

HERITAGE

FLORIDA JEWISH NEWS

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Bethanne Weiss featured at Hadassah luncheon



Bethanne Weiss

Get ready for the most fun lunch you've had in a long time. Hadassah Orlando Chapter will host its next general meeting on Tuesday, April 18, at 11:30 a.m. with guest speaker Bethanne Weiss, B.S. The event will be held at Congregation Ohev Shalom, 613 Concourse Parkway South Maitland.

Weiss — a posture and

balance expert, motivational speaker, author and founder of FUNIQ Fitness — will share about her upcoming book and teach the group "Tenish Tiny Tweaks to bring more joy and less Oy into your life." General admission is \$18, FMV is \$18. RSVP to orlando@hadassah.org by April 14. No refunds or cancellations after April 16.

Jewish Pavilion hosts Passover Breakfast April 13

The Jewish Pavilion plays an important community relations role in Central Florida. One of the main roles of the Jewish Pavilion Program Directors is to educate staff in elder care communities regarding Jewish traditions and holidays and the foods associated with the celebrations. Nancy Ludin, CEO, sees the value in educating the general public beyond the senior communities. Every year, her staff, and leadership provide a home cooked breakfast for the Maitland Chamber. Each breakfast is associated with a Jewish holiday. Participants

get to experience the foods associated with the holiday and learn about how the holiday is celebrated. The holidays previously celebrated include Israel Independence Day, Rosh Hashana, Hanukah and Purim. This year, the Jewish Pavilion staff and leadership are providing a Passover Breakfast on Monday, April 13, at 8:30 a.m. at New Hope for Kids in Maitland. The table will be decorated for Pesach with candlesticks, kiddish cup and Seder plate. She will utilize a Children's Haggadah to explain the Passover story of the Exodus from Egypt.

The menu planned is quite extensive including crackers with lox and veggies, sweet latke pancakes with jelly and cinnamon, fruit salad, Israeli salad, carrot tzimmes, macaroons, potato kugel, heese cake, matzah brie with veggies, matzah bark with chocolate, quiche, juice and coffee. More volunteers have agreed to participate in the cooking but have not yet decided what they wish to prepare. Register with the Maitland Chamber if interested. <https://www.maitlandchamber.com/events/calendar>.

Akiva & Shwekey perform here in April

Chabad of South Orlando presents Akiva & Shwekey live in concert on Sunday April 9. The event will be held at the Walt Disney Theater at The Dr. Phillips Center for Performing Arts, located at 445 Magnolia Ave., Orlando. Doors open at 7 p.m. and the concert begins at 8:30 p.m. Tickets are on sale via the Dr. Phillips Center. For group tickets, email levi@jewishorlando.com. Known for his emotional and heartfelt music that touches the soul, Israeli singer and songwriter Akiva Turgeman has

achieved phenomenal success and rising stardom in Israel and abroad. Akiva has already captured the hearts of millions with his mega-hit songs like "Al Ta'azvi Yadayim", "Pshutim", "Atah Holech Iti", and "Shalom BaBayit". With his brand new show performing the latest material from the album "Al Ta'azvi Yadayim", Akiva brings a unique blend of music to the stage, making his concerts an unforgettable emotional experience. Yaakov Shwekey is one of the most popular Orthodox

Jewish recording artists and musical entertainers today. Since the release of his debut album, Shomati, Shwekey has issued a steady stream of popular contemporary Jewish music albums, compilations, and DVDs, including Shwekey 2 (2002), Yedid (2004), Leshem Shomayim (2007), Ad Bli Dai (2009), Libi Bamizrach (2010), Cry No More (2012), Kolot (2014), We Are a Miracle (2016), and Those Were the Days (2017). In 2018, he delivered Musica, which peaked at number three on the Billboard World Albums chart.



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Netanyahu says real danger to democracy is ‘all-powerful court’

By Debbie Reiss
World Israel News

Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu said in a televised statement that he had no plans to stop the judicial reform, beginning with the passage of a bill to reform the process of appointing judges. “I’m taking the reins,” Netanyahu said, noting that until now his “hands were tied” over a conflict of interest. “For our people, and for our country I will do everything to reach a solution,” he said. Addressing the protesting IDF soldiers and reservists, the premier said: “There is no place for refusal to answer the call of duty. It endangers our national security and everyone’s personal security, and there is no justification for it.” “I will do everything to heal

the rift in the nation because we are brotherly people and with God’s help we will do it together, and together we will succeed,” he said. “Citizens of Israel, a few months ago, as soon as the election results were announced, I said, ‘I intend to be the prime minister of all the citizens of Israel,’ I meant it then and I mean it today,” Netanyahu said at the beginning of his statement. “We have one country and we must do everything to protect it from external threats and from an irreconcilable rift from within. We cannot allow any dispute, no matter how acute, to endanger the common future of all of us.” He went on to warn that the real danger to democracy was “an all-powerful court.”

“Opponents of the reform are not traitors and its supporters are not fascists. Most of the citizens of Israel love our country and want to preserve our democracy. But since there are those who appropriate democracy for themselves, I want to say a few words about democracy: the supporters of the reform think that there is no democracy here. What is real and what endangers democracy is an all-powerful court. “On the other hand, the opponents of the reform think that what will endanger democracy is a Knesset and a government that will act without restraints and without brakes, that will endanger the rights of the individual.” “The supporters of the reform are outraged that

the balance between the authorities has been violated over the past decades. The court unjustifiably interfered with security considerations in the fight against terrorism, raising difficulties with the government’s policy,” he said, noting that the Supreme Court prevented the removal of infiltrators from Israel as well as intervened with offshore gas deal. **Restoring the ‘proper balance’** The “most painful” claim of the pro-reform camp, Netanyahu said, was the cronyism in Israel’s process of appointing judges. “Many in the nation agree that the Supreme Court is run as a closed club for the appointment of judges in a friend brings friend system.

The judges have a veto in the existing system on the appointment of judges and in practice appoint themselves, which does not happen in any other democracy in the world,” he said. The law, which will pass in its present form in the Knesset next week, “will balance and diversify” the court. “We do not want a controlled court but a balanced court, which will also gain the trust of the people,” Netanyahu continued. Citing Harvard law professor emeritus Alan Dershowitz, he said, “This is not the end of democracy but the strengthening of democracy.” Dershowitz, who has spoken out several times against the proposed reforms, nevertheless has made it clear that they do not in any way

threaten Israel’s democracy — “quite the opposite,” he told Australia’s J-Air radio last week, “they actually enhance it.” Noting that many people were scared of an “illiberal *Halachic* (Jewish law) state, with anti-gay and anti-women legislation,” Netanyahu said he believes it is possible to pass a reform that will “provide an answer to both sides, that will restore the proper balance between the authorities that will preserve the individual rights of every citizen in the country.” He called out the opposition over its refusal to enter discussions aimed at finding a compromise. “Almost three months have been wasted because of this refusal. I hope that will change in the coming days.”

As Netanyahu flies to London, the UK’s chief rabbi calls for ‘Jewish unity’ around the world

By David I. Klein

(JTA) — Ahead of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s upcoming visit to London, the United Kingdom’s chief rabbi is calling for “Jewish unity” in Israel and around the world in response to dramatic protests against proposed changes to the Israeli judicial system. “I never thought that we would witness a time when citizens of Israel, including respected leaders, are openly speaking about the possibility, God forbid, of civil war,” Ephraim Mirvis wrote in a short op-ed in the Jewish Chronicle, the U.K.’s oldest

Jewish newspaper. “At this moment of national crisis, Jewish unity must be our foremost priority. Jewish unity is not only a noble aspiration. It is a sacred responsibility—for politicians, leaders, activists, and for us all, both in Israel and around the world.” It was his first statement on the ongoing protests, which have brought out hundreds of thousands onto the streets of Israel for months. Mirvis avoided taking a side in the charged debate over whether the proposals put forward by Israel’s right-wing government will help reform their judicial system by reining in the power of the Supreme

Court or erode the country’s democracy. The government drew fresh rebuke from protesters as it passed a law that limits the ways a sitting prime minister can be removed from office. Netanyahu has been embroiled in multiple corruption cases for years. Netanyahu delayed his London flight to early in the morning on Friday after making a nationally televised speech in which he said he will intervene in the judicial reform process, which has included bills on how judges are chosen and on the Supreme Court’s ability to halt legislation. He was met with a chilly reception by local Jews during

diplomatic visits to both Italy and Germany this month. According to Haaretz, Netanyahu is expected to use the visit to reassure his British counterparts that his reforms will not change Israel’s identity as a democratic state. His public schedule included only a meeting with British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, a Conservative, and no meetings with local Jewish figures. Some liberal Jewish groups have joined in protesting Netanyahu’s upcoming appearance in London. “You can’t enjoy a weekend in London while you are bringing down a democracy” reads a poster by Yachad UK, a British-Jewish group which advocates for a peaceful solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. “Prime Minister Netanyahu is coming to London. He leads the far-right government which is working to destroy Israel’s judicial system, entrench occupation and trample on the rights of women & minorities,” the group added in a tweet, inviting others to join them in an all-day protest during Netanyahu’s visit. In an op-ed, Marie Van Der Zyl, the president of the Board of Deputies of British Jews, argued that those protesting should not be dismissed as haters of Israel. “The protests in London are being led by Israelis. Israeli flags are proudly being flown.

These are not people who seek to destroy Israel, but wish to save it from something they

fear might lead to its destruction,” she wrote in the Jewish Chronicle.

Knesset repeals disengagement law for northern Samaria

(JNS) — Israel’s Knesset on Tuesday voted 31-18 to repeal articles of the 2005 Gaza Disengagement Law banning Israelis from entering and residing in four communities in northern Samaria. The Gaza disengagement led to the destruction and evacuation of the Israeli communities of Sa-Nur, Homesh, Ganim and Kadim in northern Samaria, as well as 21 communities in the Gaza Strip. In addition to rolling back the articles (23-27) banning movement into and out of, and residence in, northern Samaria, the amendment stipulates that Article 28, which canceled rights regarding real estate in vacated territory, will not apply to rights established there starting from the date of the bill’s approval. “There is no longer any justification to prevent Israelis from entering and staying in the evacuated territory in northern Samaria, and therefore it is proposed to state that these sections [of the disengagement law] will no longer apply to the evacuated territory,” reads the introductory text to the bill. The bill’s passage erases “to

some extent” the “the stain on the garment of the State of Israel” left by the disengagement, it continues. The Israel Defense Forces must now approve a military order allowing Israelis to return to those areas. “Seventeen years of attempts, an uncompromising struggle, and a strong belief in the righteousness of this path converged into one moment when the Knesset plenum voted in favor of canceling the Disengagement Law,” Likud MK Yuli Edelstein, who sponsored the bill, said Tuesday. “The State of Israel tonight began the recovery process from the deportation disaster,” he added in reference to the 2005 expulsion of some 8,000 Jews from their homes in Gaza and Samaria. “This is the first significant step towards real healing and settlement in Israel’s historical territories that belong to it.” Edelstein sponsored the measure at the request of Samaria Regional Council chairman Yossi Dagan, who was himself among those expelled from the Samaria communities.

“This is a struggle we have been waging for 18 years and we finally see the light at the end of the tunnel,” said Dagan last month as the bill was making its way through Knesset committees. “The deportees of [northern Samaria]—heroes who are standing with us as the tip of the spear in this struggle—will yet see recompense for their actions. The residents of the communities of Ganim, Kadim, Homesh and Sa-Nur will return within their borders,” he added, referencing Jeremiah 31:15-16. A game of cat and mouse has taken place between the IDF and former residents and supporters since the disengagement, particularly at Homesh, where a yeshiva has operated out of caravans and tents. Troops have dismantled the yeshiva several times over the years. The coalition agreement between Likud and the Religious Zionism Party, led by Minister of Finance Bezalel Smotrich, requires the government to allow for the Homesh Yeshiva to remain as a first step towards rebuilding the four communities.



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The right side of Jewish history

By Benjamin Sipzner

(JNS) — Israel is undergoing many challenges since the new government was formed, internally and externally. Terror has accelerated, and on the international scene, Israel's internal judicial reform initiatives have been met with criticism from around the world.

Many of these challenges have been created by extreme left-wing Israelis who understand the international political landscape and are abusing it to take away legitimacy from this new government and its plans. Immediately coming off the right's election victory, Israel's political left went on the offensive against the legitimacy of Benjamin Netanyahu's coalition, which was voted in through a democratic election. As time has passed, their behavior has become more intolerable and is pushing Israel to the brink of civil war and international isolation.

Immediately after the elections, Yair Lapid, the former prime minister and current head of the opposition, called on new officers of the Israel Defense Forces at their graduation ceremony to question the new government and their orders to the Israeli army, saying, "the call to use force without laws, without rules, without adhering to the model of a law-abiding army." These calls weaken Israeli society and the IDF.

Additionally, on Dec. 1, Lapid wrote an open letter to Israel's municipalities that said the parties set to form the next coalition government have "abandoned the education of our children and handed them over to the most extreme and darkest elements in Israeli society. I urge you not to cooperate with the unit for external programs and partnerships in the Ministry of Education."

That was three months ago. Unfortunately, things have gone downhill quickly. Since then, there have been calls by former prime

ministers, mayors and generals in the army for armed civil war against the right, and thousands of death threats against ministers and members of parliament alongside violent protests against the State of Israel. Former prime ministers and senior ministers of Israel have besmirched the Israeli government on international media platforms and have called for a boycott of the state and the ruling coalition by foreign powers.

The protesters have interviewed and written op-eds on leading media publications worldwide, have called on Israeli and international companies to withdraw or not initiate investments in Israel; called for Israelis to stop serving in the IDF and in the reservist army; and even called for Israelis to abandon their home and move to Europe or the United States.

At their protests, they display posters of Netanyahu alongside Russian President Vladimir Putin, Hitler and Iran's Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, and call the prime minister a traitor. They have blocked roads illegally and vandalized property in Israel for months. Still, Israel's police have not acted with force to disperse them as they did in the past with protesters from other social sects in Israeli society.

The protesters knew this would happen. They are looking for pictures of police dispersing them with force so that they can run to the world media and say that Israel is a fascist and oppressive state. Meanwhile, Israel's elitist and most privileged citizens are disturbing millions of Israelis' daily movements.

Recently, left-wing Israelis have even started protesting in front of embassies of foreign nations in Israel, and Israeli expats have protested at central locations in cities of Western countries. They are aware that the international mainstream media and left-wing governments will gladly be on their side in weakening Israel's right-wing.

They ignore the fact the introduction and invitation of foreign intervention in Israeli politics will weaken Israel's sovereignty and respect on the world stage for decades. Everything is "kosher" for left-wing Israelis if it means holding onto their self-ordained power structure, which is the Israeli Supreme Court.

Knesset members have been barricaded inside their residences by hundreds of left-wing activists attempting to prevent them from leaving and being able to vote. A protester tried to get close to Simcha Rothman, head of the Knesset's Constitution, Law and Justice Committee, at his home to possibly harm him. A few weeks ago, a crowd of thousands barricaded Sara Netanyahu outside a hair salon in Tel Aviv. Later that evening, she was escorted home by hundreds of Israeli police officers. Last week, Israeli Minister of the Economy and Industry Nir Barkat attended a political event with the Likud Party's branch in Kfar Saba that became surrounded by hundreds of left-wing protesters who broke the building's windows and shouted and hurled objects at Barkat as he was escorted in and out of the event.

In the Knesset itself, two members belonging to Lapid's Yesh Atid Party jumped over the table, shouting at Rothman. The Yesh Atid and Yisrael Beiteinu (led by Knesset member Avigdor Lieberman) parties have threatened to withdraw from Israel's Knesset in an attempt to signal to the rest of the world that Israel is no longer a democratic country worth serving in its parliament.

The proposal laid out last week by Israeli President Isaac Herzog was not nearly a compromise from the very basic fact that every party in the opposition supported it and every party in the coalition opposed it. A different kind of proposal could have been a life preserver to begin to pull us out of this terrible situation we are in. Instead, Herzog,

who was the leader of the left-wing Labor Party before becoming president and a career left-wing politician, chose to pander to his political colleagues and ignore the collusion voted in democratically by the Israeli public. His proposal and the attitude of the left signal to the Israeli right that Israel's democratic elections don't have to mean much, and that even if they are democratically elected, any significant policy they wish to enact must receive approval from the left-wing political elites.

On their recent trip to Israel, the organizations of the Conference of Presidents didn't request to meet with Rothman or Israeli Minister of Justice Yariv, who are leading the reforms from Israel's coalition government. They caved into the pressure by mainstream media and political correctness instead of becoming educated on the issues and taking a balanced approach. These organizations and others have released two letters in just a few months to show their concern about the new government's policies—something they didn't even do once during the 18 months of the last government.

