

FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR AND OUR PRESIDENT

Unity: Aḥeinu v' Aḥoteinu Kol Beit Yisrael

By Daphne Lazar Price and Mindy Feldman Hecht

It is hard to believe that more than a year has passed since the genocidal attacks of October 7th. Even though the written word comes to both of us pretty easily, we still struggle with writing about the traumatic experiences of this past year. As we write this note in November, it feels important to own that it is impossible to capture the full narrative throughout the pages of this *Jofa Journal* for so many reasons. First, new details about the attacks and their aftermath—from witnesses' accounts to hostages' testimonials to soldiers' experiences—are still emerging. Second, when we embarked on collecting articles for this issue of the *Jofa Journal*, we recognized that we might be—and indeed we still are—in the middle of this war.

Third, there is so much more that we could have included in this time capsule of sorts. We know from reports, conversations, and meetings that the day-to-day experiences of women and men in Israel—civilians and enlisted persons alike—are all-consuming, directly impacted because of ongoing safety concerns, or the



intense military service, or because they remain evacuated from the north or the south. Finally, and speaking from our own experience, as we continue to process all of the primary and secondary trauma, it is very difficult to reflect in writing about this deeply traumatic period.

The divergence of experiences of Jewish people living in Israel in contrast to those living abroad initially created such a chasm, it appeared nearly unbridgeable. Each of us was stunned by the enormity of the atrocities and faced the grim reality that the reports of death and destruction were far worse than the initial rumors. In the days after Simḥat Torah, Jewish people abroad somberly went back to work and school, while Israelis were grappling with life-and-death security issues, managing households while one or more family members deployed, and attending funerals and *shiva* houses, and making hospital visits. Too often, when Jews are attacked in Israel, it is chalked up by Americans

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On Bearing Witness: Reflections on the Maharat and Jofa Mission to Israel

By Sara Hurwitz

Adapted from an article published in The Jewish Link, January 18, 2024

I am one of many people who have gone to Israel on a mission. In January, Jofa and Maharat brought over 30 people to give *hizuk* and support. In fact, we got so much more than we gave, and the images that I have witnessed have forever changed me.

As we were putting together the itinerary for the mission, we debated whether we should visit the devastated kibbutzim in the south. The concern was not so much with our safety. Rather, there are some who argue that visiting sites of destruction is a form of voyeurism—“war tourism” as someone described it. In fact, this very debate was happening in Kfar Azza itself. Some members of the



kibbutz wanted to keep their homes private. They wanted to retain a sense of dignity, even though many of their homes were shattered and sullied by Hamas terrorists. Others, however, wanted, even needed, people to see the atrocities firsthand. They wanted us to bear witness to their pain.

Bearing witness. I have heard that phrase over and over again in relation to the terrible atrocities perpetrated on October 7th. What does it mean to bear witness?

The quintessential phrase in our Jewish tradition is the *Shema*: “Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One” (Deuteronomy 6:4). In the Torah, the *ayin* and the *daled* are written larger than the other letters. Put together, the letters spell the word *eid*, meaning witness. In this context, we are called to be a witness to God’s oneness.

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On Bearing Witness *continued from page 1*

But on a deeper level, we are being told to open our eyes and witness all that surrounds us. This *tefillah*, where we cover our eyes, actually means the opposite. We are not supposed to bury our heads in the sand and close our eyes to the darkness and sadness of the world around us. The *Shema* is calling on each of us to be an *eid*, to stand up and be a witness.

The requirement of bearing witness is not a passive act. A witness effectuates change, and therefore, the bearing of witness must lead to action. The actions that we take can manifest in several ways.

Bearing Witness Means Continuing To Pray.

At several points throughout our mission, we paused to pray. We recited the *misheberakh* prayer for the return of captives in Kikar Hatufim, after listening to Shelly Shem Tov praying for the return of her son Omer. We prayed with Natalie Ben Ami, begging for the return of her father, Ohad. We felt like we were escorting their daily pleas for the return of their loved ones directly to God. We also gathered to recite that same prayer at Reim, at the Nova festival site, overlooking the smiling faces of the missing captives.

We said the *kel maleh* prayer, picturing the 1200+ souls who died on October 7th. We said another *kel maleh* at Har Herzl, crying for the young soldiers, men and women who died in battle. In front of one grave was a young soldier bent over the grave of his commander, Roi Nehadri. Roi died on October 9th. I didn't know Roi or his friend, but I stood next to him trying to hold his pain. The soldier told us that as Roi fell, he raised his fist, as if to offer a final message: *Am Yisrael Hai*. The Nation of Israel will live.

Bearing Witness Means Holding Peoples' Stories Of Pain.

I have heard Dr. Cochav Elkayam-Levy speak a few times. Dr. Elkayam-Levy has been tasked with documenting and archiving the stories of sexual violence against women that was perpetrated on October 7th. For the last few months, she has been inundated with the most tragic stories of devastation and destruction orchestrated on women's bodies. More than holding these stories, she has become the spokesperson tasked with convincing the international community that Hamas's actions were highly coordinated and purposefully violent and sexual acts against women. I watched her break down and realized that I can help her handle these stories. I can offer to hold her hand, listen and share a bit of the pain, offering her even small moments of relief from the constant deluge of darkness.

Bearing Witness Means Retelling The Stories Of Heroism.

There are so many heroic stories. Mothers in Kfar Azza who stayed in their homes, placing their bodies over their

children, saving their lives. Children hiding underneath beds and closets for hours. Parents who left their children to go out and fight. Soldiers who volunteered to show up, even if they didn't have to. Wives who were stuck at home with children, waiting for their husbands to return home. Parents praying that they would not get that dreaded knock from the army telling them that their child had been injured, or worse, murdered. Volunteers who cooked, gathered clothes, found homes for displaced families, moved out of their own homes to make space for others. Grandparents leaving their jobs to watch their grandkids while parents were serving. Therapists who try to remind soldiers that there will be a tomorrow and a tomorrow after that. The woman who needs to pump breast milk while she is serving, so she can continue to feed her baby when she returns. The women who were called to fulfill their service in the Shura base, drafted as part of the *hevra kadisha*, who have the holy responsibility to escort the precious souls, *neshamot*, to their final resting place.

The list goes on and on. The spirit of voluntarism and helping out is inspiring. The country is united around the herculean task of defending their country, no matter what the cost. Every single person I met had a story to tell, and each and every one of them is heroic.



Rabba Anat Sharbat
at Hostage Square

Bearing Witness Means Acknowledging Women's Roles In The War.

There's a sentiment that many hold that this is the war where women have broken through multiple glass ceilings. The question about whether women can serve in combat units has been answered: they can and do, saving hundreds of people in their tanks. Then there

are the *tatzpitaniot*, young women who are the "spotters" watching borders and villages. These soldiers knew something was happening leading up to October 7th. Their calls to the army leadership were ignored. Many of their peers were among the first who fell. We learned that many young women have avoided these jobs. But today the job has been elevated, its importance revealed. We watched them work, their eyes trained on computer screens scanning Israel's borders for danger.

Everyone also acknowledged the young mothers who hold up the "home front" in addition to the *hayalot* who are combat fighters on the actual front. There has been a renewed awe and respect for the women holding down the home while their husbands are away.

Bearing Witness Means Committing To Act.

As we walked through Kfar Azza, we witnessed the devastation in the youth village. We saw pictures of a smiling young couple, Sivan and her fiance, next to pictures of their bloodied belongings and grenade holes all over their walls. I saw the final WhatsApp messages between Sivan and her family, where her father writes at 12:21 "Sivani." And then again at 22:40. Sivani could not

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respond. My stomach was in knots. I had no words.

I tell these stories because perhaps this is my service. This is what a *hayal* named Ravid told me. He sought me out to say thank you for being here. But then he went on: “I know that I am in uniform and am literally on the front. But you have a front as well. You can also do your service and do your part. You can take these stories home. You can tell the U.S. what you saw. That’s how you can wear your uniform.”

Bearing Witness Means Finding Moments Of Light And Hope.

Out of the ashes, there were glimmers of hope. It’s the only way that people get up in the morning. Families talking about their loved ones who are held captive, imagining their resilience and strength.

