orthodox Jewish community."

Mauer did not respond immediately to a JTA request for comment Wednesday.

Resnick assumed the position of editor at The Jewish Press in 2018. He has long had a history of using incendiary language and has called the gay rights movement "evil." Under Resnick's editorship, The Jewish Press was criticized by the Anti-Defamation League in 2019 after publishing an op-ed titled "The Pride Parade: What Are They Proud Of" comparing gay marchers in the New York event to animals, adulterers and thieves.

"If blacks resent America's [sic] so much, let them discard Christianity (which the 'white man' gave them) and re-embrace the primitive religions they practiced in Africa," Resnick wrote in a tweet in 2019.

"Can someone give me a coherent reason why blackface is racist?" he wrote in another tweet that year.

Resnick was not the only editor in Jewish Press history to espouse racist views.

The paper was edited in the 1960s by Rabbi Meir Kahane, a Jewish nationalist who advocated violence against Arabs and was banned from the Knesset, Israel's parliament. Though the paper distanced itself from Kahane in 1969, it still lists him among the paper's prominent past editors on its website.

In 2015, Resnick gave a glowing review to a Kahane biography written by Kahane's wife and described his own experience of "near trance" while reading one of Kahane's books in high school.

● NEWS

NYC Comptroller Candidates Say They Oppose BDS

At forum with nonprofits, rivals denounce antisemitism and support timely payments to human services organizations.

By Shira Hanau

Seven candidates for New York City comptroller said they would not support the Israel boycott or divest the city's pension funds from Israeli companies.

The seven spoke at a virtual forum Monday night, less than one month before the June 22 Democratic primary. UJA-Federation of New York was among a number of nonprofit sponsors of the forum.

The candidates spoke about the priorities for the position, which oversees the city's pension funds and acts as the chief financial officer of the city. Sally Goldenberg, Politico New York's City Hall bureau chief, moderated.

Although there have been few overt calls for the city to divest from Israeli companies, the Israel boycott is considered a threshold issue for much of the Jewish community. The topic was first raised by candidate Michele Caruso-Cabrera, a former CNBC host who launched a challenge to progressive Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez from the right in 2020. Caruso-Cabrera condemned the antisemitic incidents in New York City in recent weeks.

"I stand with the Jewish community now and forever and want to do as much as possible to reduce antisemitism," she said, calling on her opponents to condemn the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions movement, or BDS.

Zach Iscol, a Marine Corps veteran and nonprofit executive who followed Caruso-Cabrera, said he would not divest the city's pension funds from Israeli companies. "Those are important investments and ones I wouldn't want to lose the opportunity for," Iscol said.

Brad Lander, who is Jewish and one of the most progressive candidates in the race, also weighed in on the question of BDS and the city's pension funds.

"I don't support BDS and I would certainly not use the portfolio of the pensioners to affect politics," Lander said. But he added that he does not support criminalizing BDS, referring to legislation that would penalize companies that refuse to do business with Israeli entities. "It is appropriate for people to engage themselves in nonviolent action to make change."

Lander also condemned the recent spate of antisemitic attacks in New York City in the wake of the violence in Israel and Gaza. "We have to stand up to hate, the antisemitic acts have to be called out and opposed," he said.

While the comptroller position is not a particularly flashy or high profile one, it has gotten a boost due to the crush on the city's budget after a year of pandemic-related losses and new costs. It is also seen as a stepping stone to higher office, a route that Scott Stringer, the current comptroller, is trying to take to Gracie Mansion.

"The comptroller's office is probably the most important office that people aren't paying attention to," Corey Johnson, the current speaker of the City Council and one of the candidates for the role, said during the forum.

Most of the candidates agreed on certain broad positions. All agreed that the city needs to do better when it comes to paying nonprofit organizations who hold contracts with the city in a timely manner, an issue important to many of the organizations that receive funding from UJA-Federation.

Brian Benjamin, a state senator who represents Harlem and the Upper West Side and chairs the Budget and Revenues Committee, touted his experience in investment banking and spoke about the need to direct federal stimulus money towards recovery costs rather than long-term programs.

Also appearing were State Sen. Kevin Parker of Brooklyn's 21st District and State Assembly David Weprin of District 24 in Queens.

● EDITOR'S DESK

The Precarious Future of Pro-Israel Activism

The 'mainstream' is catching up to a younger Jewish generation growing increasingly skeptical of the Israeli government's policies.

By Andrew Silow-Carroll

You may be hearing a lot these days about the “Overton Window” and how it applies to the Israeli-Palestinian debate.