For Jews who hail from the Diaspora, we need to remember our commitment to Israel. As a people who look in from the outside, we understand the uniqueness of Israel, a nation-state for the Jewish people. We were not educated with a scorched-earth approach to our eternal homeland when politically things don't turn out the way we want. The Jewish Diaspora has a responsibility during a time of internal turmoil in Israel to urge the left-wing not to "burn it down" and to stand on the right side of Jewish history.

Benjamin Sipzner is the director for international operations at Ad Kan. He was the Anglo coordinator for outreach and events for the Religious Zionist Party in Israel's last two elections. Email him at: sipznerbenjamin@gmail.com.

Israeli protesters, I can no longer keep silent

By Phyllis Chesler

(JNS)—I can no longer keep silent. I may be sitting in Manhattan, but my heart is in Jerusalem and my heart is very heavy.

I may not be a lawyer or a legal scholar, but I have been an organizer, an activist, a leader who has acted on behalf of civil and human rights — especially women's rights. But I have never acted in the way that Israeli rioters are now acting: Not stopping, threatening to continue until they've brought down an entire country.

These leftists/progressives/"good people" (my former people) seem to be behaving the same way that pro-Palestinian/pro-jihad students behave in the streets and classrooms of America. They are like hecklers in the classroom who will not allow a speaker with whom they disagree to speak, trying to chase them out of the lecture hall. These rioters are aiming to abolish a lawful and democratic election because they despise and fear the people's choice. They aim to make their country odious in the eyes of the world.

Do they not understand that Israel is already defamed, that the noose has tightened around the Jewish neck globally, that Israel is already hated everywhere? Do they think that by standing for civil rights, women's rights, gay rights, minority and Arab rights (all important issues) they will be seen as the "good" Israel, the "good" Jew and will be sent to the gas chambers last?

Do they not see that their style of protesting, however righteously intended, resembles

a Black Lives Matter demonstration, a jihadist uprising, or an adolescent tantrum? Do they not see that they are enacting their own form of BDS?

Do they not understand that they reside in a neighborhood where such a dangerous riot would be put down with live bullets, prison, torture, execution, perhaps even chemical warfare? Do they not understand that they are lucky to live in a country that does not do such things? Do they have no better way to protest what they view as dangerous and awful as a "tyranny of the majority?"

I am not in favor of abolishing women's rights, gay rights or minority rights in Israel. My record speaks for itself. And for the record, please allow me to note that the overly hallowed Israeli Supreme Court—yes, even under Menachem Elon and Aharon Barak—which the demonstrators/protestors/rioters believe has been so just, even holy, utterly failed to do justice for the Women of the Wall or the Original Women of the Wall, who want to pray with women only and at the Kotel proper, not at Robinson's Arch in mixed gender minyanim.

Yes, I understand that the haredim, who may have voted for the new government, also opposed us with contemptuous violence. Nevertheless, I refused to write about any of this in the major North American press; not while Israel was under siege.

As Jew-hatred in the West keeps rising; as physical, even murderous attacks on visible Jews both in the diaspora and in Israel keep

rising; as more and more Israelis, including Israel's president, are being treated shamefully; as more and more Jewish students and professors are being harassed, even persecuted in America—what is going on in Israel right now is very dangerous, beyond disheartening.

I understand: The secularists/modernists/atheists are overly righteous, but they are also terrified lest they be subjected to religious law and prejudices about women, minorities and Arabs. They do not wish to live in a theocratic and misogynist state. They genuinely fear that their civil rights will be lost. They have a point—but they are also out of touch with reality.

The religious nationalists believe that only those who are God-fearing can save the Jews and have the moral right to preside over the only Jewish state. They are also focused on Jewish survival in an increasingly dangerous neighborhood and world. Iran is uppermost on their minds, plus the Arab terrorist attacks and the world media diabolically turning reality upside down. Then there is the E.U. funding of Palestinian terrorism and the U.N. passing an unending number of anti-Israel resolutions. As I wrote, the noose is tightening, the Jew of the world is now everywhere defamed.

Is this also a fight between Sephardim/Mizrahim and the Western-centric Ashkenazim? Between post-enlightenment modernists and traditionalists? Brethren: Were we not all at Sinai?

It seems to me that, in the name of democracy, the most uncivil, anti-democratic protests have been taking place against a democratically elected government whose views the protestors do not share. Why not start organizing to win the hearts and minds of the electorate? Why not plan for victory in the next election? Why not hold demonstrations that do not intend to shut the entire country down?

Now is the time for unity and compromise. If not now—when? We have lost our nation before because of sinat hinam, unwarranted hatred of one another.

The Israeli rioters are playing at being American Jews who, for a long time now, have identified themselves as being in opposition to Israel. However, what was once a genuine disagreement on the issues has become a chasm, a deep and dangerous division. Israel is so important to Jews that each Jew wants to see it in their own image and not in anyone else's image. How about in God's image? What happened to our being a nation holy to God, a people in God's image?

People: As they say, yesh gvul. There has got to be a limit to such riots.

Phyllis Chesler is an emerita professor of Psychology and Women's Studies at the City University of New York (CUNY) and the author of 20 books, including "Women and Madness," and "A Family Conspiracy: Honor Killings." She is a Senior IPT Fellow, and a Fellow at MEF and ISGAP.

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Which side are you on: Jewish American or American Jew?

By Andrew Silow-Carroll

(JTA) — Earlier this month the New York Times convened what it called a “focus group of Jewish Americans.” I was struck briefly by that phrase — Jewish Americans — in part because the Times, like the Jewish Telegraphic Agency, tends to prefer “American Jews.”

It’s seemingly a distinction without a difference, although I know others might disagree. There is an argument that “American Jew” smacks of disloyalty, describing a Jew who happens to be American. “Jewish American,” according to this thinking, flips the script: an American who happens to be Jewish.

If pressed, I’d say I prefer “American Jew.” The noun “Jew” sounds, to my ear anyway, more direct and more assertive than the tentative adjective “Jewish.” It’s also consistent with the way JTA essentializes “Jew” in its coverage, as in British Jew, French Jew, LGBT Jew or Jew of color.

I wouldn’t have given further thought to the subject if not for a webinar last week given by Arnold Eisen, the chancellor emeritus at the Jewish Theological Seminary. In “Jewish-American, American-Jew: The Complexities and Joys of Living a Hyphenated Identity,” Eisen

discussed how a debate over language is really about how Jews navigate between competing identities.

“What does the ‘American’ signify to us?” he asked. “What does the ‘Jewish’ signify and what is the nature of the relationship between the two? Is it a synthesis? Is it a tension, or a contradiction, or is it a blurring of the boundaries such that you can’t tell where one ends and the other begins?”

Questions like these, it turns out, have been asked since Jews and other immigrants first began flooding Ellis Island. Teddy Roosevelt complained in 1915 that “there is no room in this country for hyphenated Americans.” Woodrow Wilson liked to say that “any man who carries a hyphen about with him carries a dagger that he is ready to plunge into the vitals of the Republic.” The two presidents were frankly freaked out about what we now call multiculturalism, convinced that America couldn’t survive a wave of immigrants with dual loyalties.

The two presidents lost the argument, and for much of the 20th century “hyphenated American” was shorthand for successful acculturation. While immigration hardliners continue to question the loyalty of minorities who claim more than one identity, and Donald Trump played with the politics of loyalty

in remarks about Mexicans, Muslims and Jews, ethnic pride is as American as, well, St. Patrick’s Day. “I am the proud daughter of Indian immigrants,” former South Carolina Gov. Nikki Haley said in announcing her run for the Republican presidential nomination this month.

For Jews, however, the hyphen became what philosophy professor Berel Lang called “a weighty symbol of the divided life of Diaspora Jewry.” Jewishness isn’t a distant country with quaint customs, but a religion and a portable identity that lives uneasily alongside your nationality. In a 2005 essay, Lang argued that on either side of the hyphen were “vying traditions or allegiances,” with the Jew constantly confronted with a choice between the American side, or assimilation, and the Jewish side, or remaining distinct.

Eisen calls this the “question of Jewish difference.” Eisen grew up in an observant Jewish family in Philadelphia and understood from an early age that his family was different from their Vietnamese-, Italian-, Ukrainian- and African-American neighbors. On the other hand, they were all the same — that is, American — because they were all hyphenated. “Being parallel to all these other differences, gave me my place in the city and in the country,” he said.

In college he studied the

Jewish heavy hitters who were less sanguine about the integration of American and Jewish identities. Eisen calls Rabbi Mordecai Kaplan, the renegade theologian at JTS, “the thinker who really made this question uppermost for American Jews.” Kaplan wrote in 1934 that Jewishness could only survive as a “subordinate civilization” in the United States, and that the “Jew in America will be first and foremost an American, and only secondarily a Jew.”

Kaplan’s prescription was a maximum effort on the part of Jews to “save the otherness of Jewish life” — not just through synagogue, but through a Jewish “civilization” expressed in social relationships, leisure activities and a traditional moral and ethical code.

Of course, Kaplan also understood that there was another way to protect Jewish distinctiveness: move to Israel.

The political scientist Charles Liebman, in “The Ambivalent American Jew” (1973), argued that Jews in the United States were torn between surviving as a distinct ethnic group and integrating into the larger society.

According to Eisen, Liebman believed that “Jews who make ‘Jewish’ the adjective and ‘American’ the noun tend to fall on the integration side of the hyphen. And Jews who make ‘Jew’ the noun and

‘American’ the adjective tend to fall on the survival side of the hyphen.”

Eisen, a professor of Jewish thought at JTS, noted that the challenge of the hyphen was felt by rabbis on opposite ends of the theological spectrum. He cited Eugene Borowitz, the influential Reform rabbi, who suggested in 1973 that Jews in the United States “are actually more Jewish on the inside than they pretend to be on the outside. In other words, we’re so worried about what Liebman called integration into America that we hide our distinctiveness.” Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik, the leading Modern Orthodox thinker of his generation, despaired that the United States presented its Jews with an unresolvable conflict between the person of faith and the person of secular culture.

When I read the texts Eisen shared, I see 20th-century Jewish men who doubted Jews could be fully at home in America and at home with themselves as Jews (let alone as Jews who weren’t straight or white — which would demand a few more hyphens). They couldn’t imagine a rich Jewishness that didn’t exist as a counterculture, the way Cynthia Ozick wondered what it would be like to “think as a Jew” in a non-Jewish language like English.

They couldn’t picture the hyphen as a plus sign, which

pulled the words “Jewish” and “American” together.

Recent trends support the skeptics. Look at Judaism’s Conservative movement, whose rabbis are trained at JTS, and which has long tried to reconcile Jewish literacy and observance with the American mainstream. It’s shrinking, losing market share and followers both to Reform — where followers tend to fall on the “integration side” of the hyphen — and to Orthodoxy, where Jewish otherness is booming in places like Brooklyn and Lakewood, New Jersey. And the Jewish “nones” — those opting out of religion, synagogue and active engagement in Jewish institutions and affairs — are among the fastest-growing segments of American Jewish life.

Eisen appears more optimistic about a hyphenated Jewish identity, although he insists that it takes work to cultivate the Jewish side. “I don’t think there’s anything at stake necessarily on which side of the hyphen you put the Jewish on,” he said. “But if you don’t go out of your way to put added weight on the Jewish in the natural course of events, as Kaplan said correctly 100 years ago, the American will win.”

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of JTA or its parent company, 70 Faces Media.

Why they won’t talk about the Oslo Accords

By Stephen M. Flatow

(JNS) — Media pundits spend a lot of time “explaining” to the rest of us why some political or social development just occurred. Last week, The New York Times presented what it claimed are the real reasons behind the controversy over Israeli judicial reform. The recent election results, which brought Israel a new government — and the judicial reform plan — are part of a “rightward drift” that goes back a number of years, according to the Times’ Jerusalem Bureau Chief Patrick Kingsley.

“The failure of peace negotiations with the Palestinians in the 1990s led some Israelis to lose faith in the centrist and leftist leaders who had championed the process,” Kingsley said.

Think about that. Kingsley and the Times described the most widely-acclaimed Middle East peace agreement of the 20th century as “the failure of peace negotiations with the Palestinians.”

The signing of Oslo I on the White House lawn, with a dramatic handshake between Yitzhak Rabin and Yasser Arafat and the Oslo II agreement, with Israel’s withdrawal from the territories where 98 percent of the Palestinian Arabs live — both are, in the eyes of the Times, “the failure of peace negotiations with the Palestinians.”

Back in the 1990s, however, the Times considered the Oslo Accords a tremendous success. Its lead editorial on Sept. 14, 1993 — the day after the signing at the White House — declared that after decades of

“warfare and only a few moments of promise,” the signing of the agreement “brought the brightest promise of all: reconciliation between the two main parties to the conflict, Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization.”

The editors of the Times were ecstatic that “these old enemies came together to recognize each other’s right to exist.” It also heaped praise on Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin for saying “what seemed to be on everyone’s mind: ‘Enough of blood and tears. Enough!’”

But — and here’s the kicker — the Times also noted that Oslo “commits the Palestinians to the principle that their Israeli neighbors are on the land to stay, and are to be lived with in peace.”

Therein lies the problem.

The New York Times and those who share its views loved the Oslo Accords because Israel was surrendering to many of the demands of the Palestinian Arabs. Therefore, it was, in their eyes, a triumph, not a “failure.”

At the time, most Israelis cautiously supported Oslo because they hoped that the Palestinian leadership would keep its promise. They hoped it was sincerely “committed,” as the Times editorial put it, “to the principle that their Israeli neighbors are on the land to stay, and are to be lived with in peace.”

But Palestinian leaders didn’t adhere to that principle. On the contrary, the bombings (one of which took the life of my daughter Alisa in 1995), shootings and stabbings continued. Terrorist groups were not disarmed or even outlawed. Israel’s dozens

of extradition requests for terrorists were ignored. An entire generation of young Palestinian Arabs were raised to hate Jews and Israel — not to embrace the principle “that their Israeli neighbors are on the land to stay, and are to be lived with in peace.”

That’s why the Times never talks about Oslo. That’s why Kingsley could not even bring himself to say the words “Oslo Accords.” That’s why he now calls them “failed peace negotiations,” not negotiations that produced an agreement to which the Palestinians are bound. Acknowledging Oslo would mean admitting that the Palestinians have violated their obligations every single day since the accords were signed.

Telling the truth about Oslo would mean confronting the Palestinian Authority and demanding it take steps that everyone knows it will never take.

Telling the truth about Oslo would mean giving up the illusion that surrendering territory to the P.A. will lead to peace.

Telling the truth about Oslo would mean acknowledging the painful truth that the accords do not contain a single word prohibiting Israel from building Jewish homes in Judea and Samaria.

It would also mean acknowledging another painful truth — that Israel’s 1995 withdrawal from the areas where 98 percent of the Palestinian Arabs reside means that, for all intents and purposes, Israel’s “occupation of the Palestinians” ended 28 years ago.