I take with me the images...

...of Rabba Anat Sharbat who shows up every Shabbat to lead *Kabbalat Shabbat* services and *Havdalah* services at Hostage Square, where she hugs and holds families who can’t pray themselves.

...of the *hayalot* we visited on their base who get up and dance with a group of strangers, laughing together with pure joy.

... of the letters that we delivered to *hayalot*, written by first graders and eighth graders in the U.S.

... of the hope of Sarit Zussman, who buried her son Ben just a few weeks before our visit. Her message: tears are inevitable, but there is also hope. Through Ben’s memory, she finds *emunah*, faith, and *tikvah*, hope.

On Wednesday morning we volunteered at Yad Mordechai, helping farmers save their produce. We bumped into another group of Americans joyfully picking grapefruit. Our job was a little more depressing. We were bussed over to the lemon trees. The trees were deceptively beautiful; the lemons were past their prime and could no longer be sold. Our job was to pick the lemons and then throw them on the ground.

What a poignant metaphor for so much that was lost. I felt like crying every time I threw a precious lemon to the ground. I even managed to stash a few away to eat immediately—just to save a few. But Yehala, whose farm we were working on, told us that throwing the lemons away was necessary to ensure that the fruit would grow again. Destruction would somehow, in time, allow for rebirth.

Rabba Sara Hurwitz is the first woman to be publicly ordained as an Orthodox rabbi. She is the co-founder and president of Yeshivat Maharat and has served on the rabbinic staff at the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale–The Bayit since 2003.

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to being part of the realities of a far-away geo-political conflict. But now, as antisemitism rises here in North America and around the world, in our communities and on college campuses, we find ourselves changing behaviors and attitudes as we seek to strengthen ourselves and those around us. The bittersweet outcome is an outpouring of concern by Israeli Jews for Jewish communities in North America (and around the world), while American Jewish communities demonstrate support for Israel. In many ways, our communities have never been more unified.

As Orthodox Jews, our one constant is our faith in *Hashem* and commitment to *mitzvot* and Torah. Our *tefillot* have taken on new urgency as we pray for the safety and the well-being of the State of Israel, the IDF, those who are in need of physical and spiritual healing, and, of course, for the safe return of the hostages. On our mission to Israel this past January, we recited these prayers when we met with hostage family members in Hostage Square, at an army base, on the hallowed grounds of Kfar Azza, and at the site of the Nova music festival in Re’im.

During our time together, we were part of the assembling of a mosaic of life in Israel, as Rabbi Seth Farber, director of ITIM, so eloquently described it, with each person contributing their own tile. We heard from Rabbi Doron Perez, CEO of World Mizrahi, who spoke with stoicism about what a gift it was to dance at one son’s wedding while another son’s well-being was

yet unknown. (Daniel’s, ז”ל, death was confirmed a few months later.)

We picked Meyer lemons on the border with Gaza. Though the lemons were overripe and could not be sold, they had to be cleared off the trees to make way for next year’s crop. Once in Kfar Azza, we stood in the rubble with Maj. Liad Diamond from the IDF’s Spokesperson Unit. There he shared heroic stories of the fallen and survivors alike. He urged us to come back to a rebuilt kibbutz where, instead of hearing the constant din of artillery fire in the background, our voices would be drowned out by the laughter of children playing barefoot in the grass. And later that night, we dined and danced with a unit of *tatzpitaniot*, army spotters, whose sister unit was decimated on October 7th.

The motto of the Nova music festival is “We will dance again.” Whether that’s an aspirational wish or a prophetic prediction, we know that bit by bit it is already coming true. Despite the immense heartbreak of the last 12 months, Rachel Goldberg and Jon Polin have taught us all so poignantly about what it means to be religious Jews. As Rabbi Mishael Zion framed it in a *Times of Israel* blog post dated September 8, 2024, “with their exceptional *middot* (character), spirituality, and dignity, they have become beacons to millions.” Through our communities and the work that we do together, may we bring comfort, healing, and a revolution to the world.

B’sorot tovot. May we hear good news soon.

Bring them all home now. Am Yisrael Hai.

Antisemitism on Campus: A Hillel Director's Reflections

By Amalia Haas

On the Shabbat of October 7th, I was teaching a Lunch 'n Learn session about Simhat Torah in Wilder Hall, the student union of Oberlin College, when one of my students said, “Rabba Amalia, I’m not sure if it is appropriate to share this information coming across my phone. There is terrible news from Israel.” I looked up at him. I had two daughters in Israel and a son-in-law. He shared the news as it was emerging: hundreds dead, the Gaza border overrun, hostages taken, sirens sounding across the country. The room became very quiet. “Should we cancel the Simhat Torah celebrations?” one of my students asked. I considered this as I continued my *shiur*.

“We will read Torah and have the celebration as planned tonight,” I said, “for of this day, it says that we will be ‘*Akh Sameah*,’ we will be happy (*sameah*), ‘*akh*’—in spite of circumstances that would take happiness away from us.”

Serving as a rabbi-in-residence on this campus, I collected names and locations of Israeli students on campus and set off—first for my host’s house and then to find those students.

It was no longer *yom tov* in Israel, and although my non-Jewish host had never used WhatsApp, he called my daughters, who confirmed their safety. That evening’s Simhat Torah celebration was a true coming together—with food, Torah reading, and the dancing of *hakafot*. Children of Israelis said that it had meant so much to them to come together in community on that night.

The *Oberlin Review*, the college paper, usually had a pro-Palestinian, anti-Israel letter or article weekly or bi-weekly. Within a week of October 7th, a pro-Palestinian march was organized on campus. As deans and staff watched the march from across the street, I walked up to them. One of the deans asked me, “But aren’t some of those students Jewish?” As an Oberlin alumna and former Hillel staff person on the campus from the 1990s, I was well aware of the phenomenon of Jewish students being among the leadership of Oberlin’s Students for Justice in Palestine group, called Students for a Free Palestine, or SFP. But I understood the dean’s confusion.

During this period, there were anti-Israel slogans chalked and posted all over campus—in dorms, on public walkways and classroom buildings, and even in bathrooms. Pro-Israel students expressed feeling harassed by being unable to get away from the messaging and by the erasure of the murders of Israelis and the hostage-taking. In those early days, we had not yet heard about the weaponizing of rape and sexual violence.

With Hillel student leadership, I organized a Vigil for Lives Lost in Israel that was co-sponsored by the campus

Chabad. On a strongly anti-Zionist campus, I publicized a gathering of Students Who Care about Israel. Some students who came were silent for ten to fifteen minutes after they arrived, as if they needed to adjust to being in a space where they could express grief. Some were in disbelief that there was such anger toward Israel when the dead had not even been identified. Out of that gathering grew a group of students who wanted to form a Zionist group (Oberlin had previously had a Zionist group but it had lapsed), a group that would come to be called Obies for Israel.

When Hillel’s student email attached a flier from the Cleveland Jewish Federation about the November 14th March on Washington in support of Israel, our email was smeared. “Hillel, you hate black people! You hate people of color! You are racists! Shame on you Hillel! Shame!” In deep distress, the coordinators of our social media outreach took a break for mental health reasons, and comments were turned off on our social media account. Nonetheless, we did bring almost a

dozen students from Oberlin, a campus with about 650 Jews, to the D.C. march.

On November 17th, 100 Jewish students published an “Open Letter from Oberlin’s Jewish Students” in which they wrote, “we are ashamed of Oberlin Hillel’s support of the state of Israel. We will not allow them to speak for us.” They announced that, with SFP, they would begin holding their own anti-Zionist Shabbat gatherings. They wrote that Zionism is “not an extension of Judaism—it is a racist ideology built on the displacement and destruction of Indigenous peoples. Israel was built within a framework of occupation, designed to possess lands already inhabited by indigenous Palestinians.... As we do not condone this campaign of occupation, we do not claim Israel as our Jewish state.”

They wrote that as “grandchildren of survivors of genocide ... we condemn the ongoing genocide of the Palestinian people and the larger white supremacist and colonial project that it exemplifies.” They also condemned the Israel education they had received growing up as “Israeli propaganda” that they encouraged Jewish students to “unlearn.”