Basically, the Overton Window – named after the policy analyst who came up with the idea – represents the range of policy options widely accepted as legitimate or viable in public debate. Supporting same-sex marriage, for example, was seen as political suicide before, say, the early 2000s. The Overton Window shifted when states began to pass domestic partnership laws, and municipalities began allowing gay couples to marry.

Courageous or extremist, depending on your point of view, political outliers stake out what the consensus considers an untenable position, and the window shifts when the “mainstream” begins to catch up.

In the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the window has shifted decidedly to the left in recent years, especially in Congress. Where once Israel could count on solid bipartisan support for all it did, Democrats are now more willing to question its government's policies.

Israel's most strident critics are on the far left, where Squad members Rashida Tlaib and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez have been leading the pro-Palestinian charge. But even many pro-Israel stalwarts – including New York's own Jerry Nadler, New Jersey's Bob Menendez, and Rhode Island's David Cicilline — appeared to grow impatient with Israel's bombing campaign in Gaza. Sen. Jon Ossoff, the Jewish freshman from Georgia, led a call

by 28 Democrats in the Senate for a ceasefire. Gregory Meeks, the Queens congressman who chairs the House Foreign Affairs Committee, came close to asking for a delay in an arms deal between the U.S. and Israel.

Up until about five minutes ago, the U.S. military aid package was considered sacrosanct by the American political establishment. Nothing is as important to AIPAC than that yearly aid package. But a bill introduced by Rep. Betty McCollum (D-Minn.) linking aid to Israel's behavior got backing from J Street and Americans for Peace Now, two left-wing pro-Israel organizations. J Street isn't AIPAC, and McCollum's bill isn't going anywhere, but, as Yehuda Kurtzer points out, “some Israel advocates fear that even a bill with limited scope and no chance of passing represents a slippery slope — namely toward conditioning U.S. aid to Israel, as some lawmakers are proposing, or even eventually cutting the aid entirely.”

(Meanwhile, if you bristle at me calling either J Street or Peace Now pro-Israel, you don't appreciate how far the Overton Window has shifted, nor how groups like IfNotNow and Jewish Voice for Peace – the former agnostic when it comes to Zionism, the latter firmly opposed – are attracting younger acolytes.)

How you explain that shift might depend on your politics. Republicans say Democrats are beholden to a progressive wing that can't distinguish between true friends and real enemies. Democrats blame Benjamin Netanyahu for his one-sided embrace of the GOP and obeisance to Donald Trump. Jewish liberals say it is Israel that has changed: Years of right-wing governments have made Israel less democratic and less appealing even to former supporters. Jewish conservatives say assimilation and synagogues' squishy emphasis on “social action” have drained Jews of their ethnic pride and political clout.

There's a generational shift underway as well. We are 76 years away from the liberation of Auschwitz and 73 years distant from the founding of Israel. People turning 60 have only dim first-hand memories of the Six-Day War. Most 20-somethings were not alive when Yitzhak Rabin was assassinated, and the hope he represented for a resolution of the conflict is something they learn about from their Gen-X parents.

No surprise, the recent Pew study found that Jews ages 50 and older are much more emotionally attached to Is-

rael than are younger Jews. As of 2020, says Pew, half of Jewish adults under age 30 describe themselves as very or somewhat emotionally attached to Israel (48%) – not bad, but that compares with two-thirds of Jews ages 65 and older.

A young woman I know, born in Israel, raised here and educated in Jewish day schools, says she never saw anything like the explosion of anti-Israel invective that flowed across her social media this month. She remains proudly pro-Israel, but admits that she often finds herself asking why she and her liberal friends agree on almost everything else except Israel.

Every generation shifts the window. When I first started reporting on Jewish affairs, it was taboo to talk about a Palestinian state or dialogue with the Palestine Liberation Organization. The window blew wide open leading up to Oslo. Today new red lines are being crossed: Some self-described Zionists have spoken openly about their support for a single democratic Jewish-Palestinian state or for at least a limited boycott of goods produced in the settlements. In Jewish Currents, a magazine dedicated to flouting Jewish communal taboos, Peter Beinart recently made the case for allowing Palestinians the right of return to present-day Israel or compensation for property they lost in the founding of Israel.

Jewish groups tend to be slow in noticing when the terms of debate are changing, especially when it comes to Israel. They'll gin up outrage if someone influential floats a formerly taboo topic, or fall back on arguments from a pro-Israel handbook whose pages are worn from age and overuse. Which isn't to say that the outrage isn't deserved, or the old arguments aren't strong or correct. But a growing cohort of young Jews can barely relate to assertions about Israel being the only democracy in the Middle East or a brave survivor of seven decades of Arab belligerence and rejectionism.