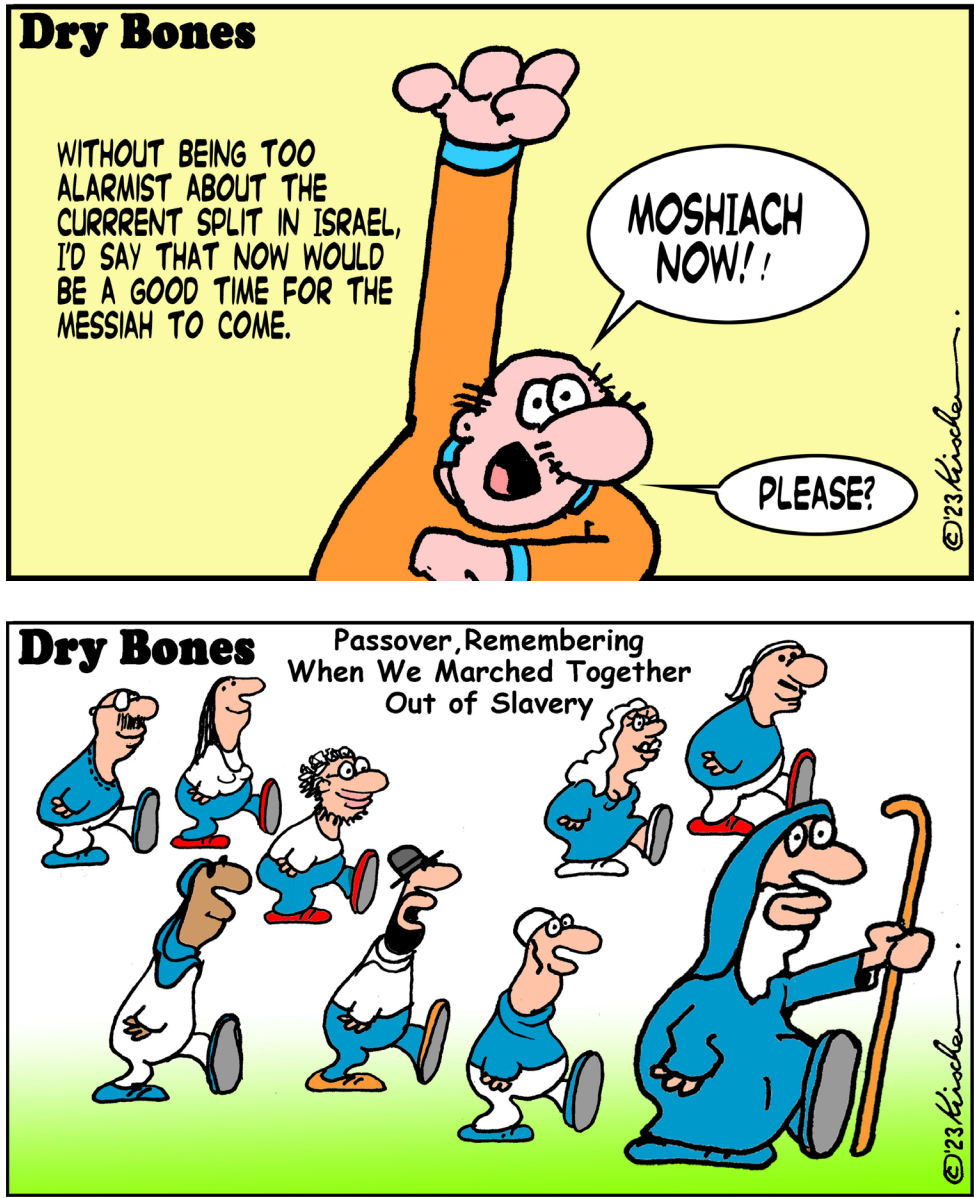
So, what can Kingsley

and the Times do, except bury Oslo, airbrush it out of descriptions of recent Israeli-Arab history, deep-six those old Times editorials calling the negotiations a success and declare them a failure, and pretend the Oslo Accords were never signed and the P.A.

has no obligations that it still must honor.

Otherwise, the public would realize that Palestinian Arab leaders’ promises are worthless and any future agreement with them will be another sham for which Israel will again pay in blood.

Stephen M. Flatow is an attorney and the father of Alisa Flatow, who was murdered in an Iranian-sponsored Palestinian terrorist attack in 1995. He is author of A Father’s Story: My Fight for Justice Against Iranian Terror.



What's Happening

A COMPREHENSIVE
COMMUNITY
CALENDAR

For inclusion in the What's Happening Calendar, copy must be sent on separate sheet and clearly marked for Calendar. Submit copy via: e-mail (news@orlandoheritage.com); mail (P.O. Box 300742, Fern Park, FL 32730-0742); fax (407-831-0507); or drop it by the office (207 O'Brien Rd., Ste. 101, Fern Park) Deadline is Wednesday noon, 10 days prior to publication.

LIGHT
SHABBAT
CANDLES AT
MARCH 31
7:24 p.m.
APRIL 7
7:28 p.m.

MORNING MINYANS

Chabad of North Orlando and Chabad of Altamonte Springs are holding in-person minyans. Chabad of South Orlando — Monday - Friday, 8 a.m. and 10 minutes before sunset; Saturday, 9:30 a.m.; Sunday, 8:15 a.m., 407-354-3660.

Congregation Ahavas Yisrael — Monday - Friday, 7:30 a.m.; Saturday, 9:30 a.m.; Sunday, 9 a.m., 407-644-2500.

Congregation Chabad Lubavitch of Greater Daytona — Monday, 8 a.m.; Thursday, 8 a.m., 904-672-9300.

Congregation Ohev Shalom — Sunday, 9 a.m., 407-298-4650.

GOBOR Community Minyan at Jewish Academy of Orlando — Monday – Friday, 7:45 a.m. – 8:30 a.m.

Temple Israel — Sunday, 9 a.m., 407-647-3055.

For events happening at the Roth Family JCC, please visit the website, orlandojcc.org. For events at the Holocaust Memorial Resource & Education Center, please visit holocaustedu.org.

FRIDAY, MARCH 31

Ahavas Yisrael — Kabbalat, 30 minutes before sundown.

SATURDAY, APRIL 1

Torah Portion — Parashat Tzav: Leviticus 6:1-8:36.

SUNDAY, APRIL 2

COS Senior Bingo — 2 p.m. Play 10 games. Cost \$5 for a set of cards and \$3 for each additional set. All money collected at the door will be distributed as prize money. Complimentary nosh with hot/cold beverages. For information, contact Andy Rosen and Jerry Leibman, andy@pineloch.com or 407-921-0129.

TUESDAY, APRIL 4

COS Men's Club — Virtual bridge, 7 p.m. All welcome, no cost. Register at www.bridgebase.com. For info: Jim Tinkoff, jtinkoff@cfl.rr.com or Andy Rosen, andy@pineloch.com.

FRIDAY, APRIL 7

Ahavas Yisrael — Kabbalat, 30 minutes before sundown.

Quote of the Week

"The idea that it's possible to move from slavery to freedom and from darkness to light and from despair to hope — that is the greatest Jewish story ever told."

— Rabbi Sharon Brous

"I'm lost without it!"

"It's inexcusable!"

"My week is not complete without it!"

"I can't live without it!"

"How in the world am I supposed to know what's going on?"

These are some of the comments we receive from readers when they miss an issue of *Heritage Florida Jewish News*.

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China’s growing influence on the global stage is ‘mixed bag’

By Bradley Martin

(JNS) — Hours after China brokered a surprise deal between Iran and Saudi Arabia, a reporter asked U.S. President Joe Biden what he thought about the two countries, which come out of rival Islamic branches that have competed for centuries over guardianship of the faith, re-establishing diplomatic relations.

“The better the relations between Israel and their Arab neighbors, the better for everybody,” he said.

Critics ridiculed the president’s non sequitur, but Biden’s statement raises the question of what impact the deal—and importantly, China’s involvement as a fixer—might have on Jerusalem’s relations with its Arab neighbors following the Abraham Accords.

“China is not working for or against Israel’s interest,” Howard Shatz, a senior economist at Rand Corporation told JNS. “This is a good agreement in China’s interest and a mixed bag for Israel.”

Less tension between Iran and its neighbors may mean neighboring Arab states, like Saudi Arabia, have less incentive to work with Israel. But the United Arab Emirates maintains ties with Iran even after signing the Abraham

Accords, and significant disagreements between Saudi Arabia and Iran are unlikely to resolve anytime soon, said Shatz.

“Time will tell,” he stated.

China is in a singular position to broker an agreement like the one between Iran and Saudi Arabia, due to its close ties with both parties, Middle East experts say.

“All signs indicate that China is strategically, not sporadically, deepening its engagement in Persian Gulf economies,” Behnam Ben Taleblu, a senior fellow at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, told JNS.

“Few countries can manage the rivalry between Tehran and Riyadh today, and Beijing’s ability to walk that tightrope is driven largely by the fact that it is Saudi Arabia’s and Iran’s most important trade partner, thanks to Beijing’s reliance on hydrocarbons from the region to power its economy,” he explained.

Shatz agreed, saying “the most important part of this development is that China brokered the agreement. The United States could not have served as a broker because it does not have relations with Iran, whereas China does. Both Saudi Arabia and Iran look

at China as an integral part of their future.”

Shatz and Taleblu believe the deal signals a decrease in tensions between Iran and Saudi Arabia. They also noted that it remains to be seen whether China’s ascendancy on the world stage as a peace broker is good for the Jewish state.

‘Improve his standing at home’

Meir Javedanfar, a lecturer at Reichman University in Herzliya who teaches diplomatic and security studies of Iran, said China made a calculated move to further its own interests and is likely to use the deal as leverage in its dealings with Moscow and Washington.

China’s President Xi Jinping secured a third term, which is unprecedented since Mao Zedong, Javedanfar told JNS.

“With this deal, Xi Jinping hopes that it will improve his standing at home and portray him as a global player,” said Javedanfar.

He noted that the Chinese president is now visiting Russian President Vladimir Putin, and wants to project Chinese power and influence not only in the Middle East and Russia—since Russia depends on Chinese buyers for its oil and gas exports—but also in its dealings with America.

“Passover Terms” by Yoni Glatt

Difficulty Level: Medium
koshercrosswords@gmail.com

Across

1. iPhone application

6. “Come ___?” (Italian greeting)

9. Words before “Is Born”

14. Big name in hummus

15. Morticia, to Wednesday

16. Shmuel’s 15-Across

17. Maggid from a kindergarten teacher?

19. If one’s broken, it’s often good

20. Chairman pro ___

21. FBI member?

23. Old in Yiddish

24. Making friends over matzah?

27. Letters before Constitution or Lincoln

28. It’s needed for camping

29. Star Hawk Young

32. Magic incantation

35. What the kosher Angler doesn’t want to catch

38. Seder scapegoat, once?

42. Common colonist

43. Taps a pitch

44. Fusses

45. A writer may work on it

47. 21st, e.g.: Abbr.

49. What the impatient say during Dayenu?

55. Klutzes

56. “Shalom!”

57. Words before dime or diet

60. Power

62. Like some at the end of the second Seder or chometz found on Chol Hamoed?

64. Awaken, as feelings

65. Org. supporting flossing

66. Presidential candidate Haley

67. “___ a rose is she”: Coleridge

68. Start of an Iowa city

69. Made comfortable

Down

1. No. 2 in the lab

2. Fashionable arrival

3. WWII-ending weapon

4. Hit 2022 Indian film

5. Indefinite answers

6. “I told you so!” smile

7. Marisa in Spider-Man movies

8. “...sure plays ___ pinball”

9. Zevulun to Binyamin

10. Michael who won a Pulitzer for “The Killer Angels”

11. Script or Haggadah run-through?

12. “West Side Story” character

13. Given a G, say

18. Quarterback Tagovailoa, and others

22. Dan who was an All-Star for the Braves and Marlins

25. Regretful one

26. First phone caller

29. Org. scanning flyers

30. Operated

31. Hurricanes, blizzards, locust swarms, and fiery hail?

32. Eat leavened bread on Passover, e.g.

33. %, briefly

34. Frozen wasser

36. Grunge relative

37. Flour bag figs.

39. “___ to differ”

40. Mizrachi school in Ohio

41. Scott who can control a 42-Across

46. Tzedakah box

47. State south of Mass.

48. Funny Levy

49. Tolkien’s heroic captain of Rohan

50. Too trusting

51. Just awful

52. Escape the notice of

53. Ephron and Roberts

54. Errant golf shots

58. Synonym for 3-Down

59. Israel’s Yesh

61. Some offensive N.F.L. players, briefly

63. Sabado or Domingo, e.g.

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See answers on page 14A.

The road less traveled throughout history



The path less traveled in the woods of Colorado.

By Marilyn Shapiro
First Person

As I write this, I am at 9100 feet in Summit County, Colorado, spending time with my daughter Julie and my granddaughter, The Mountain Girl, while my son-in-law Sam is away on a once-in-a-lifetime rafting trip through the Grand Canyon.

On one particularly beautiful morning, I dropped my second-grade Mountain Girl off at school and, with the help of trekking poles, started a hike on the bike path that runs through the county. After an invigorating hour work-out, I considered expanding my hike to include the more secluded trails accessible from the flat, more populated path. Did I dare go into the woods alone? I debated for a while and then took a right turn onto a trail head. Hey! I could always turn back!

It helped that I soon met up with a friend who was walking with her dog Dickens. When I mentioned my own hesitancy following the Peak Trail, she assuaged my concerns. “Dickens and I take an hour hike almost every day of the year.” Hopeful as well as a little anxious, I pushed on up the trail. The cloudless sky was a cerulean blue; the mountains above me were dressed in white, and the trail through the leafless aspens was pristine and quiet. I silently thanked Julie for living in such a beautiful location and God for providing such a beautiful day.

Ironically, when I reached my destination, I was not alone. Mountain Girl’s entire second-grade class was on a field trip. They dotted the entire frozen lake, throwing snow at each other and making snowmen and (as I later learned) snow ducks. Mountain Girl gave me a hug before I navigated the last mile down to my daughter’s home. So much for my adventure being—well—an adventure!

Still, judging from my multiple postings including photographs on Facebook and the comments that followed, many of my family and friends thought of my winter sojourn

as irresponsible, strange, even insane. Hadn’t I gladly moved to Florida to get away from Upstate New York winters? More importantly, am I crazy for hiking by myself in the woods? Aren’t I afraid of falling on one of the trickier trails? Attacked by a mountain man? Eaten by the moose, elk, and bear who inhabit the forested areas where I am venturing out?

Time to fess up. Unlike Cheryl Strayed, who set off on a three month long solo journey the Pacific Crest Trail to find herself and then wrote about it in “Wild”, it had taken me a few days to eschew the easier walks on Frisco’s sidewalks and head up snow-packed, slightly steep, less populous trail in the winter. As a matter of fact, it took me a while to hike alone during our six-week summer rental when the trails are filled with tourists from around the country and world taking advantage of the Summit County’s spectacular but short summer.

But I swallowed my fear and took the leap of faith.

Growing up as a Cohen did not equate with courage; it was closer to cowardliness. We were not an adventurous family, in terms of our choices, our vacations, and especially our testing of our physical limits. Although my brother Jay played football and wrestled, the rest of the family considered strenuous exercise taking a leisurely walk. Case in point: when I had broken from the mold after marrying Larry, I took a three-mile jog on the back roads near my parents’ Lake Champlain cottage. When I got home, my father said, “You shouldn’t run like that! You can have a heart attack!” My 25-year-old self just smiled and walked away.

We won’t even get into what he said about Larry’s running races, which included some marathons. And I can’t imagine what he would think about our son Adam’s 60-mile bike rides; Julie’s skinning (skiing up hills) in zero degree temperatures; and Sam’s 200-mile rafting trip through the Grand Canyon. So yes, I had to invoke Shakespeare’s MacBeth to get the courage to take an easy winter hike!

I have been thinking of courage and risks and taking chances in relationship to the upcoming major Jewish holiday, Passover. Based on interpretations by the great medieval biblical and Talmudic commentator Rashi, not every Hebrew followed Moses on his trek out of Egypt across the Red Sea. “According to the biblical account Exodus 13:18b), Israel left Egypt chamushim, often translated as armed,” wrote Rabbi Norman S. Lipson in a 3/26/1999 article in the Sun Sentinel. Rashi, however, translated the Hebrew word one-fifth, which meant only 20 percent of all Israel left with Moses. “80 percent stayed in Egyptian slavery!” Lipson wrote.

Wow! So if the Cohen family had lived in Egypt at the time of Exodus, knowing my father, I bet we would have stayed home.

“Better the devil you know than the devil you don’t know!” he would say. While a small group of neighbors started packing and baked matzah, he and Jay would have gone back to building more pyramids while my mother, two sisters, and I would be kneading more leavened bread for dinner.

Even if Rashi’s interpretation was wrong, and most Jews did leave, I am sure one of us Cohens would not have emulated Nachshon ben Amiad, the hero in a midrash. Standing at the shores of the Red Sea with the Pharaoh and his army bearing down on the fleeing Hebrews, this brave man risked his life and jumped into the churning waters. At last moment, God interfered and split the sea,


saving Nachshon and providing the path to safety to all the rest who feared to take the leap of faith.

In a 4/22/2022 article in the Jerusalem Post by Nathan Lopes Cardozo, dean of the David Cardozo Academy in Jerusalem, praised the “Nachshons of every generation.” “Those who were prepared to jump into the sea, taking huge risks, were responsible for magnificent scientific discoveries, space travel, grand business deals, daring political decisions and waging wars on evil.” Others may have considered them as strange, irresponsible, even insane. Cardozo commented, but their willingness to take risks based on hope moves the world forward.

Okay. My taking the “road less traveled” by turning right on a bike path and heading up a mountain trail certainly does not qualify as an epic, world-changing event. But I think of Adam, Julie, and Sam, who dare to live a more adventurous life than my family. And I think of Nachshon, Judah Macabaeus, Theodore Hertzl, David Ben Gurion, Hannah Szenes, Anne Frank, Steven Spielberg, and so many other Jews whose vision, heroism, and courage paved the way for those who tend to hang back on the shore, waiting to see what will happen.

Marilyn Shapiro is an author/blogger. You can follow her at www.theregoesmyheart.me.