These messages were repeated in dozens of articles, posters, and teaching events across campus. As a Hillel director, as a rabbi, and as a fellow Jew, what was my responsibility to these students? I consulted with other rabbis and Hillel directors around the country, some of whom had a similar split emerging within their communities, but there were no easy answers.

The public face of Oberlin’s students remained staunch-



Seen on the Oberlin campus

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Hillel Director's Reflections *continued from page 6*

ly anti-Israel. Posters put up by SFP were allowed to stay up. Oberlin has two boulders that are frequently repainted. When someone painted “Free the Hostages” messages on one boulder, it was immediately defaced with bloody hands. The college sent grounds staff to paint over that.



publicly on campus about the Israel-Gaza war for fear of being canceled and facing hostility on campus (and, with the reach of social media, possibly beyond).

Student Reactions

Some Jewish students sought me out to share their feelings and experiences. One sophomore had been cornered by two friends who told her that they had defended her against another student who had been saying on social media that she was a Zionist. “You wouldn’t do anything as terrible as that, would you?” She described the pain of having this conflict dig into her personal relationships.

Another student told me that post-October 7th she had not been able to bring herself to go into a Jewish space—even for Shabbat services and a meal. “I’m utterly terrified. I know it’s not rational, but I can’t help myself.”

Some brave students raised their voices in the *Oberlin Review*. For example, a senior wrote on April 26, 2024: “Making divisive claims that spread misinformation while silencing Zionist—Jewish—perspectives isolates Jews on campus.... Despite Oberlin’s spirit of dialogue and the large Jewish presence on campus, however, I do not feel safe being outwardly Zionist. The events of Oct. 7 were a massive shock to the Jewish community, especially to those—such as myself—with family in Israel, yet Oberlin’s Jewish students are not allowed to grieve our losses unless we renounce our homeland.”

Several students who published pro-Israel pieces were targeted and threatened on YikYak, an anonymous social media platform. I brought these cases to Oberlin security, and they were elevated to the dean’s office. In some cases, students were told that they could be escorted on campus by campus security.

As the year progressed, Obies for Israel continued to meet and collect anti-Israel images from across campus, some of which were antisemitic. Our charter as a campus group was moving through the bureaucracy of the college, and, finally, shortly before Passover the group was chartered. We held a Seder table for the hostages outside the student union, and the educational table nearby had an Israeli flag on it. “I understand wanting to support the hostages, but why do you have that settler

colonialist flag here?” asked one student. The sight of the hostage tables on Oberlin’s campus was so extraordinary that nearly 500 people took photos of it.

Toward the end of the school year, the center of campus was taken over by an encampment and then by the teaching of classes by students for the “People’s College for the Liberation of Palestine.” Among these classes was “The Myth of Jewish Oppression” and “The Weaponization of Antisemitism.” During a year in which programming and publications were aimed at drawing connections between the Palestinian struggle for liberation and liberation for people of color and LGBTQIA, Jews who were pro-Israel were made to feel isolated on campus.

Reflections on the Year

In reflecting on this year on campus, there is so much work that needs to be done. On the level of the administration and college programming, I met with staff who are responsible for DEI education and orientation to discuss inclusion of antisemitism in the framework of mandatory college programs.

But there is work to be done before students arrive on campus. I am struck by the need for Jews to learn at a young age about how antisemitism manifests over time, not only about the Holocaust. I agree with Dara Horn (*Atlantic*, May 2023) that “... in the total absence of any education about Jews alive today, teaching about the Holocaust might even be making antisemitism worse.” From a very early age, Jewish (and non-Jewish) children need to begin to learn that antisemitism consists of conspiracy theories that morph and evolve over time. Young Jews need to learn basic antisemitic tropes and how they are being repackaged in anti-Zionism.

As a Hillel director, as a rabbi, and as a fellow Jew, what was my responsibility to these students?

They need to be given a perspective on Israel that is not only through rosy-eyed glasses, so that when they arrive on campus they don’t feel that the Jewish community has simply sold them a bill of goods. They should learn that one can disagree with Israeli government policies and still support Israel’s right to exist. They should learn that there is only one country whose right to exist is called into question and learn to frame that within exceptionalist rhetoric that is used about Jewish people. These are not easy educational projects, but from what I have seen on campus during the 2023-24 academic year, they are crucial ones.

Rabba Amalia Haas is an educator, chaplain, beekeeper, and mother of six. She is a member of the spiritual care teams of the Cleveland Clinic and SVIVAH. During the 2023-24 academic year she served as rabbi-in-residence at Oberlin Hillel.

Campus Antisemitism: College Students Speak Out

Report from Cornell: A Campus Gone Mad

By *Amanda Silberstein*

This article is adapted from the written testimony of Amanda Silberstein before the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on the Judiciary Hearing on Free Speech on College Campuses, November 8, 2023.

“I was alone in a world gone mad.” These are the words my grandfather wrote the day in October 1942 after his father had been shot dead and the Jews in his small Polish town, including his entire family, were deported to a death camp. He was a teenager, alone in a labor camp, with a bleak future filled with unimaginable suffering.

I have thought about my grandfather’s words often in the days since October 7th, as I have watched what I can only describe as a world gone mad. I have seen and heard things on and around Cornell’s campus that before



October 7th I could not have imagined:

- Cornell Professor Russell Rickford publicly justifying and celebrating barbaric acts of terror as “exhilarating” and “energizing,” describing the torture, rape, and murder of innocent women and children as “resistance.”
- Classmates perpetuating age-old antisemitic tropes on social media.
- My campus defaced with anti-Israel signage and graffiti, using phrases such as “F__ Israel” and “Zionism equals genocide.”

Anti-Zionism and antisemitism are inextricably linked—this is evidenced by the Jew hatred that consistently and openly accompanies attacks on Zionism. On campus, I was confronted daily with shouts to free Palestine “from the river to the sea.” This catchy chant is not about peace or sovereignty for the Palestinian people—it is a call for a Palestinian state extending from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea, a territory that encompasses the **entire** State of Israel. It is a Jew-hating, genocidal mandate seeking to deny the Jewish right to self-determination in Israel. It is a call to exterminate all Jews, in accordance with Hamas’s open and unequivocal goal. This chant is

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Responding to Antisemitism at Columbia University

By *Eliana Goldin*

Something I never thought I would say is that October 7th pushed me to see some of the worst parts of the Jewish community.



This wasn’t my immediate reaction to the events unfolding in Israel and subsequently on campus. Immediately, I sank to the ground and cried. Immediately, I texted my friends and family in Israel to make sure they were okay. Immediately, I hyperventilated.

Though it felt like October 7th had somehow caused the earth to stop spinning, the opposite was true: The world, and especially college campus activism, erupted.

Columbia was no exception. Although dormant literally until October 6th, Students for Justice in Palestine jumped on the opportunity for an impending counter-offensive from the IDF following Hamas’s October 7th attack, and keffiyehs began popping up all around campus. It didn’t take long for campus to devolve into the hotbed of

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Let’s Not Demonize College Students

By *Rebecca Raush*

This article is adapted from an article originally published in the Times of Israel blog, December 6, 2023, <https://blogs.timesofisrael.com/lets-not-demonize-college-students/>.

In the weeks after October 7th, the text messages came in droves, from friends and family alike: “Oh my goodness! Are you okay? There is so much antisemitism on college campuses!” I responded that I was fine, and that they were spending way too much time fretting about what is going on on college campuses.

As a senior at Rutgers University, I did not anticipate spending my final year of college being immersed in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on my campus in New Jersey. I enrolled in 2020 to earn a bachelor’s degree in English with a minor in international and global studies because I knew that Rutgers was a diverse place with a vibrant Jewish community.

I chose to attend a university with a diverse student

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not about Palestinian life—it is about Jewish death.