I can see a future in which the Jewish mainstream has two basic options: The first is throwing all in with conservatives and Evangelicals for whom Israel is blameless. Let New York Times columnists complain that Israel "systematically discriminates against Palestinians in the occupied territories." Ignore the rabbinical students who want to hold Israel accountable for the "violent suppression of human rights." Meanwhile, legacy organizations would nurture a partisan pro-Israel agenda that would

appeal to a minority of American Jews while leaning into America's hopelessly polarized politics. It would work so long as the right wins elections or at least can stymie the impulses of the left.

Or the mainstream could invest hard in Israel's coexistence and shared society sector while the country figures out a reasonable, workable and mutually acceptable solution to the Palestinian problem. American Jewish groups can stand up for the values of liberal democracy while acknowledging they can't, and probably shouldn't, presume to tell Israelis how to vote.

Groups that have done this for years have often been ridiculed and ostracized by pro-Israel groups. But given the shifts in the Overton Window, the mainstream might have to adapt their agenda in order to convince an increasingly skeptical Jewish majority that Israel is a country they can and should care about.

● OPINION

American Jews Need Allies Against Antisemitism

By Jordana Horn

Obviously, these past few weeks have been difficult for so many people, mainly the Palestinians and Israelis who have been enmeshed in conflict and under fire. Thankfully, there's now a ceasefire that everyone hopes will hold — but the aftermath of the conflict lingers.

I'm not Israeli, and I'm not living in Israel. I'm a Jew, I live in the U.S., and these past few weeks have made me extremely uncomfortable in a way that will persist long after the smoke of the most recent destruction has cleared. There are those who would say that it's unseemly to talk about these feelings in light of the greater suffering in the Middle East. But if we don't talk about what's going on, candidly and openly, I fear for what will come next for us Jews in America.

The fact is, there's been a tremendous uptick in targeted

hate crimes against Jews all over the world in the past two weeks. In the United States, recent violent incidents include an assault on Jewish diners at a kosher restaurant in Los Angeles, a smashed door of a synagogue in Arizona, garbage thrown at a Jewish family in Florida, and a Jewish man being punched, kicked and pepper sprayed in Manhattan — and just today, a smashed window at a kosher pizza restaurant on the Upper East Side of New York City.

I'm thankful President Biden has made an unequivocal statement against antisemitism, and I don't doubt his sincerity or his intent. And I'm grateful for other politicians who have done the same. However, the reality on the ground is unfolding all around us, both in person and online — and there are those who refuse to discuss it or acknowledge this rise in violent hate against Jews, much less denounce it or condemn it.

That's how antisemitism grows. And I won't be complicit, or let it go quietly.

Over the course of the past two weeks, more than 17,000 Tweets were posted with permutations of the idea "Hitler was right." And despite my efforts to bring these alarmingly frequent incidents to folks' attention — even posting screenshots of hateful remarks made to me on my own Instagram feed, like "Killing the son of god and subverting nations into a cesspool of sexual deviance and destroying the family home and working to wipe out the white race is unholy and God will have his vengeance (sic)" — I find Jews like me being gaslit, quite honestly, by people I'd consider allies under other circumstances.

Instead of offering unconditional allyship or support, I'm seeing many folks respond to this exponential growth of antisemitism with retorts like "Islamophobia is on the rise" (I've not seen any statistics bearing out a sudden dramatic uptick in Islamophobia, and find that this is often stated as an attempt at "whataboutism"). Or, "Actually, you can be anti-Zionist and not antisemitic." (To that, I say, actually, anyone can criticize the government of Israel — but arguing that Israel has no right to exist seems a lot like antisemitism). Or, "Palestinians are Semites!" (Exactly how is that relevant when I'm telling you about Jews getting beat up, or spat on, or told that "Hitler should have finished the job"?)

Why does it seem to be so excruciatingly difficult for so many people — including people who consistently stand up against hatred directed toward any other group — to unequivocally stand up against antisemitism?

I believe in systemic racism. I believe that our nation, built on the scaffolding of enslaving people, has prejudice and stereotypes, at best, and hatred, at worst, baked into its fundamental recipe. And I'm also someone who believes, as a white-presenting Jew, that I should sit back and listen, or be an upstander as needed, when a Person of Color tells me about their experiences with hatred and bigotry. I do not attempt to tell them that they did not experience what they are telling me that they did, even if it's beyond the parameters of my understanding or my own experience. I am someone who has learned, especially over the past year, what it means to be an ally. I've marched, put up signs, had many hard and productive conversations, as well as hard and unproductive ones. I've done my own initiatives as an individual, including starting a town-wide reading project where participants read and discuss books meant to open our eyes to experiences not our own, and setting up a town-wide meeting with our local police department to have an open dialogue with our community. I do believe that even one person can make a difference, however small, and try to live my life according to that ideal.