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— Rikki Hanin
Mayflower resident

Matzah pajamas are the latest trend in a long history of American Jewish branding

By Jackie Hajdenberg

(JTA) — Rabbi Yael Buechler conceived of her latest product two years ago, after planning ways to make the Passover seder fun for her two young sons. But it wasn’t until she started promoting the matzah pajamas she designed that she decided to make adult sizes, too.

After she reached out in December 2021 to The Maccabeats — the Orthodox a capella group that releases splashy new videos for most holidays — to offer kids’ pajamas for their Passover project, they demurred.

“They wrote back jokingly, ‘Haha — but like, do they come in grownup sizes?’” Buechler recalled.

But these days, both lines sell like, well, unleavened hotcakes. Jewish influencers have modeled the pajamas on social media, often as entire families, and the children’s set vaulted near the top of Passover sales rankings at Modern Tribe, an online marketplace for Jewish products.

That the breakout Passover product is technically sleepwear reflects a new frontier in the ongoing commercialization of Jewish holidays. It also reflects the turn toward comfort clothes that Americans in general have made since the COVID-19 pandemic began just before Passover three years ago.

“You used to get dressed

up to go to seder, but now everyone is a lot more casual,” said Amy Kritzer Becker, one of Modern Tribe’s owners.

Indeed, the promotion of fancy clothing for Passover is a prime example of American consumerism layered atop traditional Jewish practice. Many traditionally observant families buy new clothes, especially for children, for the holiday, to fulfill the mitzvah of “simcha,” or joy.

That became a marketing opportunity for clothing manufacturers as Jews moved to the United States in large numbers and emerged as a new consumer segment.

“Because of the alignment of the Passover holiday with Easter, it was an opportunity for Jews to also purchase nice attire,” said art historian Kerri Steinberg, author of “Jewish Mad Men: Advertising and the Design of the American Jewish Experience.”

Steinberg says the commercialization of Judaism has been a defining characteristic of American Judaism — and, in some ways, a safeguard for Jewish identity in a country that long boasted of being a melting pot.

“One thing that’s been very discrete and sort of distinctive I would say about Judaism in America is how it’s been branded and marketed, and packaged,” she said. “[That acculturation] stopped short of full assimilation

because in order to maintain a vibrant Jewish market, their identities had to be sort of retained in a discrete way.”

“In America, capitalism has been the key structure,” Steinberg added. “So it does make sense that there were opportunities for more consumption of Jewish goods and products around the holidays.”

Some of those goods and products were integral to observing the holiday. American Jewish newspapers from the turn of the century and onward featured ads from companies like Streit’s, Horowitz, and Manischewitz battling over claims to the best matzah and whitefish.

And of course there is also the Maxwell House Hagadah, created as a marketing ploy for the coffee company in 1932 and still produced today. Its creator, Joseph Jacobs, was an advertising maven who saw huge potential in a base of Jewish customers; he is credited with inventing the concept of targeted marketing.

But other products promoted for Passover had little or nothing to do with what happens during it. Stetson advertised its hats to Jewish customers in Jewish newspapers, while Colgate hawked perfume and other companies noted sales on shoes. Even Macy’s had a Passover department advertised in a March 1912 edition of the now-defunct Hebrew Standard.

By the second half of the 20th century, other forces were working in favor of Passover products. The rise of identity politics in the 1970s meant that many Jews were seeking items that would let them display their Jewishness, Steinberg said. Then, starting in the 1990s, the rise of kitsch, a nostalgic aesthetic, opened the door to nostalgic items such as Manischewitz purses, Streit’s aprons and gefilte fish T-shirts.

Just as dreidel and menorah patterns are ubiquitous on items mass-produced for Hanukkah, the telltale striping of factory-produced matzah has long adorned items marketed for Passover.

“People have always loved matzah products,” said Becker, whose store offers a slew of print-on-demand matzah-emblazoned products, as well as baby shoes in the print.

“Obviously matzah is the preeminent symbol of the holiday,” Steinberg said. “Claiming matzah is just a proud assertion of Jewish distinction.”

For Buechler, who launched her line of Jewish fashion products a decade ago with nail decals of the 10 plagues, the motif was inspired by her son’s confusion.

She had gotten her children new pajamas to liven up another at-home seder, their second during the pandemic. “It goes late anyway,” she reasoned about the festive meal, which traditionally cannot begin until after sunset.

When she offered the two options — one yellow and the other blue — her then-2-year-old son declared he would have the “matzah pajamas.”



She decided to turn his idea into reality, creating a design that could be printed on fabric, ordering samples and then producing them in a large quantity in China. Then she set to work promoting the product, mailing free sets to influencers and reaching out to online Judaica stores, many of which were initially hesitant to purchase inventory they weren’t sure would sell. (Buechler also gave a set of matzah pajamas away through Kveller, the Jewish parenting site that, like JTA, is part of 70 Faces Media.) Then the adults began to demand pajamas for themselves, which were manufactured quickly.

How does fast fashion square with the meaning of the holiday?

“Passover has always been about making things in haste,” Buechler said. “And when you think about the matzah itself, the entire reason we have matzah is because we left Mitzrayim, we left Egypt, in a hurry.”

By last year, Buechler says she has sold around 1,800 sets of the matzah pajamas. Etsy lists them as a “bestseller” item, and Modern Tribe, which also sells Buechler’s Midrash Manicure products, has sold over 100 of the children’s matzah pajamas since adding them to their inventory. They were the second-highest selling Passover item last year, behind coasters featuring the 10 Plagues.

“We’ve had a hard few years,” Kritzer said. “I think people just want to have a little fun too.”

Make Passover cleaning manageable

By My Jewish Learning

Passover, the annual celebration of the Exodus from Egypt, is one of Judaism’s most beloved holidays — and also the one that requires the most preparation. The Torah teaches that one should remove leaven or hametz (understood by Jewish tradition to mean food that is made from one of five forbidden grains and food that has been fermented) from one’s home — it should neither be seen nor found in one’s possession.

Traditionally, Jews attempt to clean all the leaven from their homes, chasing out the cracker crumbs and stray Cheerios wherever they lurk: behind the refrigerator, in the pockets of coats, under car seats. Larger leavened items, like boxes of pasta and crackers, are often sold to non-Jewish neighbors with the understanding that these will be purchased back at the end of the holiday.

Aside from the comprehensive nature of this kind of purge, because Passover cleaning often coincides with spring cleaning, many find the undertaking overwhelming and daunting. But obsession is not necessarily required to satisfy the traditional requirements of the holiday. If it all seems

too much, it may be that you are doing more than you need to. Here are our tips for keeping your Passover cleaning manageable:

Hametz is not Dirt

Yes, crumbs of food often lurk in the same places one finds dirt and grime, but there is no requirement that the home be clean, only that it be purged of leaven. You really don’t need to dust your fan blades.

Focus on the Kitchen

You are not likely to eat in your bathroom, so skip that space when doing your Passover cleaning. Keep your focus on the places where you prepare and eat your food — dayenu!

Some Hametz Doesn’t Count

Some authorities say that hametz is only a problem if it is the size of an olive or larger. So those tiny crumbs you’re desperately seeking out? Not so significant.

Some authorities say that hametz which is not edible also doesn’t count. What’s “inedible”? If a dog wouldn’t eat it you probably wouldn’t either.

Throw Your Hametz in a Cardboard Box or Just Tape Up the Cabinet

Once you sell your leaven products they no longer belong to you. The only other requirement is that

you should not see them. So grab a cardboard box, a sheet or some masking tape and hide those cookies that now technically belongs to someone else from view. Done and done.

Nullification is Your Friend

On the night before the first seder, it is traditional to hide a few last crumbs of bread and then search for them by candlelight. The following morning, these are burned (*biur*) and then a blessing is recited that renders any unseen leaven no longer hametz (*bittul*):

All hametz that is in my possession, which I have neither seen nor removed, and of which I am unaware, is nullified and ownerless like the dust of the earth.

Our sages understood that it is pretty much impossible to get everything. In fact, the Talmud implies that sometimes a person would accidentally forget about a cake in their cupboard on Passover! So do your best, say this blessing and relax. Whatever you missed (and you surely missed something — everyone does!) has symbolically turned to dust.

Passover is the festival of freedom. If you can’t enjoy the cleaning, at least don’t let it enslave you. Chag Kasher v’Sameach!

Insights from The Orlando Senior Help Desk

Keeping your Eyes Healthy

By Nancy Ludin
CEO, Jewish Pavilion

Aging is a process that brings many changes. There are several simple steps you can take to keep your eyes healthy during your lifetime.

Visiting an eye care professional regularly for a comprehensive dilated eye exam is the most important thing you can do to reduce your risk of vision loss as you age.

A comprehensive dilated eye exam is different from the basic eye exam or screening you have for glasses or contacts. By dilating the pupils and examining the back of the eyes, your doctor can detect eye diseases in their early stages, before vision loss occurs. They can check for:

- Age-related macular degeneration, which gradually destroys the macula, the part of the eye that provides sharp, central vision.
- Cataract, a clouding of the lens in the eye.
- Diabetic retinopathy, a complication of diabetes that damages blood vessels in the

retina, the light-sensitive tissue at the back of the eye.

- Glaucoma, a group of diseases that can cause fluid and pressure to build up in the eye and damage the optic nerve.

Early diagnosis and treatment are the best ways to prevent vision loss. In addition to making eye exams part of your routine health care, these tips will help you maintain healthy vision.

Eat a healthy, balanced diet — Dark, leafy greens such as spinach, kale and collard greens. Eat fish, high in omega-3 fatty acids, such as salmon, tuna, and halibut.

Maintain a healthy weight. Being overweight increases your risk for diabetes. Diabetes complications, such as diabetic retinopathy or glaucoma, can eventually lead to vision loss.

Don’t smoke. Smoking increases your risk for age-related macular degeneration, cataract, and other eye diseases that may damage the optic nerve.

Wear sunglasses and a brimmed hat when outdoors. Protecting your eyes from the

sun’s ultraviolet rays when you are outdoors is vital for your eye health.

While most seniors face major adjustments when transitioning to an elder-care community, Jewish seniors face additional challenges. Not only do they lose their homes, and many of their friends, but they also lose ties to their cultural heritage. This is where the Jewish Pavilion, a 501c3 non-profit, steps in. The Pavilion serves as a resource that provides room visits, festive holiday celebrations, and more to 450 Jewish residents in 50 facilities for seniors. The Jewish Pavilion promotes inclusion, and thousands of seniors of all faiths are welcomed into our programs. www.Jewish-Pavilion.org

The Orlando Senior Help Desk at the Jewish Pavilion (407-678-9363) helps thousands of callers navigate their way through the daunting senior maze, alleviating caregiver stress while giving advice on all types of elder issues. www.OrlandoSeniorHelpDesk.org.

Sephardic Matzah Spinach Pie recipe

By Susan Barocas

This recipe originally appeared on The Nosh.

Matzah pies called minas are a classic Sephardic Passover dish, traditionally served for brunch or lunch with the slow-cooked, hard-boiled eggs called huevos haminados. The truth is that a mina makes a great side or main dish for any meal, even when it's not Passover. With a top and bottom "crust" made from sheets of matzah, the filling can be made of meat — like seasoned lamb, beef, chicken — or vegetables, most commonly spinach and cheese, though sometimes with leeks or mashed potato added. Another option is to shred, salt and squeeze about 2 pounds of zucchini to use in place of the spinach in the recipe below. The flavors in this vegetarian mina mimic spinach and feta borekas or spanikopita, but I've added a twist. Given the fondness for artichokes in Sephardic food (and for me personally), I've added some to the filling for extra texture and flavor.

- Ingredients
- 20 oz frozen chopped spinach, thawed
 - 5 or 6 sheets plain matzah
 - 2 Tbsp olive oil
 - 1 medium onion, finely chopped
 - Salt to taste
 - 1 14 oz can artichoke hearts, drained and diced
 - 1/2 cup fresh dill with thinner stems, finely chopped
 - 1 cup (about 4 ounces) crumbled feta
 - 2/3 cup grated Parmesan or Romano cheese, divided
 - 1 1/2 cup milk (can be low-fat)
 - 1/2 tsp ground black pepper
 - 1/8 tsp nutmeg (optional)
 - 3 large eggs, divided

Directions

Preheat oven to 350 degrees.

Put the spinach into a fine mesh strainer and set in the sink or over a bowl to drain.

Fill a large baking pan with tepid water. Break two sheets in half as equally as possible. Add the matzah to the pan of water for 2 minutes, making sure they are submerged. (You can gently lay a couple heavy pieces of silverware across the top of the matzah to hold down.) The matzah should be pliable, but still hold its shape. Take each sheet out by lifting it holding onto two corners. Let some of the water drip off for a moment, then lay the softened matzah in a single layer on a thick dish towel or two. You can do the matzah in batches depending on the size of your pan with water.

Heat 1 tablespoon olive oil in a large skillet over medium heat. Add the onion and a couple pinches of salt, stir and sauté about 5 minutes until the onion starts to soften. Mix in the chopped artichoke and cook another 10 minutes, stirring occasionally, as the artichokes and onions begin to take on a little color.

As the mixture cooks, use a large spoon or your hands to squeeze as much liquid as possible out of the spinach. Set the squeezed spinach into a large mixing bowl, breaking up the clumps. When the onion and artichokes are ready, add to the bowl with the spinach and stir to blend the vegetables. Add the dill, feta, 1/3 cup grated cheese, milk, pepper and nutmeg, if using. Mix until well blended, then taste for saltiness. Depending on the saltiness of the feta, add salt as needed. Beat two eggs and stir into the mixture until well blended.

Put 1 tablespoon olive oil in an 8 x 11.5-inch (2 quart) glass baking dish. Swirl the oil to cover the bottom and a bit of the sides, then put the dish in the preheated oven for 4 to 5 min-



utes. Heating the baking dish will help create a good bottom crust and keep it from sticking. As soon as the dish comes out hot, cover the bottom completely with about 1 1/2 sheets of matzah, slightly overlapping. The matzah should sizzle as it hits the oil. Spoon half the spinach mixture onto the matzah and gently spread evenly. Cover with another layer of 1 1/2 sheets of matzah, then the remaining spinach mixture making sure it's even. Add the top layer of matzah, covering the filling edge to edge. Use the extra half piece of wet matzah to fill in any of the layers as needed.

Beat the remaining egg and tablespoon of oil together. Pour the mixture all over the top of the matzah. Some will drip down the sides and that's fine. Use a pastry brush to spread any pools of egg so the coating on the matzah is even. Bake for 40 minutes, then sprinkle the remaining 1/3 cup grated cheese evenly over the top. Continue baking another 10 to 12 minutes until the top is golden brown. Let stand 10 minutes before cutting. Serve warm.

A Happy and Peaceful Passover to all our friends



Andy, Karen, Nathaniel and Gabrielle Reiff



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Sudoku (see page 14A for solution)

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Happy Passover

חג פסח שמח

to you and your loved ones from the Board & Staff of

Jewish Family Services of Greater Orlando



JFS Orlando



Jewish shoppers struggle with highest prices in recent memory for Passover food



New kosher-for-Passover pastry dough and foods on display at the annual Kosherfest trade show in November 2022.

By **Faygie Holt**

(JNS) — A woman pushed her shopping cart down an aisle filled with Passover foods in a supermarket in northern New Jersey. She lifted a box of kosher-for-Passover soup cracker off the shelf and started to stack it with the rest of her groceries. Then she noticed the price tag.

“Five dollars for this?” she murmured aloud as she returned the container to the shelf.

“Food costs are high everywhere,” chimed in a fellow shopper nearby.

This exchange last week in a supermarket that stocks a good number of kosher-for-Passover items is indicative of the challenging fiscal environment facing consumers and shop owners in the countdown to the holiday, which this year starts at sundown on April 5.

“It is more expensive this year than at any other time in

our lifetimes, and that’s when you adjust for inflation and everything else,” says David G. Greenfield, CEO of Met Council, a New York-based Jewish charity. “It’s a wonderful holiday, but it’s bringing a lot of people stress this year, and what we are trying to do is blunt that stress.”

Menachem Lubinsky, founder of Kosher Today and the annual Kosherfest conference for the food industry, cites a number of factors for the high costs including supply-chain concerns and higher costs of basic staples at a time of inflation in the United States.

According to the February 2023 Consumer Price Index, food prices rose 0.4 percent last month and 9.5 percent from the year before.

Passover staples like potatoes and eggs are also markedly higher this year than last. The CPI found that potato costs were averaging 13.5 percent higher than in February

2022, while the price of eggs remains extremely high—more than 55 percent higher year to date—although the price is down somewhat from January 2023 where the actual costs were in some cases \$6 a dozen. Chicken and meat costs are also up at nearly 4 percent.