Imagine that you frequent Jewish events on campus. Imagine that you live in a Jewish sorority house. Then imagine scrolling on your phone one day, only to discover that a fellow student wants to “shoot up” the kosher dining hall and “gang rape all Jew pig women” on campus. That is what my peers and I experienced last November when reading the multiple online threats made by a fellow student instructing other Cornell students to assault Jews on campus—to “follow them home and slit their throats.” This was not just hate speech—it was a call to action and an immediate threat. This sentiment did not begin with that student. Professors and student organizations have been fueling Jew hatred and spreading it across campus with disregard, or potentially even with deliberate intent to incite.

And even after that student’s arrest, professors have continued to teach blatant anti-Israel lessons in their classrooms. Students in the course “Race, Racism, and Public Policy” reported that their professor played a video in class claiming that Israel is committing the crime of apartheid, in what students felt was an attempt to place blame for the terror attack on Israel. Students in the writing seminar “True Stories” reported that their professor stated: “Palestine is a text book case of genocide” and sought to pressure students who had previously expressed sympathy for Israel to change their views. These not-so-subtle examples of bullying and attempts at indoctrination have a tangible impact on the pervasive Jew hatred spread throughout our campus.

My grandmother, along with many other of my family members and close friends, live in Israel. Why are they calling me everyday to check in and see how I am doing—do I feel safe on campus? Is there enough security? Do other students know that I am Jewish? They live in an active war zone with rockets constantly fired in their direction, and yet, my safety on an American college campus is keeping them up at night.

Growing up with first-hand accounts of what my grandfather endured during the Holocaust, I could never comprehend how neighbors and friends stood by as Jews were rounded up to be killed and how governments around the world turned a blind eye—until now. Witnessing such unbridled and unapologetic antisemitism on college campuses is a testament to the impacts of permitting Jew hatred to fester and infect the mob mentality of impressionable students.

It is shocking that college campuses have devolved into echo chambers fostering animosity, aggression, and bigotry, a shift that is painfully reminiscent of the vitriol and terror my grandfather endured in the 1930s. Antisemitism can no longer be hidden under the guise of anti-Zionism. Disseminating lies about Israel is an effort to validate violence against Jews.

I am grateful for the supportive words from the Cornell administration, but action speaks louder than words. We require tangible measures including strict adherence to

policies that forbid threatening or intimidating behavior towards any student, and ensure that purveyors of violence are removed from campus. No student should ever live in fear for their safety, regardless of background or religion.

What is happening at Cornell and universities across the country is not about protecting expressions of free speech or free exchange of ideas. It is about enabling and even promoting intimidation and the threat of harm to Jewish students and supporters of Israel. It is imperative that decisive action be taken to ensure the collective safety of students.

Amanda Silberstein is a member of the Cornell University class of 2026. She studied at Bar-Ilan University in Israel for a year after her high school graduation. At Cornell, she serves as the Vice President of both Cornellians for Israel and Chabad.

Antisemitism at Columbia *continued from page 7*

antisemitism that my community had always warned me about but that I had never really seen come to fruition.

On October 12th, just five days after the attack, my friends and I stood silently with Israeli flags on our backs while hundreds of Free Palestine protesters chanted “from the river to the sea” in the middle of Columbia’s campus. While graves were still warm and corpses were still being identified in Israel, college students in New York City demanded liberation from the very nation that was still recovering from the worst attack on Jews since the Holocaust.

My experience on campus only worsened as the year progressed. My column for the *Columbia Daily Spectator* was canceled after just one article because lies were spread about me on social media. I was bullied relentlessly online, and absolute strangers gave me dirty looks on campus because they recognized my face.

Yet, at a moment when humanity revealed the worst parts of itself, the Jewish community was no exception. Despite touting our status as an *or l’goyim* (a model for the world), the Jewish community behaved just like everyone else around us. We jumped to conclusions about what the “other side” was thinking, we spoke about the strangers in our midst with a negative tone of voice, and we closed ourselves off from thinking critically about anything that might threaten our sense of unity. Friends of mine openly made fun of people wearing keffiyehs, yelled profanities at people who gave us dirty looks, and questioned the status of Jews who found themselves more on the left.

It became increasingly difficult for me to have honest conversations about the state of the war within the religious Jewish community. Suddenly, words like “ceasefire” became absolutely taboo, and an entirely mocking tone characterized conversations about more left-wing Jews in the community. The notion of *segulat yisrael* (that we are the chosen nation)—which I had

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"Are You Here for the Injured or the Dead?"

By Roni Raffeld-Bluth

"Are you here for the injured or the dead?"

This is what I was asked when I entered the hospital, two hours after I was informed that my husband, Pitzi, was severely injured in a firefight with terrorists on the Lebanon border.



"Are you here for the injured or the dead?"

As if I had entered the gate of a wedding venue and was asked if I was on the groom's or bride's side. "Where do I leave the gift?" passed through my mind.

"Are you here for the injured or the dead?"

Just a single millimeter was the difference between those two options.

.....

On October 7th, I woke up to the sound of my cousin knocking on the door. When Pitzi opened it, I heard them whispering. I came out of the bedroom confused and saw Pitzi sitting on the couch with his phone in one hand and his head in the other. "What chaos!" he said. "Your mother called and said they can't reach your brother." I recalled that my younger brother, Yoav, a sniper in the Paratroopers Brigade, had been guarding the Nahal Oz military base during Simhat Torah.

Pitzi, who works for the Israeli government, was then called to his office. After he left, I stood on the balcony and viewed the main street of the *yishuv* where we lived. Instead of the sounds of Simhat Torah celebrations and children's laughter coming from the synagogue, there was utter silence. Although I was not alive during the Yom Kippur War, the stories and descriptions I had heard my whole life seemed to come to life at that moment. Every few minutes, I saw a father, dressed in uniform, say goodbye to his family, get into a car, and drive off to defend our country.

Around 6 p.m., Pitzi returned home from work and told me he had been called up to the reserves in Northern Israel. After Pitzi said goodbye to our three children, my daughter Noam (age 8 1/2) came to me crying hysterically: "Abba [dad] will die in the war!" I took a map and showed her that the war was in the South, that we live in the center, and that Abba was heading to the North. "He's even safer than us," I tried to comfort her.

He was safe. Until October 9th.

.....

"Everything is okay," Aryeh shouted at me as he and Netanel, Pitzi's brothers, came to tell me that Pitzi was injured. "Everything is okay," he said again.

"Of course everything is okay," I replied. "I didn't even ask you how you are doing!" Aryeh looked at me. My heart ached even before my brain understood. Like lightning preceding thunder. "Pitzi was severely injured

in a firefight," he said. "But he's okay."

"Why are you crying?" I snapped at Netanel. "Aryeh said he's okay."

We hugged and sat down on the front steps. I had pictured this scenario hundreds of times—every time Pitzi was called to his office. I had imagined a knock on our door while the kids joked around at breakfast. This time they joked around at dinner.

"PITZI WAS SHOT IN HIS FACE," Aryeh said. "But he's okay."

From inside the house, our usual playlist played: "*Ba'sof Yehiyeh Tov*" ("In the end, it will be good"). "How ironic," I thought to myself.

First, I called Noam. I brought her into our bedroom and told her that Pitzi was injured. "But he's okay."

"You promised me!" she scolded me. "You showed me on the map that Abba is in the North, and that the North is very far from Gaza." I was dumbstruck.

Then I called our son David (age 6). I remember telling myself to lower the music. Because what did the song "White Balenciaga" have to do with anything? David smiled and hugged me.

I kissed our son Itai (age 2 1/2) and explained that I would be back soon.

We set out on the road: Aryeh, Netanel, and I.

The drive progressed at a painfully slow pace, but my thoughts changed rapidly. "Now that Pitzi is injured in the face, we are reopening the candidacy of 'the most beautiful person in the family,'" Netanel said. They were trying to put a smile on my face. "Too soon," I smiled back.

My heart pounded. "Breathe, Roni. Everything is okay," I told myself.

The pulling of the handbrake was the final chord for the ride. We arrived at the hospital.

"Are you here for the injured or the dead?"

"The bullet hit five millimeters from his eye, crushed his upper jaw, and broke the first vertebra in his neck. One millimeter from the brainstem," the surgeon explained. "We had to wire his jaws; he will not be able to speak for a while."

"Do you want to keep the bullet?" he asked.