My activism — or that of countless Jews across the land — is not a quid pro quo, by any stretch of the imagination. But I'd be lying if I didn't say that it does make me wonder: where exactly are our allies now? Why am I being told, as I tell people about targeted violence against Jewish diners on the streets of Los Angeles or New York, or people wearing Jewish stars, "This is complicated"?

No: It's not complicated that my kids need even more security now at their Jewish schools. It's not complicated that my kids' Jewish camp will not allow care packages because they're worried about bombs. It's not complicated that many Jews are taking off their external signs of being Jewish, whether stars of David or kippot. That's unequivocally wrong and terrible.

It's been absolutely appalling to see the surge of hatred against Jews, both here and abroad. But what's making it worse is seeing how those whom we've aligned ourselves with in the fight against bigotry in the past have been silent — at best — in our time of need.

These past two weeks have been pretty personal for us Jewish parents. What is more of a gesture of hope in the world, after all, than having a child? For Jews, especially, we have children, in part, out of a sense of carrying on our legacy of heritage, history, and tradition that our ancestors fought to keep alive. Personally, I had six kids, which in darker moments I think of as my own private way of fighting against Nazis, hate, and all those who would put out the flame of Jewish light in the world. And I don't want to have the hard conversations with my kids, to activate that dormant epigenetic trauma, to introduce them to the realization that in every generation, we've had to worry about who would hide us when the shit hits the fan, or where we would go. I don't want to face the fact, explicitly, that the past two weeks have shown conclusively exactly why the Jewish people so desperately need the state of Israel to exist. But in the past two weeks, many of us have had to realize what generations before us have realized: it's possible that, as Jews, we are not safe anywhere. (Kveller)

● OPINION

Pew's Message to Jewish Educators: Change or Else

Today's young are less religious, more diverse and less connected to Israel.

By David Bryfman

The recent Pew Report, "Jewish Americans in 2020," offers critical insights for stakeholders invested in Jewish education and engagement.

Educators who remain unaware of or indifferent to these insights are at risk of offering a Jewish curriculum that is increasingly irrelevant to growing segments of the Jewish population.

If Jewish educators want to reach more and different segments of the Jewish community, a "Jewish education reset" is warranted. Here are some trends gleaned from the Pew report that should inform this reset:

JEWISH PEOPLEHOOD: DIVERSE AND DIVERGENT

The American Jewish population is deeply divided on both religious and political grounds — which are often interrelated. And while the report describes large gaps and rifts between Jews in Israel and America, many Jews claim to have far more in common with Israelis who share their world views than with their fellow Jews here in the U.S.

These gaps are particularly stark between the Orthodox and non-Orthodox, especially haredi Jews and non-Orthodox Jews. For Jewish educators who hold that Jewish collectivity is a major force that binds Jews together, this presents a major challenge.

Coupled with these divides is the dramatically increasing diversity of younger Jews, which also reflects changes in the overall American population. This younger Jewish population is more racially and ethnically diverse than previous generations. This level of diversity creates challenges for a Jewish educational system in America that was mostly developed by and for population perceived as homogenous and Ashkenazi. There will be a lag period between developing a cadre of diverse Jewish educators that both reflects Jewish Generation Z's diversity and who are effectively trained in a new framework for delivering Jewish education. The pace of this change does not make it any less necessary.

RELIGION: BEYOND THE SYNAGOGUE

The Pew study makes very clear that American Judaism is not only a religion. Younger Jews are less likely to identify as Jews by religion, let alone with any of the traditional Jewish religious movements. Instead they consider themselves Jewish ethnically, culturally or because of their family background.

Many communal leaders continue to claim young people will recognize a need for religious institutions when they advance through life stages, especially if they become parents of young children. The data suggest that major changes in synagogue life must occur for this "return" to come to fruition. The good news is that many synagogues are already taking heed of these trends and adapting accordingly.

Most of Jewish education's infrastructure, routines and norms were built around religious practice, ritual and ideology. Most Hebrew and Sunday schools, Jewish day

schools, summer camps and youth organizations explicitly or implicitly operate as if all Jews believe and live their lives as part of a religious group in America rather than as people who define themselves by Jewish ethnic and cultural characteristics.

The data challenge the very purpose of Jewish education. If the purpose of Jewish education is not to make young Jews more Jewish along religious criteria, then what is the purpose? Many educators have begun to answer this question with increased focus on youth mental health and wellness, or meaningful volunteer and learning opportunities. The bigger question is whether these examples will be adopted by the broader field of Jewish education — and quickly enough to reflect the changing views and desires of younger Jews.