Says Greenfield, “The direct-consumer impact is highest on foods that most people are buying for Pesach, for example, eggs are up depending on where you live depending 50-70 percent, and that’s a pretty important Pesach staple. I can’t think of a single Pesach, back when I was a kid, that eggs weren’t used in almost everything.”

Those costs are being felt by manufacturers as well. As Shani Seidman, chief marketing officer at Manischewitz explains, “Inflation impacts all food costs, whether it is during Passover or at any time. We try to keep our costs as low as possible despite inflation.”

“Salaries not rising with food cost”

Liza Wiemer of Wisconsin has seen the impact of the higher prices as she’s started preparing for the holiday.

“I spent \$1,000 at Jewel-Osco—almost all of it for Pesach—and that was keeping in mind that only our eldest son, his wife and their newborn baby would be joining us,” she says. “It’s a lot of money, but I’m resigned to the fact that this is what it costs.”

While she found some of the needed items on sale, “there were certain items I didn’t purchase because it seemed too extravagant,” she says. “Pesach or not, there is no doubt a lot of the staples I use rose in price.”

For those who are already struggling to meet the general increase in food prices this year, holiday costs, which are always higher to begin with, create an even greater challenge.

Rachel Krich, executive director of Project Ezra, an organization in northern New Jersey that seeks to help

families in crisis, has already received requests for help with purchasing items for the holiday.

“There’s a lot of general anxiety going into Pesach this year,” states Krich. “People are saying they are in serious financial situations, and their regular food budget simply will not cut it. If you budget X for your regular food budget, Pesach is 2 times X. It just knocks people out because salaries are not rising with the increasing food costs.”

Project Ezra provided 25 families with funds last year to help them with Passover food costs. This year, the organization has already had “30 applicants, and we haven’t even advertised the program yet.”

She adds that those who are requesting aid are coming from areas that are considered more financially secure than other parts of the community.

“Our job is to make sure that people have food”

Alexander Rapaport, executive director of Masbia, a kosher food pantry that serves meals to people in parts of Brooklyn and Queens, N.Y.—New York City being the epicenter of kosher food in the United States, though similar trends take place in major urban markets throughout the country—estimates that his organization will spend nearly \$1.5 million to feed at least 10,000 families.

“Our job is to make sure that people have food,” he says. “We need to get the most volume so it results in more people being fed.”

Those calculations may impact what Masbia can offer as part of its boxed food deliveries. (Masbia also runs a soup kitchen, where people can get a fresh, hot meal.) Last year, Rapaport placed an order for chicken in December, well in advance of Passover to get the best prices. However, when he contacted suppliers this time around, either no one had it or the price was too high.

For a while it looked like Masbia would not be able to

offer chicken, but last week he got a good deal on poultry from Mesorah Farms and was able to secure a tractor-trailer’s worth to feed families in need. As of now, eggs are still off the menu; however, Rapaport is hopeful that closer to the start of Passover, they will be able to get a good deal at the last minute.

Met Council, which will be providing kosher-for-Passover food for more than 225,000 people through 200 distribution sites in New York and New Jersey, was able to secure a gift of \$500,000 worth of eggs from Deb El Foods. The gift comes as the overall donations to the organization’s Passover campaign are down.

“When people have less to spend, they will give less to charity,” says Greenfield, noting that donations are down about 10 percent or about a million dollars less than last year while stomaching a 13 percent increase in wholesale food costs.

The net result is that while they are feeding more people, they will have fewer items to give out. “We won’t turn anyone away, we won’t stop giving, and we will make sure our pantries are full,” declares the Met Council CEO.

While some believe that prices are artificially inflated at Passover—by far the most expensive Jewish holiday cost-wise when it comes to food—to the tune of more than \$2 billion in sales, Lubinsky says that is not the case.

“Ninety percent of retailers go out of their way to keep their prices down because they are dealing with loyal consumers who shop their store all year round,” he states. “I even know stores that don’t pass on the whole increase to their consumers.”

“There is a ton of waste”

If that’s the case, then why then does Passover food cost more, even if anecdotally?

Lubinsky names several reasons. One, some factories need to shut down a production line to accommodate changes to the way items

are made for Passover, which raises costs. In other cases, a manufacturer may need to hire additional delivery trucks or arrange for more kosher supervisors to handle the increased demand for Passover food.

Those who make it a point to eat round, handmade shmurah matzah (specially “guarded” to make sure that no fermentation has occurred during the milling, making and baking process) during the holiday are being further challenged by the closure of one of the major suppliers, the Brooklyn-based Shatzer Matzos.

Lubinsky estimates that Shatzer controlled an estimated 18 percent of the shmurah matzah market. “Other matzah bakeries say they will be able to produce enough to fill the gap, but they are going to have to charge more because the cost of labor is up, and it’s hard to find workers for these factories.”

Krich has personally noticed the higher cost of shmurah matzah. While she can find it in most stores in her New Jersey neighborhood for about \$20 a pound, her family in Los Angeles can’t find any for under \$40.

Regardless of where people live or how much money they put aside for holiday purchases, the key to spending less on Passover starts with a budget, says Stacey Zrihen, a financial planner and lay leader for Living Smarter Jewish, a division of the Orthodox Union.

“Then create a list and have a menu. Don’t go shopping just to browse and pick up things that ‘look good,’” she advises. “Get everyone involved in planning the meals. If you are having guests and they say ‘What can I bring?’ it’s OK to ask them to contribute a side dish or fruit plate.”

On Passover, notes Zrihen, “there is a ton of waste. We buy too much, we cook too much. The answer isn’t to not buy meat or chicken, it’s to buy only what you need and know what are the ‘extras.’”

Celebrating Passover on a budget

By **My Jewish Learning**

Passover is one of Judaism’s most beloved holidays — but it can also be one of the most expensive. Passover requires a menu that avoids all hametz (leavened products) and often necessitates the purchase of many new foods that are certified kosher and free of hametz. Jews also attend one or two seders — elaborate festive meals with multiple courses. Complying with Passover rules of kashrut alone can present a financial burden, as many Jews find themselves in need of purchasing one or two extra sets of dishes or cooking utensils, or otherwise using expensive disposables. And food that has been supervised to meet the kashrut standards of the holidays comes with additional expense. Combine all this with the desire to create an extra festive occasion and Passover costs can add up quickly.

Passover celebrates freedom. We’re here to help unburden you from financial strain. Here are tips for celebrating Passover in a way that is joyous and meaningful without breaking the bank.

Let someone else host the seder

This isn’t an option for everyone but consider if it is right for you. Making a Passover seder can be an expensive undertaking. If you have hosted many in the past, try asking someone else to do it. If you know a friend or family member who is already hosting and are comfortable doing so, ask for an invitation and offer to help by bringing a dish or two. Many congregations also host seders that can be attended, sometimes for a small fee.

If hosting a seder is meaningful to you or you must do it because there are no other options, then consider hosting only one seder and not both, or just forget this particular

tip and turn to the rest of our list. And invite your guests to contribute a bottle of wine.

Make your regular dishes kosher for Passover

Many Jews keep kosher for Passover by owning a separate set of dishes for the holiday (or two — one for meat and one for dairy). Others use disposable dishes. Purchasing either can be expensive and, in the case of new dishes, then requires year-round storage. Consider what dishes you already own that can be made kosher for the holiday — adding zero dollars to your bottom line.

Plan the same menu for both seders

If you live in the Diaspora and celebrate Passover with two seders, you can cut down expenses (and effort) by planning the same menu for both and cooking large quantities. One huge pot of matzah ball soup is not much more expensive than a pot half its size.

Plan a menu around affordable ingredients

Many favorite Jewish foods — from potato kugel to borscht — were peasant foods, and therefore less expensive. (Both can be made for Passover.) There is no requirement to center your seder around an expensive cut of meat or exotic fruits. Lean into delicious recipes that make use of the affordable ingredients enjoyed by Jews for hundreds of years: potatoes, eggs, cabbage, carrots, chicken, beans and rice (if you eat kitniyot). And there’s no rule against having a vegetarian seder.

See what foods you already have

Check your pantry and see what you can use for Passover. Many ingredients — like unprocessed nuts, tea, coffee — do not require a special kosher for Passover certification. Avoid buying the specially certified versions of

these things because they will be more expensive.

Keep your menu limited

Many are tempted to plan a large panoply of seder dishes. But truthfully, by the time the meal arrives late at night, most people do not want a 12 courses. Choose a few balanced dishes — such as a soup, a protein, a starch and a vegetable — and give yourself permission to keep it simple. This will make the meal much more affordable.

Cook what you know

Nothing is worse than buying lots of ingredients for an exotic recipe only to have the recipe come out so-so. Choose foods that you know you love and know how to cook so you don’t end up throwing out disappointing dishes.

Choose recipes with fewer ingredients

Buying lots of ingredients can quickly increase the cost of your food, so choose things that have shorter ingredient lists. If you are someone who

replaces every ingredient in your pantry for Passover, this will be an especially helpful tip. You can also consider switching to fresher forms of certain ingredients. For instance, if you normally cook with a lot of garlic powder, but don’t want to buy an expensive new bottle for Passover, just purchase a few heads of garlic for the holiday.

Skip most of the premade foods

If these are a lifesaver for you, then ignore this tip. But premade Passover foods can add greatly to the cost of your meal. Similar items can often be prepared at home for much cheaper. For instance, for dessert, rather than buy expensive cakes and platters of fruit, you can please a crowd with some cut up melon and homemade chocolate matzah.

Buy matzah in bulk, and buy most of it after seder

Carnegie Hall concert to honor Japanese diplomat Sugihara

By Larry Luxner

For most of his life, Chiune Sugihara received little recognition for the dramatic actions he undertook as Japanese vice-consul to Lithuania on the eve of World War II: the rescue of some 6,000 Jews from Poland and elsewhere from the Nazi death machine.

For decades, the Jewish world remained largely ignorant of his heroism. When, in 1985, Yad Vashem, the World Holocaust Remembrance Center located in Israel, honored the unassuming retired diplomat as a Righteous Among the Nations, Sugihara was too old and sick to travel to Jerusalem to accept the award. He died shortly after.

But his renown has grown in the years since his death, and now Sugihara is being celebrated in a new way with an extraordinary piece of music composed to commemorate his heroic actions.

On April 19 at Carnegie Hall, Japanese-American-Israeli cellist Kristina Reiko Cooper will perform this original piece of music—Lera Auerbach’s Symphony No. 6, “Vessels of Light”—accompanied by the New York City Opera Orchestra conducted by Constantine Orbelian.

The gala concert, organized by Yad Vashem and the American Society for Yad Vashem, which commissioned the piece, will pay tribute to Sugihara’s legacy.

Along with the honorary Dutch consul in Lithuania, Jan Zwartendijk, Sugihara issued life-saving visas to the Jews trying to escape Europe through a complex, illegal scheme involving fake transit visas via Japan to the Dutch-speaking Caribbean island of Curaçao.

Not a single Jew actually traveled to that faraway island off the coast of Venezuela, home to the oldest surviving synagogue in the Americas. But the operation — carried out under the noses of Lithuania’s Nazi occupiers — enabled thousands of Jews to resettle in Shanghai, leading to eventual freedom.

“Being half-Japanese myself, I understand the culture, and I know as a Japanese person that opposing authority goes against every fiber of our being,” Cooper, the cellist, said this month in an interview near her home in Tel Aviv. Born in New York to a mother of Japanese descent, Cooper later converted to Judaism and moved to Israel. She and her husband, Leonard Rosen, are raising their three children as Orthodox Jews.

“Everybody’s heard of Schindler, who had a factory. But Sugihara had nothing to gain from this. In fact, he had everything to lose,” said Cooper, a visiting professor of music at Tel Aviv University. “He didn’t want recognition and never spoke to anybody about it. He didn’t even know that he had saved anybody until the very end of his life.”

Cooper, who studied at Juilliard and comes from a long line of musicians — her father is a pianist and her mother a violinist and former concertmaster of the American Symphony — has a special



Japanese diplomat Chiune Sugihara saved thousands of Jews during the Holocaust.

personal connection to the Sugihara story.

Her husband’s father, Irving Rosen, was one of the Jews whose lives was saved by Sugihara’s actions. Armed with papers enabling Rosen’s family to leave Lithuania and emigrate to Curaçao via Japan, the entire family traveled via the Trans-Siberian Railway from Vilnius to Moscow to Vladivostok, then by sea to Japan — and eventually Shanghai.

“I became obsessed with this story and wanted people to know about it, especially given everything that’s going on in the world with the rise of authoritarian governments, mass dislocations, refugees, wars, rising antisemitism and anti-Asian hate,” Cooper said. “I’m not a writer, a filmmaker or an actress. I’m a musician. People had asked me, ‘Why not put together a nice concert in tribute to Sugihara?’ But I wanted to write something that could last forever.”

With the backing of Yad Vashem and the American Society for Yad Vashem, Cooper asked Auerbach to write the piece, a 40-minute composition for solo cello, choir and orchestra involving 130 performers, including Yiddish “whisperers,” allusions to Psalm 121 and an introductory piece by Japanese composer Karen Tanaka titled “Guardian Angel.”

At Carnegie Hall, Cooper, who plays on an Italian-made Guadagnini cello from 1743, will perform Auerbach’s moving, large-scale symphonic work as a soloist. She’ll also perform in Prague on March 27, Los Angeles on May 18, in California’s Napa Valley on July 18 and in Warsaw on October 8.

“Most people do not pay attention to history, because they’re so wedded to current events,” said the Carnegie Hall event’s co-chair, Peter Till, a board member of the American Society for Yad Vashem. “But this is even more relevant today because of the rise of extremist hate groups. They’ll forever deny that it exists, or ignore it, or say it couldn’t happen here, but hate continues to repeat itself and people have to face up to it.”

The Sugihara story is especially compelling, Till said, because it’s the first event of its kind that links Holocaust survivors with Asia in general — and Japan in particular.

“This is as much about the music as it is an expression

of humanity, of people from diverse cultural backgrounds coming together to save lives,” he said. “For Yad Vashem, this is a very important event because it shows the depth of understanding.”

Of the roughly 28,000 non-Jews who’ve been designated by Yad Vashem as Righteous Among the Nations, only 40 were diplomats. Sugihara is the only Japanese citizen so honored.

“On the whole, the eligibility process for diplomats is slightly different than for ordinary rescuers, because they had immunity,” said Joel Zisenwein, director of Yad Vashem’s Righteous Among the Nations Department. “In most cases, they were not at physical risk. But many of them had defied the guidelines and official policies of their foreign offices. Sugihara is even more interesting because he represented an ally of Nazi Germany.”

Zisenwein said Sugihara provided between 2,100 and 3,500 transit visas, though the exact number is not known.

“Literally, all rescuers from the Holocaust era have passed away, so people accepting the award are generally descendants or even grandchildren of the recipients,” Zisenwein said. “It’s interesting that Sugihara received his award for actions prior to the German invasion of Lithuania. Most of the Jews he rescued were Polish refugees who had fled there in 1939. Many countries claim to have their own ‘Schindlers.’ But here indeed was an individual who saved thousands of Jewish lives.”

The evening’s master of ceremonies will be Zalman Mlotek, who is also artistic director of the National Yiddish Theatre Folksbiene. Tickets and sponsorships are still available for the event.

“It’s not just the people Sugihara saved. It’s the worlds of those thousands of people,” said Mlotek, whose father, Joseph Mlotek, was a 21-year-old Yiddish poet working at a newspaper in Warsaw when World War II broke out. After fleeing to Lithuania, the family heard about Sugihara and was able to obtain transit visas to Shanghai, where the elder Mlotek and his brother Abram spent the war years.

“My father became a Yiddish activist here in New York and set up a network of 200 Yiddish schools all over the country. He published books with my mother and did concert tours for Yiddish musicians,” said Mlotek, 71. “I look at myself today, as artistic director of the Yiddish theater for 20 years, carrying on this same legacy that would have been decimated had it not been for the heroism of Sugihara.”

Auerbach’s composition had its world premiere last November in the Lithuanian city of Kaunas (known in Yiddish as Kovno), where Sugihara’s story took place. Additional performances are scheduled for cities around the world through 2024.

This story was sponsored by and produced in collaboration with the American Society for Yad Vashem. This article was produced by JTA’s native content team.

Central Florida Synagogues

Orlando Weekday Morning Minyan (Conservative/Egalitarian), services Monday-Friday 7:45 a.m. (9 a.m.—national holidays); 2nd floor Chapel—Jewish Academy of Orlando; 851 N. Maitland Ave., Maitland. For information call 407-298-4650.

Celebration Jewish Congregation (R), services and holiday schedules shown at www.JewishCelebration.org; 407-479-8377.