.....

The next day, Pitzi woke up. When he realized his jaws were wired, he signaled for a pen and paper. He wanted to know what happened, if anyone was hurt, and if he and his team had succeeded in their mission. Sadly, I had to tell him that his soldier Gilad was killed in the firefight. The pain and sadness in his eyes were unbearable. I wiped away the tears from both of our eyes.

Though Pitzi remained the most handsome in the family, in the first few weeks his face was swollen, adorned with a rainbow color hemorrhage. He was connected to a nasogastric tube, and a cannula decorated his neck. I wasn't sure when the right time would be to reunite Pitzi with our children. A wise person once told me that children internalize any situation, including a crisis, the way they see their parents handle it, becoming more

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Life in Israel These Days is Different

By Lisa Sayegh

It is now October 8th, 2024. I wrote this article in July to reflect on a trip to Israel that was meant to emotionally support friends and family, explore how I could spend more time there in the future, and volunteer. So much has happened every day since that I questioned the relevance of publishing this. I then realized that not only does the title remain too apt, but it is also a reminder of experiences we had along the way. So here are some vignettes and reflections from my July trip.



seeing how full the restaurants were and how the gorgeous young Tel Avivians were laughing and talking with their peers. Did they not understand that there are over 100 hostages still not home and that we are at war? I thought to myself: These are hardy people; of course, they need to move forward.

The next day I reported to “Hostage Square” for my first volunteer slot this trip. I had been in Israel in January and had volunteered at Hostage Square before. I loved the range of people who visited. In January I had met mostly Anglo and French-speaking visitors, but this night most visitors were Israelis, as the program was in Hebrew. A panel of hostages’ families and a wounded soldier were asked questions by a moderator. It was

The Reveal

Like many committed Zionists, I arrived in Israel to volunteer and to support however I could. After strolling through Tel Aviv’s streets, I was somewhat unnerved by

Are You Here for the Injured *continued from page 9*
adept at handling crises on their own the more calmly and sensibly they see their parents handling it. I chose to face Pitzi’s injury with measured bravery. A week later, I decided to bring the children to the hospital, just in time to celebrate our tenth wedding anniversary. When the children entered Pitzi’s room, those same eyes that cried in silence when I told Pitzi that Gilad was killed, sparkled with happiness.

After a few weeks, Pitzi was discharged from the hospital. At first, he moved around in a wheelchair and drank and ate only liquid foods, but, as the weeks passed, he recovered and became stronger. After four months, Pitzi became completely independent, and my role as a caregiver ended.

“There’s no way that this family has no one serving in the reserves,” I announced. “I’m enlisting.”

In my mandatory service, I had served four years as a company commander at an army base. In February, I volunteered for reserve duty as an operations officer at the 646 *Shualei Marom* Brigade. After four months of fighting, the brigade left Gaza.

As an operations officer, I was responsible for planning, coordinating, and executing all operations of the brigade (comprised of approximately 2,000 soldiers). I ensured that the safety and well-being of the troops came first, and that the mission objectives were accomplished.

During one of my shifts in the command center, a call sign came over the radio: “The commander has fallen! The commander has fallen!” One of the troops had encountered an ambush, and the radio reported a mass casualty incident. At that moment, all my senses sharpened, and my attention focused solely on one goal—evacuating the bodies and rescuing the injured. We deployed an aerial force to neutralize the terrorists, sent a drone to monitor the firefight zone, and dispatched a medical unit to the scene. Meanwhile, we heard reports

over the radio of many casualties and injuries. Three soldiers lost their lives in the incident, and ten soldiers were injured, three of whom were in critical condition.

At that moment, I witnessed the tragic process from the moment a soldier is killed until the moment the army knocks on his front door and informs his family of his death. For eight hours, we kept this terrible information to ourselves, until finally a knock on a door in my *yishuv* brought our neighbors the painful news. This event served as a sort of closure for me, in that it echoed the process that was likely followed for Pitzi on October 9th, only with an ending too painful to imagine.

These days I am an operations officer at the Paratroopers Brigade. I asked to join the unit in order to take part in an upcoming operation. This way, I can fulfill the promise I made to my mother to keep an eye on my little brother Yoav.

“It cannot be that this is how our story will end,” Pitzi thought in the moments after he was shot. This sentence is constantly with me—both on a personal and a national level. We are experiencing a difficult and complex moment in our story, with our hearts wounded and bleeding.

Despite the unbearable difficulty, we must remind ourselves that this is just a chapter in our journey and that our story continues. I am grateful to take part in writing this story, and I hope with all my heart that in the end, it will be good.

Praying for the safe return of all hostages, the safety and success of our soldiers, and for the *refuah shleimah* of all those injured.

Captain Roni Raffeld-Bluth lives in Tzofim with her husband, Pitzi, and their three children. Since October 7th, she set aside her position as a technical project manager and has actively engaged in the war effort.

based on a British show I'd never heard of, "Ask and I Will Answer."

I staffed a booth selling various items with "Bring Them Home" messaging, whose proceeds went to the families of the hostages. The booth was about three tables long. It was a busy night. People came to browse, to pick up yet another flag or poster or sticker to put on their window or car or arm. We chatted, we joked about the heat, we looked at posters of the hostages and discussed whether they have this one or the other at home and if they should pick another.

And then without fail, as they passed the last table, every single person stopped, looked at us and gave a deep sigh, seemingly from the depths of their soul. The sigh said it all—"Who would believe it is still going on after all this time?" The message was clear. I got it. Life does have to go on, but none are immune. There's a deep level of sadness for all in this country just below the surface, whether it's externally visible or not. And just when you think you can't get any sadder... you do.

Drone Attack on Tel Aviv

It happened a few blocks from where I was staying. At the market the next morning, people described buildings shaking and a great boom. People asked about the sole victim, *a"b*. Regardless, as it was a Friday, the purchases of food for Shabbat continued.

On the way home, I started getting calls and texts from family and friends overseas asking if I was all right. I responded quickly, as I was rushing out to meet a friend coming in from another area who had called to tell me that "of course" she was coming in.

After that, I went to see a play at the Camari Theater with a title that translated as "What is going on with the world?" It's not about world politics but about family. Shows on Friday afternoon tend to draw many from the suburbs of Tel Aviv. The hall was filled to capacity, even though it was not a new play. It seemed no one had canceled out of concern about coming into Tel Aviv. After the requisite announcement telling us to stay in our seats if there was a siren because the hall was below ground, the play started. Everyone was engrossed. But now I knew that no one had forgotten the hostages or our situation for even a second. They knew they had no choice but to continue onward with their lives.

After Kiddush

On Shabbat after *shul*, friends and I walked over to the drone attack site on Shalom Aleikhem Street off of Ben Yehuda. Others had the same idea. Walking home from various *shuls*, many gathered on the corner to discuss the trajectory, the impact, and the intended target of the attack. Not knowing anything about drones, I could see that the damage done seemed to have been caused by a larger explosive than one would expect from a drone.

Although I, like so many others, do not feel these

are miraculous times for the Jews, this may just be one situation that was: The building that was hit was undergoing renovations. No one lived there. The only inhabitants of the building were from some offices where they were obviously not present at 3 a.m. when the attack occurred. The one person who was killed lived across the street. The engine of the drone somehow fell into his apartment. It was said that the drone engine was bigger than one would think when one hears that it was a drone.

The building hit was one short block away from the American Embassy. You can see the embassy from the corner. Theories abound as to whether the target was the American Embassy or a warning to the U.S. that the Houthis can get that close.

Bringing Goods to Soldiers

Before my trip, a good friend canvassed the volunteer chats and sent me a list of things soldiers needed—things like deodorant, toothpaste, protein bars, quick-dri shirts, and underwear. The list also included electrolytes. We had planned to be in Israel at the same time, and each brought a suitcase full of things for the soldiers. We took a day trip to the south to Shuva junction—a Gaza entry point—to donate the things we had brought.