ISRAEL: A DISENCHANTED GENERATION

Compared to generations for whom 1948 and 1967 were seminal life moments, for the Jewish generations born after 1995 (the year of Yitzhak Rabin's assassination), Israel does not hold the same place in their minds and heart. While many Jews, including younger Jews, have a strong connection to Israel, Pew indicates that Jewish educational institutions with a pro-Israel agenda will face challenges engaging increasingly larger segments of the American Jewish population.

Pew doesn't deeply probe the reasons for this shift, but we can make some assumptions. Younger Jews today are largely social progressives and consume the bulk of their information about Israel through legacy media and social media. At best, many young people are ambivalent about the actions of right-wing Israeli governments, which are the only governments of Israel they have known in their lifetimes.

Israel can continue to be important in the lives of many young Jews today. For this to occur, however, Jewish educators need to be trained and continuously supported to teach about Israel with a newfound level of sophistication and with deft knowledge about best practices, which place the learner at the center of the educational experience.

ANTI-SEMITISM AND HOLOCAUST: STILL RELEVANT

Curricula and initiatives that focus on anti-Semitism and the Holocaust to motivate and galvanize Jewish youth

have more recently given way to approaches that harness positive internal factors rather than relying on negative external forces.

Pew signals that Jewish educators (and organizations that support their efforts) might want to re-evaluate this shift. Many Jews say they have experienced antisemitism firsthand and many describe the memory of the Holocaust as critically important to who they are as Jews today. The Holocaust and teaching about antisemitism still have place in Jewish education and the development of Jewish identity.

JEWISH FAMILIES: UNEXPECTED JOURNEYS

Pew highlights a Jewish population in America that is stable in overall numbers, but whose composition is changing over time. But perhaps most significantly, the study offers a strong counter to those who have staunchly argued that intermarriage would be the downfall of the Jewish people. Unlike most previous national studies, the 2020 report shows significant numbers of families with only one Jewish parent choosing to raise their children as Jews.

In response, Jewish education must focus on family engagement that not only focuses on how to raise Jewish children, but also on how to welcome non-Jews who are eager partners in this journey.

These trends lead to a larger question: Is the current Jewish educational infrastructure even capable of adapting to these new realities?

If Jewish education continues unchanged it will offer value to only a self-identified, committed core of the Jewish population. Jewish educational institutions that conduct business as they have for the last several decades will not engage any new audiences and will likely go out of business.

But organizations that truly believe that Jewish wisdom, tradition and culture have value to every American Jew will not just need to dramatically change — they will want to change. Working to adapt to these new realities — not only of the new learner but of the new purpose of Jewish education that speaks to this population — will be the greatest challenge to confront Jewish education in the 21st century.

David Bryfman is CEO of *The Jewish Education Project*.

● **SABBATH WEEK /
PARSHAT BEHAALOTECHA**

Don't Let the Bitterness Crowd Out the Good

Jewish history is a grand march of optimism in the face of individual suffering.

By Rabbi Seth Farber

Winston Churchill is said to have said: “A pessimist sees the difficulty in every opportunity. An optimist sees the opportunity in every difficulty.”

Parshat Behaalotecha is a Torah portion of both difficulty and opportunity. Here's the sequence of events in this portion.

1. The Levites prepare for service in the Tabernacle.
2. The commandment to offer the Passover sacrifice is given.
3. The cloud and fire that accompanied the Israelites during their sojourn in the desert is described.
4. God commands the blowing of trumpets in the Israelite camp.
5. The structure of the camp is described.
6. Moses invites his father-in-law to join the Israelites on their travels.
7. The Israelites complain about the lack of meat to eat, leading God to send an excessive amount of quail into the camp as retribution.

Each of these moments represented either a challenge or an opportunity for the Israelites as they began the second year wandering in the desert following the Exodus. And yet, they don't really seem to form a cohesive literary unit. What does the Passover sacrifice have to do with trumpets? And why is the description of the Israelite en-

campment positioned next to the invitation from Moses to his father-in-law to accompany them on their travels?

In a public lecture in the 1970s, Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik suggested a unified theory of Parshat Beha'alotcha. He posited that in the year following the Exodus, the Israelites were beginning a “grand march” and that each of these elements was part of their preparation for entering the land of Israel. First, the spiritual leadership of the people prepares for its work. Then the Passover sacrifice, the reminder of the Exodus, is introduced. Then the march begins: The trumpets stand ready, the camp is set up to go, and Moses symbolically invites the nations of the world to join. To a large extent, the redemption was upon them.