Chabad at UCF (O), 600 Oak Cir., Oviedo, FL 32765, 407-949-8838, www.jewishucf.com.

Chabad Lubavitch of North Orlando (O), 1701 Markham Woods Road, Longwood, 407-636-5994, www.jewishorlando.com; services: Mon-Fri 7:30 a.m. Friday night winter 6 p.m.; Summer 7:00 p.m.; Saturday at 9:30 a.m.; Sunday at 8 a.m.

Chabad of Altamonte Springs (O), 195 S. Westmonte Dr., Suite 1126, Altamonte Springs, 407-720-8111; www.jewishaltamonte.com; Friday evening Kabbalat Shabbat at sunset and Shabbat Morning 9:30 a.m.; In person services

Chabad of Greater Orlando (O), 708 Lake Howell Rd., Maitland, 407-644-2500; www.chabadorlando.org; services: Sunday, 9 a.m.; Monday-Friday, 7:30 a.m.; Shabbat services: Friday, 6:30 p.m.; Saturday, 9:30 a.m.; Family service, 4th Friday of the month.

Chabad of South Lake County (O), P.O. Box 120605, Clermont, FL 34712, 352-717-4119; www.jewishsl.com; In person services

Chabad of South Orlando (O), 7347 Sand Lake Road, Orlando, 407-354-3660; www.jewishorlando.com; To be added to the CAY chat and get updates on services and events please send a message to Rabbi Dubov at 407-529-8256 (times may vary); In person services

Chabad of the Space & Treasure Coasts (O), 1190 Highway A1A, Satellite Beach and 7350 Lake Andrew Drive, Melbourne, 321-777-2770.

Chabad Student Center (O), 1276 Richmond Rd., Winter Park, FL 32789; winterparkjewishstudent.org, 330-861-8770 - In person services

Congregation Bet Chaim (R), 181 E. Mitchell Hammock, Oviedo, 407-830-7211; www.betchaim.org; Shabbat services: Friday, 8 p.m.

Congregation Beth Am (C), 1470 Myrtle Lake Hills Road, Longwood, 407-862-3505; www.congbetham.org; Shabbat services: Friday, 7:30 p.m.; Saturday, 9:30 a.m.

Congregation Beth Emeth (R), 2205 Blue Sapphire Circle, Orlando, 407-222-6393; Shabbat service: monthly, 8 p.m.

Congregation Beth Israel (Rec), Collins Resource Center, Suite 303, 9401 S.R. 200, Ocala, 352-237-8277; bethisraelocala.org; Shabbat service, second Friday of the month, 8 p.m.

Congregation Beth Sholom (R-C), 315 North 13th St., Leesburg, 352-326-3692; www.bethsholomflorida.org; schedule of services on website.

Congregation Beth Shalom (Progressive Conservative), 1308 E. Normandy Blvd., Deltona; 386-804-8283; www.mybethshalom.com; Call for more information.

Congregation B’nai Torah (C), 403 N. Nova Rd., Ormond Beach, 32174, 386-672-1174; www.mybnaitorah.com; Shabbat services: Friday, 7:30 p.m.; Saturday, 10 a.m.

Congregation Chabad Lubavitch of Greater Daytona (O), 1079 W. Granada Blvd., Ormond Beach, 386-672-9300; Shabbat services Friday, 7:30 p.m.; Saturday, 10 a.m.

Congregation of Reform Judaism (R), 928 Malone Dr., Orlando, 407-645-0444; www.crjorlando.org; Shabbat services, 7 p.m. 1st, 2nd and 3rd Fridays; 6 p.m., 4th and 5th Fridays; Saturday: 10 a.m.

Congregation Ohev Shalom (C), 613 Concourse Parkway South, Maitland, 407-298-4650; www.ohevshalom.org; Shabbat service, Friday, 6:30 p.m.; Saturday, 9:30 a.m.

Congregation Shalom Aleichem (R), 3501 Oak Pointe Blvd., Kissimmee, 407-935-0064; www.shalomaleichem.com; Shabbat service, 1st and 3rd Fridays of the month, 8 p.m.

Congregation Shomer Ysrael (C), 5382 Hoffner Ave., Orlando, 407-227-1258, call for services and holiday schedules.

Congregation Sinai (C/R), 1200 W. Broad St., Groveland, FL; 352-243-5353; congregation-sinai.org; services: every Friday, 7:30 p.m.; Shabbat Service every Saturday, 10 a.m.

Orlando Torah Center (O), 8591 Banyan Blvd., Orlando; 347-456-6485; Shacharis-Shabbos 9 a.m.; Mon.—Thurs. 6:45 a.m.; Sun. and Legal Holidays 8 a.m.; Mincha/Maariv Please call for times.

Southwest Orlando Jewish Congregation/Ohalei Rivka (C), 11200 S. Apopka-Vineland Rd., Orlando, 407-239-5444; Shabbat service, Friday, 7:30 p.m.; Saturday, 9:30 a.m.

Temple Beth El (R) / Temple Israel (C), 579 N. Nova Rd., Ormond Beach, 386-675-6615 / 386-252-3097; Friday Shabbat Service 7 p.m.; Saturday 10 a.m.

Temple Beth Shalom (R), P.O. Box 031233, Winter Haven, 813-324-2882.

Temple Beth Shalom (C), 40 Wellington Drive, Palm Coast, 386-445-3006; Shabbat service, Friday, 8 p.m.; Saturday, 9 a.m.

Temple Beth Sholom (C), 5995 N. Wickham Rd. Melbourne, 321-254-6333; www.mytbs.org; Shabbat services: Friday, 7 p.m.; Saturday: 9:30 a.m. Minyan, Tuesday, 7:30 p.m.; Thursday, 10:00 a.m.

Temple Beth Shalom (R), 1109 N.E. 8th Ave., Ocala, 352-629-3587; Shabbat services: Friday, 8 p.m.; Torah study: Saturday, 10:00 a.m.

Temple B’nai Darom (R), 49 Banyan Course, Ocala, 352-624-0380; Friday Services 8 p.m.

Temple Israel (C), 50 S. Moss Rd., Winter Springs, 407-647-3055; www.tiflorida.org; Shabbat services: Friday, 7:30 p.m.; Saturday, 9:30 a.m.; Sunday 9:00 a.m.

Temple Israel (R), 7300 Lake Andrew Drive, Melbourne, 321-631-9494.

Temple Israel of DeLand (R), 1001 E. New York Ave., DeLand, 386-736-1646; www.templeisraelofdeland.org; Friday Shabbat service, 7 p.m.; Saturday, 10:00 a.m. followed by Torah study.

Temple Shalom (formerly New Jewish Congregation) (R), 13563 Country Road 101, Oxford, 352-748-1800; www.templeshalomcentralfl.org; Shabbat services: Friday, 7 p.m.; last Saturday of the month, 9:30 a.m.

Temple Shalom of Deltona (R/C), 1785 Elkcarn Blvd., Deltona, 386-789-2202; www.shalomdeltona.org; Shabbat service; Saturday: 10 a.m.

Temple Shir Shalom (R) Services held at Temple Israel, 50 S. Moss Rd., Winter Springs, 407-366-3556, www.templeshirshalom.org; Shabbat services: Fridays, 7:30 p.m. on Zoom.

Traditional Congregation of Mount Dora (T) Mount Dora, 352-735-4774; www.tcomd.org; Shabbat services: Saturday, 9:30 a.m. sharp.

(R) Reform (C) Conservative (O) Orthodox (Rec) Reconstructionist (T) Mehitsa

How to make your seder memorable

By Dr. Ron Wolfson

I don't know what the tradition is in your family, but in ours, seder night is a dress-up affair. Suits and ties, dresses, new clothes for the kids — "Shabbes" clothes we call them. Imagine our surprise when one year we arrived for seder at the door of our friends David and Shira Milgrom-Elcott in our dressy clothes, and they greeted us wearing the long, flowing robes of Bedouins! "Welcome to our seder!" they exclaimed. "Please take off your shoes before you come in."

We dutifully took off our shoes and entered their home. On the right, we saw the formal dining room, the table set with fine china and crystal, seemingly ready for the seder guests. David and Shira, however, led us right past the dining room, down the hall and into their large family room. We should have known what to expect from the desert garb worn by our hosts, but we were hardly prepared for the sight of that room.

Draped from the beams of the vaulted ceiling were large white bedsheets, forming a tent-like structure encompassing the center of the room. All the furniture had been taken out, except for some beanbag chairs and overstuffed pillows scattered around the floor, in the center of the "tent," on a low coffee table, was the seder plate.

"Welcome to our home in the desert," David and Shira explained. "The seder ceremony is a simulation of what really happened on that first night of the Exodus from Egypt, so we've decided to conduct our seder in this tent. Please make yourselves comfortable — take off your ties and jackets — and recline with your kids on the floor."

Well, you can imagine what followed next! In a masterfully led, fun-filled experience, the families in attendance enjoyed a delightful, relaxed telling of the Passover story. Once we completed the Maggid [narration] section of the Haggadah, we moved into the dining room for the seder meal. After opening the door for Elijah, we returned to the tent to complete the seder ceremony.

It was a seder we'll always remember.

And that, in a word, is what the seder is designed to help us do — remember — remember the story of the Exodus and, more importantly, our place in it. After all, the most important words of the Haggadah are, "B'khol dor va-dor hayav adam lirot et atzmo k'ilu hu yatzah mi-Mitzrayim" — "All people, in every generation, should see themselves as having experienced the Exodus from Egypt." The seder is much more than a history lesson; it is our yearly re-enactment of the liberation and continuity of the Jewish people.

Thus, seder night is the family education experience par excellence. The rabbis who created its structure and content were brilliant family educators, filling the ceremony with an array of multi-sensory methods of transmitting the messages of the evening. The seder is filled with symbolic foods, elaborate rituals, words and song, and most importantly, questions designed to keep even the youngest of children interested.

Although the seder is the single most observed Jewish celebration of the year in North American Jewish families, many of us base our conduct of the seder on a model we knew as children — each person takes turns reading a paragraph out

of the Haggadah. In some families, that is considered a "participatory" experience. It might be, but it's hardly engaging.

I learned that the search for creative ideas for seder celebration is never-ending. So, here are 10 tips on how you might enliven your family's seder experience this year.

1) Give homework.

When the Weber family invites the Wolfson family for seder, we are asked to prepare a presentation on some aspect of the seder ceremony. The presentation could be a d'rash—an explanation of what the Haggadah is trying to say. But, over the years, our presentations have also been given as a play, a song, and a take-off on a game show. Not everyone in your family may be able to do this, but there is no better way to encourage participation in the seder than by asking people to prepare something in advance to bring to the table.

2) Buy time.

The seder ceremony of my youth never lasted more than 20 minutes. That's how long it took to say Kiddush (the blessing over the wine), do Karpas (the spring vegetable), break the matzah, and fight over who was the youngest grandchild who could say the "Mah Nishtanah" [the Four Questions]. After a few minutes of everyone-take-turns-reading-a-paragraph, my Uncle Morton would ask the infamous "Fifth Question," "When do we eat?" End of ceremony.

One way to buy time to spend on the telling of the story is to offer your guests something to nibble on between the vegetables of Karpas and the meal. My very creative wife Susie often prepares an edible centerpiece. She and the kids slice

jicama very thin and with "Jewish" cookie-cutters, stamp out jicama Stars of David, Torah scrolls, and Kiddush cups. She places the shapes on the end of bamboo "shishkabob" skewers and inserts them into a head of red cabbage placed in a wicker basket. She adds color to the display by cutting flowerettes of green and red pepper, carrots, celery, and other vegetables and placing them on skewers and into the cabbage. The result is a spectacular vegetable bouquet which we use as a centerpiece on the seder table.

After Karpas, we invite our guests to "set the centerpiece" by taking the skewers out of the cabbage and dipping the vegetables into saucers of salad dressings placed around the table. Our friends Gail and Shelly Dorph buy time by using artichokes for Karpas instead of parsley. They then dip the artichoke leaves into dressings for nibbling until the meal is served.

3) Tell the story.

The core of the seder experience is the telling of the story of the Exodus from Egypt. The traditional text of the Haggadah contains four different tellings of the story, each one beginning with a question (Mah Nishtanah, the questions of the Four Children, "Tzei u-l'mad," and Rabban Gamliel's questions), a response, and praise for God. Think of ways to tell the story that supplement the Haggadah. One year, we were invited to a seder where the host family put on a skit. This 10-minute play can be downloaded for free at Haggadot.com. (You have to register, but it's free and quick.) Stan Beiner's "Sedra Scenes" is another good source. (For those seeking a humorous option, check out Shoshana Hantman's "Passover Parodies: Short Plays for the Seder Table.")

Another family we know of uses puppets and story books. The most unusual telling, however, had to be the family who presented a magical version of the 10 Plagues in costume. The father played the Pharaoh who, after complaining about how thirsty he was, asked one of the kids to fetch him some cool, clear water from the Nile. The child left the dining room and returned with a pitcher of water and an empty glass. As the "Pharaoh" poured the clear water into the glass, it turned red! It turns out the father was an amateur magician who incorporated a variety of magic tricks into their telling of the story. It was amazing — and unforgettable!

4) Ask questions.

The Haggadah invites questions. Encourage your guests to liberate themselves from the book and discuss what it is the Haggadah is trying to tell us. A favorite point to do this is after the recitation of the 10 Plagues. "What are 10 things that plague us today?" is a question anyone, no matter what their Judaic knowledge level, can answer. When the Haggadah

tells us that we should feel as if we were redeemed from Egypt, what does that mean? What are we doing about Jewish continuity in our family, in our community? The discussion resulting from these questions can be the highlight of your seder.

5) Have fun.

Having family fun is serious business, especially at the seder table. The seder was never meant to be dull. Quite the contrary, it is to be a relaxed, informal educational experience. Some families sing favorite songs children learn in religious school: "Go Down Moses," "One Day When Pharaoh Awoke in His Bed," and others. A favorite parody is "The Ballad of the Four Sons." We read "Only Nine Chairs" by Deborah Uchill Miller (Kar-Ben Copies), a hilarious account of a family's seder.

6) Be inclusive.

Scratch the surface of most Jewish adults and you'll find a child who was upset at not finding the afikoman. We created a way to include everyone in the afikoman search. We make a chart with the order of the seder (Kadesh, Urhatz, etc.) and select one letter from each word. We put these 14 letters on 3 x 5 cards and then hide them around the house. We tell the kids that each of them must find at least one of the cards for us to find the real afikoman. When the kids find all the cards, they bring them to the table. Then, we ask the adults to figure out a jumble-word-search two-word clue from the letters. The letters spell "at refrigerator." Once the clue is deciphered, everyone runs to the refrigerator and finds the real afikoman! Then, of course, everyone who participated in the search gets a prize.

7) Use sensory materials.

One of the problems in keeping young children interested in the seder is that most Haggadot are not designed for them. When our kids were in nursery school, Susie created a "Pat the Bunny"-type Haggadah using the coloring sheets sent home from class. She added tactile materials to the sheets where appropriate: cotton balls on pictures of sheep, sandpaper on pictures of the bricks of the pyramids, grape scratch-and-sniff stickers on pictures of the Kiddush cups. She put these in a loose-leave notebook and made copies for the kids at the seder. They were immediately engrossed in the book, following along and participating at their own level in their own very special way. Susie also gave each child a "goodie bag" filled with Passover symbols, frog stickers, a bookmark, even moist towelettes for the inevitable spills of wine!

8) Innovate.

Each year, experienced seder leaders look for new ideas to incorporate into the ceremony. Here are a few of my favorites. Instead of filling Elijah's Cup with wine at the beginning of the seder, wait until just before opening the door and pass

Elijah's cup to each participant who pours some of her/his wine into it. This is a demonstration of the need to act to bring the Messianic era. The Sephardim [Jews of Spanish and Mediterranean descent] pick up the seder plate and place it over every person's head during the recitation of Ha Lahma Anya, the invitation to participate in the seder. Another Sephardic custom is to beat the leader with green onions during the singing of Dayyenu as a reminder of the plagues. Save your lulav and use it instead of a feather to collect the last vestiges of hametz during the annual Bedikat Hametz search on the night before the seder. Ask a set of modern "Four Questions" to discuss at the ceremony. Challenge your guests to sing all the verses to "Had Gadya" [the song "One Kid"] in one breath. Sing Had Gadya with sound effects: choose a person to create the sound of a goat, a cat, a dog, a stick, fire, etc., which they make after the words are sung. (The most interesting sounds will be for the "Angel of Death" and "Ha-Kadosh Barukh Hu")!

9) Choose a good Haggadah.