The Shuva junction complex was covered by a large tent. There was hot food for the soldiers, drinks, and a commissary of sorts, which was somewhat of a shack. The size of the shack was such that the volunteers who normally staff the shack had to leave so that the four of us who came on the day trip had room to put our donations into the appropriate boxes. Soldiers came in to ask for this and that, so we gave them what we could find. Some soldiers looked like they should be in high school. I had just been told that some of those stationed deep in Gaza have lost up to eight kilos (18 pounds) in the last months. So I was determined to include protein bars and electrolytes whenever a soldier asked for anything. The protein bars were graciously accepted. The electrolytes were met with skepticism! I explained in Hebrew that electrolytes are a powder one puts in water to replenish minerals and vitamins. They hesitatingly accepted a tube, leaving me with a strong sense that I was being humored. I approached soldiers sitting outside and gave a tube of electrolytes to each of them. Before we left, an older soldier came by and asked me if there were instructions that he could give the others. I told him that each soldier I had met could now forward the message.

The Emotional Toll

I had lived in Israel in the '80s during many wars and war-like situations. I have traveled back and forth to Israel since the '90s for business and for family. I am not unfamiliar with feeling that we have many enemies. But this time was and continues to be different. My friends

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There's a deep level of sadness for all in this country, whether it's externally visible or not.

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always understood to mean that the Jewish people had a unique responsibility to uphold God's word—had morphed into a toxic sense of superiority that excused us from responsibility for our actions.

October 7th only further reinforced my belief in the need for a Jewish state. It strengthened my desire to make *aliyah* and further embedded my sense of self as part of the Jewish collective. But our response to October 7th also revealed the darker aspect of my proud Jewish nationalism: that in acting just like other nations, we don't always live up to our end of the covenant.

The fate of the Jewish people rests on our ability to defend ourselves physically *and* to defend ourselves spiritually. Each and every one of us is a soldier of God; some of us make the biggest sacrifice of all and fight physically, and the rest of us make small decisions every day to represent God appropriately in this world. As such, it's incumbent upon us to constantly ask: Am I acting in a way that brings about an *or l'goyim*? Am I acting in a way that truly takes on the responsibility of being chosen by *Hashem*?

Our communal responsibility is also expressed in the maxim *kol Yisrael areivim zeh bazeh* (all Israel are responsible for each other). *Areivut* is a legal doctrine that urges us to value collective responsibility. Jewish communities across the globe have taken that value and implemented it in their own ways. For example, in my own college Jewish community, we went out of our way to make sure there was a *minyan* every single day for three times a day so that my friend could say *kaddish* for his brother who had passed away. The idea of communal responsibility behind the concept of *areivut* means that there exists a certain standard by which Jews ought to conduct themselves.

Life in Israel *continued from page 11*

who are strong and—the oft-used word—resilient are now frightened and losing hope. The losses are all around them—neighbors, storekeepers, family, and friends. They don't understand how it can be that the world is against us and that the countries getting international support are terrorists and dictators. They ask me how committed Jews in the U.S. could stand against Israel. And I have no answer but to take them out to a café in Tel Aviv, and when I returned to the States, send them holiday packages, play Words with Friends in French, a language I am not conversant in, so they would win, and call often, even though we usually end up with nothing to say.

I am planning my next trip soon and hope against hope that by the time you read this in November, we will find ourselves in a safer world.

After a career in global business development, Lisa Sayegh is now dedicating her time to supporting Israel in various ways.

I've always known that I was part of something larger than myself by being born a Jew, but I never understood the extent of this until this year when I learned that my words and my actions on campus had consequences for every other Jew in school with me. When one Jew said something racist, it was interpreted by the broader student body that all Jews were racist. When one Jew refused to think critically about the war, it was interpreted that all Jews were close-minded. We didn't choose it, but to the outside world, each Jew represents every Jew. Thus, when one pro-Israel Jewish student on campus acts out of turn, she doesn't just hurt her own *neshama*, but she violates the responsibility of *kol Yisrael areivim zeh bazeh* by staining the reputation of all Jews on campus.

Columbia Jewish students have come to understand *areivut* not just as a halakhic concept, but as an integral component of the Jewish experience on campus. When our Hillel executive director and campus rabbi were bullied by Columbia administrators by text messages, we experienced the attack as if we ourselves had been targeted. When one of our student leaders was cyberbullied by an anonymous antisemitic Instagram account, we each experienced her pain as if it were our own. Being Jewish, as we've had to understand it quite intimately, is an intertwined, communal experience.

If you ask most Jews on campus how they're feeling about this upcoming academic year, I'm sure they would agree: Things aren't looking so bright. The protesters who erected the encampments and broke into Hamilton Hall were cleared of any real consequences both by the university and by the Manhattan DA's office, and those in the Columbia administration have essentially demonstrated that rules need not be enforced—or, at least, rules need not be enforced when it comes to harassing Jews.

But we haven't let that keep us down, and despite everything we've endured, the Columbia Jewish community has demonstrated our resilience time and again. From our open letter that garnered over 700 signatures of Jewish students on campus who stood proudly by their Zionism to the simple fact that we continued to attend our university despite all that happened this past academic year, we hope it's obvious that the Jewish community at Columbia isn't backing down.

In the heat of the moment, it's easy to forget who we are. It's easy to sink to the level of those around us and forget that, at our core, we are the People of the Book and the children of God. What matters to me most is that even while fighting antisemitism, we fight to maintain the religious integrity of our community as well. When we protect ourselves as Jews, we shouldn't forget that spiritual health is just as important as the physical.

Eliana Goldin is a senior at Columbia University and the Jewish Theological Seminary, studying political theory and Talmud. She is co-chair of the Zionist group on campus Aryeh, the host of her own podcast The Uproar, and a co-author of "In Our Name: A Message From Jewish Students at Columbia University."

Halakhic Considerations Raised by the October 7th War

In January 2024, the Jofa and Maharat mission to Israel met with a number of Israeli leaders, including Rabbi Seth Farber, founder and director of ITIM; Sarah Evron, CEO of the Religious Kibbutz Movement; Dr. Michal Prins, a sexual intimacy counselor to religious couples; Sharon Laufer, who identifies fallen women soldiers and prepares them for burial; Rabbi Herzl Hefter, founder and *rosh yeshiva* of Yeshivat Har'el; and Rabbi Doron Perez, executive chairman of the World Mizrahi Movement.

Our discussions included an exploration of various halakhic issues brought to the fore by the October 7th war. These topics included the circumstances under which it is required to violate Shabbat in order to save lives (*pikuah nefesh*), how to conduct a “just war,” and if and how to negotiate for the return of the hostages. This article, however, will address specifically the gendered issues related to the war.

It is noteworthy that, when it comes to personal status issues, the State of Israel does not maintain a separation of religion and state. In such matters, the Israeli government, through the Israeli *Rabbanut*, plays a crucial role in determining who is a Jew, deciding questions of burial, divorce, and marriage, as well as mandating and controlling use of the *mikvah* (ritual bath) for women. While there have been concerns about the *Rabbanut*'s overreach in a variety of areas, it is important to realize that the majority of the rabbis who comprise the *Rabbanut*, and thereby hold the power to decide these issues, have not and do not serve in the army and so are often “walled off” from the experience of general Israeli society. Yet all Israeli Jews are beholden to the *Rabbanut*, regardless of their own religious affiliation and personal practice.

Use of the Mikvah

There are several times when immersion in the *mikvah* is ritually required for women. These include conversion (also required for men), prior to marriage, and—for couples who observe *niddah*—in connection with a women's menstrual cycle and after childbirth. Ritual immersion in the context of marriage traditionally takes place after dark. In Israel there are an estimated 600,000-750,000 women who use the *mikvah* every year. Unlike anywhere else in the world, where *mikvaot* are privately held entities, in Israel the *mikvaot* are considered to be a public service and are funded and controlled by the government. In the aftermath of October 7th, there were numerous women in Israel who wanted and needed to make use of the *mikvah*, but could not go at night, either because they did not have childcare support (because their spouses were deployed) or because they felt unsafe

going out at night.