But then disaster strikes. The people complain, and God exacts punishment. Rather than seeing the opportunity that lay before them, the Israelites were too concerned about their immediate (and largely individual) needs. They simply weren't cognizant of the historical moment they were facing. The redemptive moment passes the individuals who were meant to actualize it. This is the great tragedy of Jewish history: opportunity knocks, but the Jews don't recognize its significance.

The missed opportunity in Parashat Beha'alotcha becomes even more striking when looking closely at the language in the text. The complaint of the Israelites is described with an adjective in Numbers 11:1: “The people took to complaining bitterly [ra].” This bitterness (or even evil, another possible translation of the Hebrew word *ra*) stands in direct contrast to the vision that Moses articulates to his father-in-law upon inviting him to join the Israelites: Please join us, Moses says, for “the good [hatov] that God will give us will be good for you as well.” In fact, variations on the Hebrew word *tov* appear throughout Moses' invitation.

“This is the great tragedy of Jewish history: opportunity knocks, but the Jews don't recognize its significance.”

For Moses, the grand march is an opportunity for the realization of all things good. The land of Israel is a place that sanctifies life and is a place of the ultimate goodness. Moses sees this as something that all should have access to.

But the Israelites see only the bad. And from the mo-

ment they miss the opportunity, everything turns bad. Later in the book of Numbers, when the spies return from scouting out the land of Israel, only two — Joshua and Caleb — describe the land as “good.” The others describe the land as “bad.” In short, once the Israelites put their individual needs before the needs of the nation, their entire experience is colored — everything looks bad.

We live in a remarkable era of opportunity. While we don’t always know the best way to capitalize on this wondrous moment in Jewish history, it behooves us to recognize all the good that our era has enabled us to achieve, and not let small moments of bitterness take away from our march toward a better future.

***Rabbi Seth Farber** is the founder of ITIM : The Jewish Life Advocacy Center and the rabbi of Kehilat Netivot. He lives in Ra’anana, Israel, with his wife Michelle and their five children. This essay first appeared in My Jewish Learning.*

● MUSINGS

The Trap of Acclaim

By David Wolpe

The Athenian general Phocion was considered the wisest politician of his day, although he often opposed the prevailing consensus. Once, when his speech was interrupted by enthusiastic cheering, he paused: “Have I inadvertently said something stupid?”

Everyone in public life has had this experience. There are certain declarative or even disparaging statements that will arouse enthusiasm, not for their wisdom, but for their effectiveness as rallying cries. This power to evoke emotion is not the captive of any political party or faction and is addictive both to the speaker and to the crowd. Measured, thoughtful words do not bring people to their feet. The sober eloquence of the Gettysburg address may have made it immortal, but the reception at the time was mixed.

Perhaps that is why Moses calls heaven and earth to witness his final words (Deut. 32:1). They are not platitudes to whip the passions of the crowd; they are not appeals to anger, resentment, revenge or empty pride. Moses spoke not to the mania of the moment

but to the ages. If our utterances, in public or on social media, were less sensational and more soulful, perhaps they too would be worthy of being remembered.

*Named the most influential Rabbi in America by Newsweek Magazine and one of the 50 most influential Jews in the world by the Jerusalem Post, **David Wolpe** is the Rabbi of Sinai Temple in Los Angeles, California.*

● Q & A

A New Zabar’s Podcast Wants You to Stop and Hear the Coffee

Willie Zabar, fourth-generation scion of the appetizing institution, talks about surviving the pandemic -- and the 1970s.

By Shira Hanau

For many a 20-something, the experience of moving back into their parent’s home during the pandemic was a common one.

For Willie Zabar, fourth-generation scion of one of New York’s most famous Jewish emporiums, the pandemic brought a different kind of homecoming: moving back into the family business.

A comedian and theater worker, Zabar, 28, had mostly made his career outside the appetizing and deli business, save for his teenage job at the Upper West Side

CANDLELIGHTING, READINGS:

Sivan 17, 5781 | Friday, May 28, 2021

• **Light candles at:** 8:00 p.m.

Sivan 18, 5781 | Saturday, May 29, 2021

• **Torah reading:** Behaalotecha, Numbers 8:1–12:16

• **Haftarah:** Zachariah 2:14–4:7

• **Shabbat ends:** 9:08 p.m.

store's deli counter. When the pandemic hit and left him out of work, Willie came back to Zabar's to work on social media.

Now he is launching a podcast centered on the store and featuring its personalities, from the lox counter to the coffee aisle and everywhere in between.

We talked to Willie Zabar and Zabar's general manager Scott Goldshine, who has been with the store for 44 years, about the project and how Zabar's — a celebrated marker of New York Jewish identity — has fared during the pandemic.