There are 3,000 editions of the Haggadah catalogued in the great library of the Jewish Theological Seminary, and every year more versions appear. Jews have always felt comfortable in putting together Haggadot that reflect their particular slant on experience of the seder. So, we have "The Haggadah for the Liberated Lamb" (a vegetarian Haggadah) and "The San Diego Women's Haggadah" (a feminist Haggadah). We have traditional unedited texts and greatly abbreviated liberal texts. We have new "family" Haggadot and that old standby, the Maxwell House Haggadah.

In the Conservative Movement, we have the excellent Rabbinical Assembly Haggadah, The Feast of Freedom. Choose a Haggadah that fits your family's needs. Since the cost of multiple copies is often quite substantial, pick one that will last a number of years in style, substance, and construction. Remember, the book itself should stand up to extensive use.

10) Prepare.

Of course, the ultimate Haggadah may be one you yourself put together. With inexpensive printing widely available, it is not difficult to edit your own Haggadah text. You can easily combine traditional texts with modern interpretations and readings, songs, and information. By studying the Haggadah text with the help of guidebooks like "The Art of Jewish Living: The Passover Seder," you can develop a text that reflects your understanding of the seder story and that fits the needs of your family. This will take some time, but the reward will be a seder experience that is meaningful and memorable.

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Weekly roundup of world briefs

Israel ranked fourth happiest country in world

(JNS) — Israel is the fourth happiest country in the world, according to a report produced by the U.N.-affiliated Sustainable Development Solutions Network.

Based on Gallup World Poll data, the study leverages six key factors to help explain variation in self-reported levels of happiness across the world: social support, income, health, freedom, generosity and absence of corruption.

The report was released on Monday to mark the International Day of Happiness, which was established when the U.N. General Assembly adopted Resolution 66/281 in June 2012.

The report named Finland the happiest country in the world for the sixth consecutive year, followed by Denmark, Iceland, Israel and the Netherlands.

This year's Happiness Report found that despite several overlapping crises, most populations around the world continue to be remarkably resilient.

"The happiness movement shows that well-being is not a 'soft' and 'vague' idea but rather focuses on areas of life of critical importance: material conditions, mental and physical wealth, personal virtues and good citizenship," said Prof. Jeffrey D. Sachs, director of the Center for Sustainable Development at Columbia University, who worked on the study.

Rounding out the top 10 countries on the list were Sweden, Norway, Switzerland, Luxembourg and New Zealand.

The United States ranked 15th, Britain 19th and France 21st.

Israel placed ninth in last year's report.

Israeli foreign minister in London to press positions on Iranian threat

(JNS) — Israeli Foreign Minister Eli Cohen landed in London for a visit aimed at pressing Jerusalem's position on the Iranian threat and bolstering bilateral economic ties.

According to the British Foreign Office, the 2030 Roadmap for U.K.-Israeli Bilateral Relations "contains detailed commitments for deepening cooperation across the breadth of the Israel-U.K. relationship, including on trade, cyber, science and tech, research and development, security, health, climate and gender."

Cohen participated in a memorial ceremony for former Israeli Ambassador to the U.K. Shlomo Argov, who was severely wounded in a Palestinian terror attack in 1982.

The attack, which was carried out in London by the Abu Nidal terror group, paralyzed Argov from the neck down, and was one of the proximate causes for the IDF's Operation Peace for Galilee in Lebanon.

He is also slated to meet with members of the local Jewish community before flying to Warsaw, Poland.

With respect to Iran, U.K. Security Minister Tom Tugendhat confirmed late last month that Tehran was "mapping" Jewish leaders.

"Between 2020 and 2022, Iran tried to collect intel-

ligence on Israeli and U.K.-based Jewish individuals," said Tugendhat before the House of Commons. "We believe this information was a preparation for future lethal operations."

He added that since 2022, authorities have foiled 15 credible Iranian threats to kill or kidnap people in the United Kingdom.

Netanyahu meets German opposition head, hails 'special ties' with Berlin

(JNS) — Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu met with German opposition leader Friedrich Merz in Jerusalem.

The two men focused on the countries' "special relationship" and the potential for expanding ties in a range of areas, foremost security. They also discussed international issues, primarily the war in Ukraine.

Netanyahu called on Berlin to help curb the Islamic Republic's nuclear and missile programs.

Among those participating in the meeting were Israeli National Security Council Director Tzachi Hanegbi and German Ambassador to Israel Steffen Seibert.

Last week, Netanyahu traveled to Berlin for a meeting with German Chancellor Olaf Scholz.

At a Holocaust memorial, the premier made an indirect reference to Israel's efforts to prevent Iran from threatening the Jewish state with nuclear weapons.

"The calls to destroy the Jewish people have not ended. The main lesson we have learned is that when we are faced with such evil, we must stop the evil plans early to prevent a disaster," said Netanyahu.

To prevent nuclear Iran, US should arm Israel, write 44 retired generals and admirals

(JNS) — In a March 20 open letter issued by the Jewish Institute for National Security of America, 44 retired U.S. generals and admirals asked the White House and Congress to "immediately provide Israel with the advanced weapons it needs to deter and prevent a nuclear Iran."

"Iran is coming ever closer to crossing the nuclear threshold and, thereby, sparking a crisis in the Middle East," according to the letter released by the Washington, D.C. non-profit. It first appeared in *The Hill* on March 21.

The signatories added that Washington should apply lessons from the one-year-old conflict in Ukraine.

"As retired American military leaders who devoted our lives to the defense of our nation, we prefer a diplomatic solution that would genuinely end the threat posed by Iran's escalating nuclear program," they wrote. "But no such deal is imminent, nor realistic."

Herman Shelanski, a Jewish retired vice admiral who signed the letter, told JNS that projecting strength is a very important way to dissuade would-be aggressors.

"The focus for the United States is to remain a very strong and powerful military to avoid having to go to war. There are countries that look at signs of weakness and will act if they perceive weakness," he said.

Just as the United States delivered arms to Ukraine, it should do the same for Israel, according to Shelanski. "Better to be strong and prevent than to have to go to war."

Only Israel has the means, will and ability to stop Iran from crossing the nuclear threshold imminently, the letter stated.

To that end, it said, the United States should sell, lease or place in position Boeing KC-46 Pegasus aerial refueling tankers; McDonnell Douglas F-15 Eagle and Lockheed Martin F-35 Lightning II fighter jets; and precision-guided munitions.

"JINSA organized this letter because many leading U.S. military leaders understand that Iran's unprecedented nuclear escalation represents a dire threat to American security interests, and that Israel has demonstrated the most will to counter Iran and prevent its achieving nuclear capability," Michael Makovsky, president and CEO of JINSA, told JNS.

"Hopefully, this letter will help galvanize more Democrats and Republicans in Congress to press the Biden administration to expedite to Israel the military tools it needs to defend itself and prevent a nuclear Iran," he said.

Shelanski thinks that the letter will have an impact.

TIME names Jerusalem one of World's Greatest Places

(JNS) — Jerusalem was named one of *TIME* magazine's 50 most extraordinary travel destinations, as part of the publication's third annual list of the World's Greatest Places.

TIME solicited nominations for the list—including countries, regions, cities and towns—from its international network of correspondents and contributors.

"The locations must be enthralling, exciting, and offer new or advanced experiences to meet the criteria for *TIME*," according to the outlet.

Jerusalem is listed among the other destinations including Kyoto in Japan, Musanze in Rwanda, Giza and Saqqara in Egypt, Ladakh in India and Aqaba in Jordan.

The Tower of David Museum's 360-degree view of Jerusalem was featured by *TIME* as one of the must-see attractions in the city. The museum is set to reopen to the public on June 1 following a three-year, \$50 million renewal and conservation project, which included the preservation and conservation of the historic citadel and archaeological park.

The other sites mentioned in the Israeli capital were the Biblical Zoo, Jaffa Gate, Kerem Tunnel and the Mahane Yehudah market.

Tehran remains top threat for Israelis traveling abroad

(JNS) — The Israeli government has published its regular travel warning ahead of the spring holidays, with Iran remaining a top threat to Israeli tourists.

"Iran is still the main generator of global terrorism and continues its activities to promote harm to Israeli citizens around the world directly and through affiliates and proxy elements it operates, in various

countries of the world, while violating their sovereignty," states the report from the National Security Council Counter-Terrorism Division.

According to the NSCCTD assessment, Iran will continue to attempt to harm Israelis and Israeli interests around the world. The report cites recent examples over the past couple of years of Iranian operations against Israeli and Jewish targets that were prevented, including in Georgia, Turkey and Cyprus.

Countries close to Iran and in the Mediterranean basin such as Greece and Cyprus are listed as having a higher risk factor for an Iranian-aligned attack. The United Arab Emirates and Bahrain are listed—the two Gulf Arab countries signed the Abraham Accords to normalize relations with Israel but have also recently shown an interest in becoming closer to the regime in Tehran along with other Gulf states.

In addition to Iran, the NSCCTD said that global jihadist organizations such as Islamic State, Al-Qaeda and Al Shabaab continue to pose a threat, with Islamic State recently showing increasing interest in harming Israelis and Jews.

Egypt is a popular destination for Israelis and the report warns visitors from the Jewish state to stick to tourist spots such as the resort town of Sharm el-Sheikh and avoid deep trips into the Sinai Peninsula where terrorist groups are known to operate.

The report also warns about an increase in antisemitic violence against Jewish communities, notably in Europe and North America. The NSCCTD cites examples from recent years of attacks on Jewish institutions during religious holidays such as the deadly 2019 shootings at a synagogue in Germany during Yom Kippur and earlier that year during Passover at a synagogue near San Diego, California.

A warning is also given about the Muslim fasting holiday of Ramadan partially coinciding with Passover, saying that tensions in Israel around the holiday could threaten Israelis traveling in other countries.

The travel warning is published every year at the beginning of the spring and summer tourist seasons.

Michigan GOP party slammed for tweet trivializing the Holocaust

(JNS) — "History has shown us that the first thing a government does when it wants total control over its people is to disarm them. President Reagan once stated, 'If we lose freedom here, there is nowhere else to escape to. This is the last stand on Earth.'" So read a tweet on March 22 from the Michigan Republican Party.

Quoting the former president and opposing gun control are red-meat issues for a conservative social-media account. But the photo of rings that the Nazis confiscated from Jewish victims—along with the caption "Before they collected all these wedding rings ... They collected all the guns."—sparked outrage, including from conservatives.

Matt Brooks, CEO of the Republican Jewish Jewish

Coalition, called the tweet "absolutely inappropriate and offensive." He said it should be taken down immediately.

Another Twitter user, who stated that he is Jewish and worked for the Michigan Republican Party, said: "I'm so disgusted and furious beyond words that this horrible trivialization of the Holocaust is being normalized by my state party."

"Whether you are opposed to gun control or support it, this tweet should be called out as extremely offensive," wrote Joel Petlin, superintendent of the Kiryas Joel School District in New York state. "The Holocaust should never be used as a political weapon, and such false analogies are insulting to both the victims and survivors of the Nazi genocide. Shame on you."

Jewish comedian Eli Lebowicz added: "Not enough oofs in the world for this one."

More than four hours later, the tweet remained live.

Herzog wishes regional leaders a 'peaceful Ramadan'

(JNS) — Israeli President Isaac Herzog spoke over the past few days with a series of regional leaders to convey the Jewish state's well-wishes for the upcoming month of Ramadan.

Herzog spoke with King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa of Bahrain; King Abdullah II of Jordan; United Arab Emirates President Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed; Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan; and Palestinian Authority chief Mahmoud Abbas.

During the calls, Herzog expressed his "hopes for peace and stability in the region and wished them and their peoples a Ramadan that will bring them peace, happiness, and health," according to a statement from the president's office.

Herzog also spoke with the presidents of Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Albania, Senegal and Kosovo.

The Israeli leader sent letters to other heads of state, including the king of Morocco and the president of Egypt.

"The blessed month of Ramadan celebrates values that are very close to my heart. These values—of love for one's neighbor, charity and support for the weak, and tolerant discourse—are core values that I promote all year round," wrote Herzog.

"As you embark upon this month, I pray that we can take shared steps down the path of peace together in the coming year too," he added.

Saudi Arabia announced on Tuesday that Ramadan would begin this year on the evening of March 22.

UK group appeals to Olympic Committee to allow Israeli team in South African tournament

(JNS) — Three days before an international rugby tournament in South Africa, UK Lawyers for Israel has asked the International Olympic Committee to intervene to ensure that an Israeli team may participate.

UKLFI wrote on Tuesday to Girard Zappelli, IOC Chief Ethics and Compliance Officer, pointing out that World Rugby (the international federation for rugby union) has known

about the flagrant violation of its own regulations and the Olympic Charter since at least Feb. 7.

The IOC had previously declined to intervene on the grounds that World Rugby was assessing the position.

Jonathan Turner, chief executive of UKLFI, said: "We understand why the International Olympic Committee would not wish to intervene if World Rugby were actively dealing with the matter. However, World Rugby to be dragging their feet until the exclusion of Tel Aviv Heat becomes a fait accompli. Any further delay will make it impossible for Tel Aviv Heat to participate. We hope that the IOC will make it clear that this is unacceptable."

The South Africa Rugby Union withdrew on Feb. 3 an invitation to the Tel Aviv Heat rugby team to play in its Mzansi Challenge tournament.

Tel Aviv Heat's participation had been planned for several months, and the invitation had been confirmed by SA Rugby's Executive Council on two previous occasions before it was suddenly withdrawn without prior notice.

UK Lawyers for Israel has pointed out to the IOC that in these circumstances, "the IOC can and should now intervene in accordance with its mission and role as set out in Article 2 of the Olympic Charter."

Munich says it can't block Roger Waters concert By David I. Klein

(JTA) — Weeks after the city of Frankfurt canceled a Roger Waters concert over his anti-Israel activism, the mayor of Munich says he cannot find legal standing to do the same.

"We do not currently see any legally secure possibility ... to reverse the decision already made," said Mayor Dieter Reiter, according to Deutsche Welle. "I do not want to have him [Waters] here, but now we're going to have to endure it."

Waters, the former Pink Floyd bassist, is suing the Frankfurt municipality after the city blocked him from performing in May at the Festhalle, a venue that was also the site of the deportation of 3,000 Jews during the Holocaust.

"The background to the cancellation is the persistent anti-Israel behavior of the former Pink Floyd frontman, who is considered one of the most widely spread antisemites in the world," the city said in a statement.

Waters has for years been a vocal leader of the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement against Israel, calling on fellow artists to avoid performing there. He has in recent months defended Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which led to cancellations of some of his concerts in Poland.

Deutsche Welle reported that the Munich City Council is looking into ways to show solidarity with Israel and Ukraine on the date of his show in the city in late May.

Munich Jewish Community President Charlotte Knobloch criticized Munich authorities, saying they have "missed a chance to follow through with deeds on their many declarations of intent against antisemitism."

The themes of Passover, and the bonds of history, tie our struggles to those of Ukrainian Jews

By Shuly Rubin Schwartz

(JTA) — Just over 100 years ago, in April 1922, my great-grandparents emigrated to the United States with their four children, fearing for their lives in Kremenets, a Russian city in present-day western Ukraine.

My great-grandfather, Aar-

on Shimon Shpall, an educator and journalist, recorded his thoughts about leaving “the city that we were born in and that we spent years of our lives in,” acknowledging how hard it would be “to separate from our native land, and our birthplace and our father’s house.”

But he was clear that the Russia he knew had “embit-

tered our lives and saddened our souls. If not for the 3 million of our brothers who live there, it could be overturned along with Sodom and Gomorrah and the world would have lost nothing.”

Finally, after months of grueling uncertainty, including one arrest and another pending, my great-grandfather was reunited with his family in Colorado before he and his family ultimately settled in New Orleans, where he served as teacher and then as assistant principal of the communal Hebrew school.

The anguish of my family’s departure and, I can only imagine, the feelings of refugees all over the world in every era, is captured in my great-grandfather’s diary: “Nobody desired to go, but everybody had to go. We all run, or, to speak more correctly, we flee. And when somebody flees, there is no question: ‘Where to?’ Where your feet carry you! Where you have the possibility!”

The Passover seder — the

Jewish ritual observed more than any other — serves as a symbolic reenactment of the journey of the Israelites from slavery to freedom. The haggadah commands us to experience this journey annually as a way of developing historical empathy for all who are oppressed, enslaved and displaced, and who hope for liberation. As Jews, we have ritualized the recounting of our people’s enslavement and deliverance in part to cultivate a sense of moral responsibility toward those suffering in our own day.

This year, as we approach Passover, our focus includes Ukrainians fighting valiantly to defend themselves against Russian invasion. Outraged by the violence, heartbroken by the loss of life and appalled by the destruction, we feel an obligation to help the Ukrainian people by offering monetary support and help with resettlement.