Because *mikvah* attendants and workers are government employees who are contracted to work at night, the government could not unilaterally mandate a change in their work hours and force them to take on daytime shifts. And since the halakhically preferred time to immerse in the *mikvah* is at night, the *Rabbanut* did not seek to make a systemic—even if temporary—change in *mikvah* opening hours. But in light of the wartime situation, there were many women who now needed to use the *mikvah* during the day. In the end, a compromise was reached with the *Rabbanut* in each city, whereby they would open a *mikvah* during the daylight hours.

Relatedly, married couples who observe *niddah* laws refrain from intimacy during the wife's menstruation and for the following seven days until she has immersed in the *mikvah*. For many couples this means refraining from all physical contact during this period. These couples looked for a rabbinic dispensation to allow for some physical

contact, such as a hug, when a spouse's deployment or return fell during the time when they normally refrained from such contact. There was little public discourse about this topic, but people privately shared the understanding that these were extenuating circumstances, and just as *pikuah nefesh* exceptions were made for use of technology on Shabbat in time of war, so too exceptions could be made to allow nonsexual physical touch for those with mental health or emotional wellness needs.

Military and Marriage

While there are incredible stories of women's heroism in this war, such as the tank unit that held the line on October 7th, and the sacrifice that the *tatzpitaniot* (army spotters) made on October 7th, the majority of combatants serving on the front lines are men.

In Jewish law, a marriage is dissolved either when the husband delivers a *get* (writ of divorce) or by death. If the husband fails to deliver a *get* to his wife, she becomes an *agunah* and is unable to remarry. This could occur if the husband is captured or missing in action and it is impossible to determine whether he has died, or if, as a result of accident or injury, he lacks the mental capacity to consent to delivery of a *get*.

The Gemara relates that the soldiers in King David's army would divorce their wives before going out to war to prevent exactly these scenarios. Variants of this approach could have been applied in the current war, but two considerations were raised in opposition to this practice. The first was that in King David's day, men went

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All Israeli Jews
are beholden to
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Halakhic Considerations *continued from page 13*

off to war and did not return until the end of the battle. Thus a *get* delivered at the start of the battle remained effective until the battle was over and the fighters came home. However, *halakhah* provides that a *get* is deemed ineffective if the husband and wife have had sexual relations after it was given. During the current conflict, men cycled in and out of military service and returned home for days, weeks, or months at a time, rendering any previously given *get* ineffective. Another consideration raised about giving a *get* while at war was concern for morale, i.e., the message it would send suggesting that husbands might not return. (Of course, as we know, many soldiers wrote farewell letters to their families in the unfortunate event of their death. No one raised morale concerns then.) The result of the current practice is that many wives of soldiers risk becoming *agunot*.

A related concern is that if a married man who did not have children was killed in the line of duty, his widow would be required to undergo either *yibum* (marrying the deceased husband's brother) or *halitzah* (formally and ritually separating from the deceased husband's brother). If the deceased husband's brother refused to perform either of these acts, the wife would become unable to remarry. With the increased numbers of couples rushing to get married, or scheduled to get married as the husbands returned to their ranks, the possible need for *halitzah* ceremonies due to war has increased.

Burial and Who Is a Jew Questions

There were a number of concerns related to burial. First, Jewish tradition requires burial as soon as possible after a person dies. However, in this war an unprecedented number of dead bodies had to be accounted for and prepared for burial. Some bodies were in horrific states that needed additional care—because many families wanted the option to sit with their deceased loved one before burial, and their wishes had to be taken into consideration as well. In some cases, protocols for

confirming the identities of the dead were modified. Some bodies were misplaced for a time. Some of the deceased had intended to donate their organs. In some cases, for security reasons, funerals had to be held outside of the deceased's local cemetery. This raised the question of getting permissions to exhume and rebury later down the road.

Other issues regarding burial had to do with “Who is a Jew” status. The State of Israel has two different definitions of Jewishness. The first is the halakhic definition, namely, one who is born of a Jewish mother, or one who has converted to Judaism. The other definition is connected to the 1950 Law of Return, which granted entry and automatic Israeli citizenship to every Jewish person—defined to include individuals with at least one Jewish grandparent or a Jewish spouse. As a result, there are an estimated 550,000

Jewish-identifying people with Jewish lineage who are Israeli citizens but are not halakhically Jewish.

Traditionally, Jews and non-Jews are not buried in the same cemetery. During the war, the issue became whether individuals who were Jewish for purposes of Israeli citizenship but not halakhically would be allowed to be buried in Jewish cemeteries. In recent years, the army has dealt with this issue with the passage of a bill that permits soldiers, regardless of their halakhic Jewishness, to be buried alongside their Jewish comrades. However, there are a number of families (of both soldiers and others killed on October 7th) in which only some of the family members are halakhically Jewish, yet who want to be buried together as a family. There is still no consensus about how to deal with this situation.

Conclusion

Many of the issues described above were relevant even before the war, but became more urgent and potentially able to affect more people as a result of the war. As long as the *Rabbanut* retains control over these issues, accommodations will be slow in coming and many people will suffer.

During the war the issue became whether individuals who were Jewish for purposes of Israeli citizenship but not halakhically would be allowed to be buried in Jewish cemeteries.

Jofa advocates for expanding women's rights and opportunities within the framework of *halakhah*, to build a vibrant and equitable Orthodox community.

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For more information, go to www.jofa.org

Photos from the Jofa/Maharat Mission



Mission leaders. L. to R: Mindy Feldman Hecht, Rabba Sara Hurwitz, Daphne Lazar Price



Praying at Har Herzl Military Cemetery



Home of terror victim in Kfar Aza



Dancing with hayalot



The mission met with Rabbi Doron Perez, executive chairman of the World Mizrahi Movement



Distributing donations for evacuees



Lemons thrown away to enable future growth

Partnerships and Collaborations

Jofa continues working with numerous partners and co-sponsoring events to expand the reach of our work. The long list includes Yeshivat Maharat, Kolech, the International Beit Din, Columbia University/MOVE Coalition, JCADA, Safety Respect Equity Network, Hadassah, NCJW, Eshel, Porat, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, and Shalshet Shivyoni. In the spring of 2024 Jofa Executive Director Daphne Lazar Price served as the scholar-in-residence for the Shabbaton Shivyoni at Isabella Freedman Jewish Retreat Center. Nearly 80 students from across North America were welcomed for a Shabbat focused on building a unique intercollegiate community that is halakhic, inclusive, and dynamic.

Jofa/Maharat Mission to Israel

From January 8-10, 2024, Jofa, in partnership with Yeshivat Maharat, led the first gender issue-based solidarity mission to Israel. The 30 mission participants engaged in learning initiatives, visiting with hostage family members, volunteering, and visiting the impacted areas. See full photo spread on page 15.

United Nations Protest and Special Session on Gender-Based Violence

On December 4, 2023, Jofa joined numerous major American and Israeli organizational partners in taking a powerful stand, protesting the United Nations' and the international community's egregious silence regarding the depraved and violent murderous acts of gender-based violence and war crimes committed against Jewish women and children by terrorists in Israel. Prominent women leaders from Israel and the U.S. united to demand that the UN and the international community acknowledge and actively speak up for the Israeli women and girls who have suffered.



Jofa at UN protest rally

Text Study

On September 22, 2024, Lazar Price led a text study session in Cherry Hill, NJ, focussing on women and Sefer Torah. The session studied material from Jofa-Maggid publication *Hilkhot Nashim, Volume II*.



Reproductive Rights Panel Discussions

On November 30, 2023, the JCC of MetroWest in West Orange, NJ, screened "Under G-d," a documentary short directed by Paula Eiselt (a Jofa board member) about the national Jewish response to the Supreme Court's *Dobbs* decision overturning *Roe v. Wade*. The story is woven through the lived experiences of impacted women and the lawsuits brought by Jewish and interfaith leaders to challenge *Dobbs* on religious freedom grounds. Following the screening, Lazar Price joined Eiselt for a conversation about the film and responding to questions from the audience.