Shira Hanau: Tell me what it's like to grow up in the Zabar family.

Willie Zabar: My dad worked here my entire life and I would come in with him to the store from a very young age, he would be doing paperwork and I would sit there and draw the logo over and over again. In the housewares department we used to sell these novelty magnets and my "job" as a kid was to take them out of the box and arrange them in a pleasing way. When I turned 16, I started working on the deli counter selling knishes and strudel. And then was doing more deli department stuff, slicing meat for holidays and summers ever since then.

SH: What were you envisioning when you came up with the podcast idea?

WZ: I wanted to have conversations with people who work here, people who are experts in the field. We really love the idea of getting food history experts and talking about bagels, like where they come from, how long have they been a New York staple. And also I knew that we had access to a decent amount of archival material from these audio cassettes that we have lying around the store from previous times that we've been featured in the media and mentioned in the news. Zabar's has popped up in many TV shows and movies.

SH: When you listen to the show, you hear things like the coffee beans being poured into a bag and the whir of the coffee grinder. How did you think about capturing the sensory experience of being inside Zabar's?

WZ: The people on the production team with me are Emily Cherish, our producer, and Henry Butler, who is

one of my best friends. He is an audio genius, so a lot of the individual beans falling and the stirring of the coffee, that's all him. We're just hoping to find ways to give texture and just show people the sounds of Zabar's. I wish we could have the smells, but the technology's not there yet.

SH: I loved the tip in the show about buying coffee on Tuesdays, that was great to know. Do you have any other tips?

Scott Goldshine: Very early, if you're one of the first few people in, you have the run of the store. Except for Sunday morning when there's always a line that goes around the block. Monday through Friday when we open at eight o'clock, between eight and nine, there's nobody in here.

SH: What's the best thing to buy in the store that nobody knows about?

SG: That rules out babka, rugelach, nova and coffee.

WZ: We have umbrellas, Zabar's umbrellas come in handy.

SG: We have crumb cake that I love. I personally have to bring up the crumb cake, which we sell behind the bread department.

WZ: The confections like the chocolate-covered graham crackers, chocolate-covered marshmallows are really really good. I think a lot of people don't know about that.

SG: A lot of people have their own secret stuff that sometimes I don't understand but I can't think of.

SH: What's the relationship between Zabar's and some of the other stores in the neighborhood, like the Fairway supermarket or the gourmet market Citarella.

SG: Fine. We've all been around a long time. We all get along. I mean it's different, we used to be good friends with the owners of Fairway before they became corporate so if I needed something, you know I could call one of the owners or if they had a question about something they can call me. So that relationship has always been fine. I do know that Joe, the owner of Citarella, has a place in Fire Island and I do believe he plays softball with Saul [Zabar's] son Aaron. So I guess we have a good relationship, we don't have a bad relationship. We don't

step on anybody's toes, we all get along, nobody goes to screw the other person or anything like that.

SH: How has the neighborhood changed in the time that Zabar's has been there?

SG: It was a very, very different place [in the 1970s]. It certainly wasn't as safe, you couldn't go on to Amsterdam Avenue, you couldn't walk on 80th Street from Broadway to Amsterdam, without being offered prostitution, drugs or any or all of the above. And nobody wanted to be on Amsterdam after seven o'clock at night. [Before that,] we used to be open till 10 o'clock on Fridays and midnight on Saturdays. And midnight on Saturdays was a real circus here, because when all the Broadway shows got out at 10, 10:30, they started to come in, we would have people like Ann Jackson, Eli Wallach, Zero Mostel. The place would be packed, the fish counter would be jammed. It was great, I mean it was an amazing, amazing scene.

But over the years when New York became unsafe, people stopped going out. And so we started to lose that customer base. We started to close earlier on Saturday nights because we just weren't getting the same amount of customers. In this neighborhood there were a lot more mom-and-pop type stores. Nowadays there ain't too many of them left. But it's always been a great place to raise a family, it's still of all the neighborhoods in the city it is the most residential, and it's always been a close-knit community. We still have people at Zabar's and they're regular people that are coming in five times a week to get a roll or a bagel. And that hasn't changed. People that I've held in my arms as infants are now coming in as adults.

SH: How were things different at the store during the pandemic? And how have things been changing now that New York is really opening up again?

SG: Well, it was rough for quite a while, like for most businesses. We were a little different in that our mail order business just kind of went through the roof, we were shipping all over the country, double than what we normally ship. But as far as the retail part of their store, we were down almost 70%, for quite a while. We closed the cafe, we cut the store hours so we were open till five because nobody was out in the street after that. Thankfully we didn't really lay anybody off, we were able to keep

our staff, but it was pretty tense, obviously, much, much, much less business. It was rough. We had a bunch of people that got COVID, like all other places, it was quite an interesting way to have to navigate that whole year.