We are especially attuned to helping the tens of thousands of Jews among them. The

bonds of history that tie our struggles to those of Ukrainian Jews and their proud Jewish president today are deep and, in many cases, including mine, quite personal.

American Jewry has flourished thanks to ancestors like mine who realized their determination to seek freedom and escape oppression. Thanks to their courage and resolve, we are privileged to recount the Exodus from Egypt each year as citizens of a democratic state and to develop the empathy needed at moments like this to help others who fear for their lives.

For some, historical empathy for the plight of the Ukrainian people might be complicated by ancestors who suffered from brutal antisemitism at the hands of Ukrainian neighbors or whose ancestors’ murder at the hand of the Nazis was abetted by local Ukrainians.

How can we square these complicated emotions? In part, because we also know that countless other Ukrai-

nians fought in the Russian army to defeat the Nazis, and that Ukraine has changed greatly over time. The Babyn Yar Holocaust Memorial Center, on the site of the largest massacre of Ukrainian Jews by the Nazis, is in the process of opening and today, Ukraine is led by a Jewish president.

Most important, we quell our doubts because the haggadah reminds us not to take our freedom for granted, pointing us instead to activate our sense of moral responsibility to help others who are fighting to secure their own.

Our haggadah prods us to recall our history so that it will conjure up our best selves, so that we will do what we can to ensure that the future brings freedom, safety and security to all.

It’s a sentiment I believe my great-grandfather would have shared.

Shuly Rubin Schwartz is chancellor of The Jewish Theological Seminary of America.

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By JNS Staff

(JNS) — The U.S. State Department’s Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor released the 2022 edition of its annual Country Reports on Human Rights Practices on Monday. The reports “cover internationally recognized individual, civil, political and worker rights, as set forth in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international agreements,” stated Foggy Bottom.

“The report embodies the importance of human rights for American diplomacy and for our vision of an open, free, prosperous and secure world,” Antony Blinken, U.S. secretary of state, said in a press conference on Monday. “Human rights are universal. They aren’t defined by any one country, philosophy or region. They apply to everyone, everywhere.”

The report makes clear that there was a “backsliding in human rights conditions—the closing of civic space, disrespect for fundamental human dignity” in 2022, according to Blinken, who said the report does not aim to lecture nor shame.

“Rather, it is to provide a resource for those individuals working around the world to

safeguard and uphold human dignity when it’s under threat in so many ways,” he said. “And while this report looks outward to countries around the world, we know the United States faces its own set of challenges on human rights.

In his remarks, Blinken singled out the “appalling and ongoing abuses” of the Iranian regime, the Taliban’s “relentless” discrimination against women and girls in Afghanistan, the erosion of human rights in Burma, “genocide and crimes against humanity against Uyghurs” in China, as well as offenses in Cuba, Nicaragua and Ethiopia. He addressed “calculated and deliberate” offenses in Ethiopia at some length.

“We’re not pulling our punches with anyone”

One of three questions from reporters who were present focused on Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Israel. “What would your response be to those that would say despite the contents of the report and despite all of the work that goes into it, that the issues that are flagged are not sufficiently influencing policymaking, especially when it comes to countries where it is harder for the United States to have those tough discussions on human rights, like Egypt and

Saudi Arabia and Israel?” the reporter asked.

The report devotes nearly 23,992 words—about 50 pages, single-spaced, in a standard word processing format—to Israel, West Bank and Gaza.

“We have those tough discussions across the board with friends, adversaries, competitors alike,” said the secretary of state. “We’re not pulling our punches with anyone. We call things as we see them. Sometimes, we do it more publicly; sometimes, we do it more privately.”

Among other things, the report notes of Israel that Israeli Security Agency forces, which fall under the Israel Defense Forces and operate in the West Bank, were the subject of reports of abuses. It added that there were “significant human rights issues,” including “credible” reports of “unlawful or arbitrary killings,” “arbitrary or unjust detention, including of Palestinians in Israel and the occupied territories” and “punishment of family members for alleged offenses by a relative.”

Of Iran, the report noted that “according to media reports, officials and media propagated conspiracy theories blaming Jews and Israel

for the spread of COVID-19. According to NGO reports, school textbooks contained content that incited hatred against Jews as part of the state curricula for history, religion and social studies.”

It added that the approximately 9,000 Jews who live in Iran, according to the Tehran Jewish Committee, “were reportedly subjected to government restrictions and discrimination. Government officials, including the supreme leader, president and other top officials, routinely engaged in egregious antisemitic rhetoric and Holocaust denial and distortion.”

“In January, Iran was the only country to object to a U.N. resolution condemning denial and distortion of the Holocaust,” it added. “Supreme Leader [Ali] Khamenei’s social media accounts repeatedly contained antisemitic attacks and tropes. State-run media routinely claimed ‘Zionists’ influenced Western nations on topics affecting Iran and blamed ‘Zionists,’ among others, for widespread protests following the death of Mahsa Amini in September. The Jewish community in Tehran warned persons on Telegram not to visit synagogues during the high holidays ‘due to the dangerous situation.’”

Budget

From page 10A

One box of matzah is not terribly cost effective. A set of five can be much more affordable. But the stores are practically giving it away after seders are over so consider buying just what you need to get through seder and then buy the rest after the seders are done. Also, consider making your own matzah! (This applies to other Passover specialty items, like gefilte

fish and macaroons.) But do be prepared for certain items to go out of stock. If there’s something you absolutely cannot live without, probably best to purchase it before the holiday.

You don’t need fancy Judaica

If you have lovely Passover dishes, a beautiful seder plate and other decorative items, of course enjoy them. But if you are just starting out and don’t have

these ritual items, don’t worry! You don’t need a dedicated seder plate—you can just put the ritual foods on a dinner plate or serving platter. You also don’t need a special matzah cover—you can just use a napkin. And any wine goblet will work for Elijah’s cup. Use what you have and collect Judaica when you want to and can afford to.

Choose where to splurge

Passover is supposed to

feel joyous and allow us to luxuriate in freedom. So while you employ many of these tips to keep your seder affordable, consider where you might want to spend just a little more to make it special. Do those trays of candied fruit slices remind you of childhood? Is it not seder without your favorite brisket? Consider where you might want to treat yourself and your family—and make it really count.

A fifth question this Passover: what makes Trader Joe’s matzah different from all other matzah?

By Jackie Hajdenberg

(JTA) — For millennia, Jews have eaten matzah. And for years, Jewish patrons of Trader Joe’s have been able to purchase matzah off the shelves of the tiki-themed grocery chain — which has gained its own quasi-religious following.

Now, for the first time ever, Trader Joe’s will be selling matzah under its own famous private label.

The question, even among the store’s diehard Jewish fans, is what makes Trader Joe’s-branded matzah different from all other matzah.

The grocery chain with more than 500 stores nationwide, and known for characteristically friendly, Hawaiian shirt-clad employees and a limited selection and high turnover of products, has gained a cult-like following in its 56 years of operation. An Instagram fan account boasts nearly 2 million followers; the internet is abound with memes about falling in love with Trader Joe’s cashiers; and dozens of Facebook groups with thousands of members each exist to cater toward the specific dietary needs of loyal shoppers.

Those loyalists include no small number of Jews who keep kosher. The store stocks a number of Jewish, Israeli and Middle Eastern foods — from an “everything but the bagel” spice mix to spicy zhong sauce to kosher-certified turkeys

ahead of Thanksgiving, and frozen latkes. Trader Joe’s caused a small uproar in 2012 when it stopped stocking kosher pareves semi-sweet chocolate chips. After a campaign by Jewish customers, the chain brought the product back to its shelves in 2021.

But whether that loyalty will extend to the store’s matzah is unclear. Some shoppers said they were excited about the new offering, while others wondered whether it would be any different from the matzah Trader Joe’s has sold in previous years. Still others said that by putting its name on one of the most quintessential Jewish foods, Trader Joe’s “signals that Pesach products have gone mainstream,” in the words of Susan Robinson, a member of Kosher Trader Joe’s, a Facebook group with more than 63,000 members.

The decision also demonstrates that Trader Joe’s takes its kosher-observant customers seriously, said Rachel B. Gross, a professor at San Francisco State University who teaches a course on U.S. Jews and the history of food.

“My understanding is that they’ve never wanted to do everything,” Gross said. “But they have had a really strong kosher game because that worked really well with the way they approached the niche markets in general.”

For years, Trader Joe’s sold matzah made by a brand called Holyland, and it’s unclear

whether the chain’s new boxes hold the same old product. The company — which is secretive about who produces its private-label foods — told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency only that the new private label matzah is made by “one of the largest and oldest matzo-making bakeries in Israel.”

Whether the Holyland once sold by Trader Joe’s is made by the same company as Holyland Shmura Matzo — a circular handmade variety — is similarly unclear. But there are hints, beyond the name, that they come from the same company, which is based in Israel. Both share the same distributor, and both include a logo on the front bearing the web address NaturallyBetterWithYouInMind.com, a site that boasts “high quality, all natural, kosher foods.”

A representative of the distributor of both Holyland products, a New Jersey company called Kayco, did not know whether the current Trader Joe’s product is the same as the Holyland matzah. The new Trader Joe’s matzah box says only that it is distributed and sold by Trader Joe’s, which is headquartered outside of Los Angeles.

That confusion has led to an ambivalent reaction among some members of Kosher Trader Joe’s. Multiple members of the group shared photos of the new boxes at their local stores, encouraging each other to buy the matzah in order to press the

company to produce it again next year.

Some commented on the new box design, while others remarked on the price — \$2.69 per box, a slight increase over the \$2.49 Trader Joe’s charged for the Holyland boxes last year, according to an Instagram fan page. (Name-brand boxes of matzah at the same weight cost slightly more at other retailers, ranging from about \$3.22 for a 16-ounce box of Yehuda Matzos to \$4.49 for Manischewitz’s version of the unleavened bread.)

“Trader Joe’s has sold Holyland Matzah for at least a decade, if not longer,” wrote one member. “I’m surprised that it has taken them this long to put it under the Trader Joe’s private label.”

Others were just happy to have access to matzah at all. Another member recalled that supply chain delays and restrictions related to COVID-19 led to shortages of Passover products, and that in Manhattan’s East Village, where he lives, “TJ — and the Holyland Matzo — became a Pesach saver. That’s what the commotion is all about.”

(Members of the group who adhere to strict kosher laws may not have tried the new matzah yet due to a tradition of not eating matzah between Purim and Passover, although a few customers remarked that it feels thinner than Holyland matzah.)

In addition to matzah, Trader Joe’s will sell Teva



Isabella Armus

Boxes of Trader Joe’s matzah for sale.

Glatt kosher-for-Passover Angus beef brisket and a few kosher-for-Passover wines including Sara Bee Moscato and Baron Herzog chardonnay and cabernet. The company will publish a complete list of its kosher-for-Passover offerings closer to the holiday, which begins the night of April 5.

Gross said the conversation over Trader Joe’s matzah fits in with the way Americans celebrate Passover, which she said is intimately tied to brands. She cited the proliferation of well-known Passover products like the haggadah published by Maxwell House coffee, which was first printed more than 90 years ago, or Manischewitz’s many Passover foods. The way the holiday has been shaped by brands, she said, is “in some sense, a traditional American Jewish experience.”

“Jews have really learned over the last 110, 120 years how to trust brands, and

trust brands around kashrut, especially around Passover,” Gross told JTA.

“We know that the people who keep kosher are such a small minority,” she added. “And we know that the number of people who look for heckshers are not primarily Jews, which makes me wonder how many non-Jews buy matzah, or [how many] they expect to buy matzah.”

But for at least one member of Kosher Trader Joe’s, brand loyalty was not enough to make the new matzahs stand out.

“Most articles written about this Matza as well as online comments make it out to be something earth-shattering and revolutionary, and fail to mention that Trader Joe’s has carried matza around this time, in every single store, for years and years under the Holyland Brand,” wrote Yoseph Goldstein. “Have folks easily forgotten this? Is it really the ‘coolness’ of the box?”

A sunflower for Ukraine? A tomato for farmworkers? Here’s why I’m sticking to the basics on my Passover seder plate.



By Rabbi Sari Laufer

(JTA) — Olives. Tomatoes. Oranges. Artichokes. Dates. Cotton balls. And, now, sunflowers.

This list might seem like a setup for a logic puzzle or a grocery run. But it is, instead, a (non-exhaustive) list that I have seen of additions to the seder plate, items to highlight and include stories and histories that are not, at least explicitly, part of the Passover seder.

On its surface, it is a noble goal — why shouldn’t we consider the plight of Ukrainians in spring 2023 (sunflowers), or remember the American history of slavery (cotton ball)? Wouldn’t we want to honor the farm workers who

put food on our tables (tomatoes), or intertwine the story of the Palestinians along with our own (olives)? In my own family, my mother insists on the orange on the seder plate, regardless of its apocryphal origin as feminist symbol.

But I won’t be adding anything to my plate. As a rabbi, teacher and mother, I’m sticking with the traditional items.

My decision to eschew seder plate innovation stems from the thinking about inclusion that I do all the time in my work. Both in encountering ancient text and modern community, I am always asking: Who is not in the room? Whose voices are not being heard? I know that the language I use, that we

use, matters; I think carefully about the stories I tell, the translations I use, and the questions I ask. When I preach, when I teach, my hope is always that anyone, regardless of how they identify, sees themselves in the text and in the message.

At the same time, I am always aware that by naming one story, or one identity, I might be excluding another.

One of the great tensions of Jewish life in the 21st century is between universalism — the central themes and ideas of Jewish wisdom that speak to all of the human experience — and particularism, the doctrines and injunctions meant to distinguish Jewish practice and ritual from that of the rest of the world. And of

all of our stories, it is perhaps Passover that best embodies this tension.

It is a story embraced by Jews, by Black Americans, by Christians the world over. It is our story, to be sure. But it is also a story for anyone, and everyone, who has ever known bondage, who has ever felt constricted, stuck in a narrow place. It is a story for all who have sought the freedom to be their fullest selves, whether that freedom is physical, spiritual, or both.

Bechol dor vador, chayav adam lirot et atzmo k’ilu hu yatzta mi-Mitzrayim: In every generation, we are obligated to see ourselves as if we, ourselves, had come out of Egypt.

Core to the seder, this statement is our directive — this is how we must experience and also teach the Passover story and its lessons. We experience it as our own story; it is not simply something that happened to our ancestors, or a story of myth or history. It is ours, regardless of where we come from, who we are now, or where we might be going or becoming.

The seder night is a night for telling stories, our own and the ones we think need to be told. But to my mind, we do not need more on our seder plate to make that happen. In fact, I worry that, in this case, more is less — in trying to include each particular story,

we lose the universal truths. I hope that we sit around our seder tables and talk about the plight of today’s refugees, whether from Ukraine, Syria or Central America. I hope that we sit around our seder tables and talk about the bravery of each and every person who tells their coming out story and lives their truth. I hope that we sit around our seder tables and talk about the Palestinian struggle for self-determination, the ongoing struggle for farmworker and immigrant justice here in the United States, the shameful history of American slavery and its lasting legacy of systemic racism, our own stories of immigration and exile and whatever other stories you and your families need to tell.

Over the course of the seder, we lift up the items on the seder plate and tell of their significance. What is this bitter herb, we ask? It is to remind us of the bitterness of slavery, the bitterness of being subject to a power we have not chosen, the bitterness of being despised for who we are. What is this shankbone, we ask? It is a reminder of the power that can redeem us, the helping hands that pull us out of our bondage, the strength of conviction that we honor. These are particular items, to be sure, but they are telling universal stories.

Why do we need additional items, when these symbols

allow us to tell the stories we want to tell? I worry that the more specific stories we attempt to include, the more we are excluding. What happens to people who do not see their specific story represented on a seder plate that is groaning with symbols of so many other stories?

One of the core lessons of the Exodus is the impulse toward empathy. Over and over, the Torah returns to this narrative, reminding us to protect and love and be kind to the stranger, because we were strangers in the land of Egypt. The Torah is not specific; we do not name that we must be kind to the Ukrainian refugee, or the trans teenager, or the Palestinian farmer, or the African man who is enslaved. Because to name one, in this context, would be to exclude another. Our empathy, the Torah teaches, is meant to be boundless and inclusive. We are to welcome anyone — and everyone — who feels out of place, who feels unmoored, who has been oppressed or mistreated.

To my mind, and in my understanding of the rites of Passover, each and every one of their stories is already represented on the seder plate and in the seder ritual. No additions needed.

Rabbi Sari Laufer is the Director of Congregational Engagement at Stephen Wise Temple in Los Angeles.

Chag Pesach Sameach!

Find the perfect dishes for your family's holiday feast at publix.com/passover.