But business has been slowly coming back, which is great. We're still down but nothing like we were a year ago, so I definitely see a light at the end of the tunnel. We had a catering business that went to zero. If they weren't doing brises, they're doing brises now, if they weren't sitting shiva, they're sitting shiva now, because I'm starting to see orders and big orders. So things are starting to come back. I don't know if they'll ever come back to where they were. There are still customers that will not come into this store that I haven't seen literally since the pandemic started depending on around the block. They're just terrified.

SH: Still, even with the vaccine?

SG: Still. I know someone who's actually a famous writer but I'm not gonna disclose his name, who literally lives around the block, who I'm a friend of. He's not set foot in the store, and he used to come in easily, three, four times a week. But we are starting to see some of those people come back that we haven't seen, but not everybody.

SH: When those people come back, what's it like? What do they say or what are they buying?

WZ: It's like a homecoming. There's a lot of hugs. "Hey, we didn't hear from you, we didn't know if you were dead or alive." "Okay I'm okay, you know we just didn't come in." And then they go back and they resume shopping like they normally did, whatever they used to buy, they continue to buy. A lot of them had delivery, some of them you know moved out of the city.... I know there's a bunch of people that have left the city and they've discovered they can work from wherever they are so those people aren't coming back.

SH: What do you think the store means to people?

SG: The amount of people that came in during the pandemic and thanked us for being open was tremendous. This is a landmark. It's next to the Museum of Natural History, probably the most important place on the Upper West Side. It's a landmark for the city, it's obviously a very Jewish landmark. I've heard 1,000 times: Don't ever

close, I don't know what we would do during Yom Kippur or Rosh Hashana or Passover. This place means a lot to a lot of people. We always feel that we have a responsibility to the neighborhood to open. We don't ever close, the only time I've ever had to close the store was when there was no subway service. Other than that we're open every single day. We go out of our way for people, if we have to. To this neighborhood, I'm pretty sure it's the most important store. Now some people say Trader Joe's, but we don't like those [people].

UPCOMING EVENTS

May 28 | 6:00 p.m. Free

Together Against Antisemitism: Temple Emanu-El Welcomes Cardinal Dolan for Shabbat

Cardinal Timothy Dolan joins Temple Emanu-El for Shabbat in solidarity against the rising antisemitic violence and rhetoric in NY and around the world. The event will be live streamed for the public through the Temple's website, Facebook and YouTube pages. In-person attendance is available for 200 guests. Registration is required.

Register at <https://bit.ly/3ibyAHp>

May 30 | 2:00 p.m. Free

Itzik and the Golden Peacock: Celebrating 120 Years of Itzik Manger

Join a celebration of the famous Yiddish bard Itzik Manger on his 120th birthday, with readings, talks, music and a mini song workshop with Mike Burstyn, Shura Lipovsky, Dr. Helen Beer, Ruth Levin, Mendy Cahan, Binyumen Schaechter, Sharon Bernstein, Gitl Schaechter-Viswanath, Shane Baker, Miri Koral and others. Live via Zoom and Facebook Live.

Presented by the Congress for Jewish Culture together with the California Institute for Yiddish Culture and Language, the League for Yiddish, Ot Azoy London, and Yung-Yidish Tel Aviv.

Register at <https://bit.ly/3vFYuXH>

UPCOMING EVENTS

June 2 | 7:30 p.m. Free

Taste of Jewish Genealogy: The Cultural Phenomenon of Home DNA Testing

Learn about the implications of home DNA testing for Jewish genealogy, as well as the unique challenges of genetic genealogy for Jews of European descent, from Libby Copeland, author of "The Lost Family: How DNA Testing is Upending Who We Are."

Register at <https://bit.ly/3hYzy9F>

June 3 | 2:00 p.m. Free

The Jewish Enlightenment in the Era of Absolutism

Take a look back at era of Enlightenment and Absolutism (1648–1806), featuring Elisheva Carlebach, Michah Gottlieb and David Sorkin. These scholars will discuss how the intellectual and social developments of the age impacted Jews, and how Jews contributed to those developments.

Register at <https://bit.ly/3hT9mxc>

June 4 | 8:00 p.m.

Pride Shabbat

Join Woodlands Community Temple in White Plains and its LGBTQ+ Task Force for its 5th annual Pride Shabbat service. Featuring Dana Kaplan, executive director of Outright Vermont.

View the stream at <https://www.facebook.com/WC-Temple>

Do you have an event coming up? Submit your events online at www.jewishweek.timesofisrael.com/contact/submit-an-event