On December 7, 2023, Lazar Price participated in an online panel conversation held by Hadassah-Brandeis Institute (HBI) titled "Jewish Women's Organizing in Support of Reproductive Rights: Past and Present." This program delved into Jewish women and Jewish clergy's important role in the struggle for reproductive rights, both before and after the U.S. Supreme Court's pivotal *Roe* and *Dobbs* decisions. Moderated by HBI Director Lisa Fishbayn Joffe, the panel also included Massachusetts State Senator Becca Rausch, historian and current HBI Scholar-in-Residence Melissa Klapper, and Lara Crawford of the National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW) in Massachusetts. Together they explored the history of Jewish women's activism for reproductive rights and the various forms that advocacy is taking in the present moment.

Screams Before Silence

Jofa joined dozens of organizations across the United States to screen "Screams Before Silence," a powerful documentary presented by Sheryl Sandberg that captures first-person testimony from survivors, first responders, eyewitnesses, released hostages, forensic experts, and advocates. Their harrowing accounts reveal the uncompromising truth: that Hamas used rape, assault, and mutilation in a brutal rampage of gender-based violence.

Parlor Meetings

During June 2024, Jofa hosted book talks with Gila Fine in New York and the Greater Washington area. Praised by Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, z”l, as “one of the best Talmud teachers of our time,” Fine led dozens of attendees on a fascinating literary journey based on her newly released, eye-opening book, *The Madwoman in the Rabbi’s Attic: Rereading the Women of the Talmud*, which won the Rabbi Sacks Book Prize 2024. See review on page 31.



Gila Fine book talk at Jofa parlor meeting



Daphne Lazard Price with Deborah Lipstadt at White House event

White House Event Marking the International Day for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict

At the invitation of United States Vice President Kamala Harris and the White House Gender Policy Council, Lazar Price joined dozens of leaders at the White House on Tuesday, June 17, 2024 for an event on Conflict-Related Sexual Violence, to mark the annual International Day for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict. The event included remarks from Vice President Harris, a screening of the documentary film “Screams Before Silence,” remarks by Sheryl Sandberg, testimony by freed hostage Amit Soussana, and a panel conversation with experts on conflict-based sexual violence. The event was summarized by Vice President Harris: “We cannot look away. And we cannot be silent.”

Illuminate

Daphne Lazar Price was one of ten female Jewish executives of nonprofit organizations selected to participate in the philanthropic network Elluminate’s sixth cohort. The collective aims to promote, strengthen, and advance Jewish women’s leadership in the nonprofit sector. The women participating in the collective will take part in a “robust, two-year curriculum led by noted social activist Ruth Messinger, [receive] grant funding to their organizations,” and receive membership in the Global Jewish Women’s Leadership Network, according to an Elluminate press release.

Safety Respect Equity Network

On June 4, 2024, Lazar Price was recognized for her work as a woman supporting other women in the field at the Safety Respect Equity Network’s annual convening. The gathering took place at the Museum of Jewish Heritage in New York City.

As a Lone Soldier's Mother, I Choose the Road of Faith

By Shira Atik

This article was originally published in the Jerusalem Post, April 9, 2024, www.jpost.com.

When my daughter told me, in the spring of 2022, that she was planning to join the Israel Defense Forces as a lone soldier, I was very proud, a little nervous, and not at all surprised. Tal had been talking about this since she was 15. When she informed me that she wanted to be a combat soldier, the first thing I heard was my grandmother's voice in my head—"A soldier, *meile*, but combat, *noch*?"—and my anxiety level dialed up a bit. Still, I accepted Tal's decision, giving myself a little pat on the back in the process. What a brave mother I was, allowing my child to draft into a combat unit. And what a good Zionist. All our visits to Israel, all the day-school tuition and summer camps, had reinforced one of our most fundamental values. Our child was making *aliyah*.

In the last few weeks, though, I've asked myself: If I had known this war would break out, would I have tried to talk her into taking a safer, non-combat job? Or delaying her enlistment by a year? I wish I could say that I pondered this question, but honestly, there was nothing to ponder. The answer is yes, of course. I would have begged her to choose a different unit, would have played every card in my hand—including the guilt card—to convince her to change her mind. Having a child in a combat unit during wartime is every mother's nightmare. Knowing that your child is carrying a gun is disturbing enough in peacetime, but knowing that your child may have to use that gun to save her own life is chilling.

Just as I know that I would have pressured her to stay out of combat, I also know it wouldn't have made any difference. And now, even if leaving the army were an option, she would choose to stay. She is doing exactly what she signed on for. Like every other soldier in the IDF she took an oath to fight for Israel, even if it meant sacrificing her life. She believes with all her heart that this is what she is meant to be doing. When we talk on the phone, I listen for overtones of fear or regret. I don't hear any.

Going Down the Road of Faith

But how is that possible? How can she be sleeping in a bunker surrounded by rockets and not be scared? After many sleepless nights and many conversations with other parents of lone soldiers, I've realized that when we look to the future, two roads stretch out before us. We can go down the road of fear, of worst-case scenarios, of

haunting images that freeze us in our tracks, or we can go down the road of faith—in our children, in Israel, and in God.

Is it magical thinking? Perhaps. But it is what allows us to get through the day, and, even more important, allows our children to do what they have to do. The Torah teaches us to choose life: "*U'vaharta ba-hayim*."

If Israeli soldiers allowed themselves to go down the darker road, they would lose their way. Instead, they follow the light. They focus on their love for the Jewish homeland and the Jewish people, on the holiness of their mission, and their eyes shimmer. They are part of something greater than themselves, and they know it.

I, too, am learning to focus on the light. I have had friends come up to me and wrap their arms around me. "Oh, I'm so sorry," they say. "You must not sleep at night."

And yes, there are a lot of sleepless nights and plenty of tears. But most nights, I do sleep, because what Tal needs right now is a strong mother. If my daughter's job is to dive into the deep waters, my job is to be a buoy. Being the strong one doesn't come naturally to me, but I am getting better with practice. I am choosing the road of hope, and I'm trying my hardest—for myself, my husband, my children, and all the Jewish soldiers on the frontlines—not

to veer off-course. I am digging deep inside myself and finding courage I never knew I had.

I am choosing life.

Shira Atik is a poet and Hebrew-English literary translator. Her work has been published in the Ekphrastic Review, Midwest Quarterly, Passengers, Poetica Magazine, Zeek Magazine, and the Jewish Literary Journal.

If my daughter's job is to dive into the deep waters, my job is to be a buoy.

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I Believed Diverse Coalitions Would Benefit Jewish Women. Now I Fear We Were All Alone.

By Daphne Lazar Price

This article originally appeared on the Jewish Telegraphic Agency website, November 27, 2023, <https://www.jta.org/2023/11/27/ideas/i-believed-diverse-coalitions-would-benefit-jewish-women-now-i-fear-we-were-all-alone>.

I am the executive director of the Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance and a lifelong feminist. I advocate for Orthodox Jewish women's representation and inclusion in all areas of life. Before joining Jofa in 2019, I spent 20 years working with faith groups, women's advocates, and other social justice organizations. We worked in coalition towards social change by sharing awareness-raising campaigns, in-person gatherings, and through the legislative process.

I once found it meaningful when people set aside differences to build bridges towards positive change. It was not always easy to be in these spaces because of political or religious differences, sometimes related to Israel/Palestine, and sometimes because I was the only Orthodox Jewish woman in the room. But I really believed that the more diverse the coalition, the more likely we could reach success.

These days I'm so sad. Sad for the tremendous losses all around. And on a personal level, I'm also sad that I devoted so many years of my life to groups that don't seem to care about me or my pain.

I'm used to being uncomfortable; my work at Jofa presents an uphill battle. I am constantly fielding criticisms from rabbis who accuse me of ruining Orthodoxy by including women in rituals, positions, and spaces they think should be reserved solely for men, and from pluralistic Jewish people who accuse me of upholding the patriarchy. It can be lonely to be an advocate for Orthodox Jewish women. Working with diverse advocacy groups gave me solace as I considered them to be a safety net when the resources in my own community fell short.

I worked with many groups for years on areas of shared interest. We collaborated on reproductive justice, sex trafficking, prison rape, and obstetric fistula prevention. We released resources for our communities, created awareness-raising campaigns, including marching together at the Million Mom March, the March for Women's Lives, and Save Darfur. So after partnering for years, I expected my sister feminist groups to share their outrage about Hamas's war crimes against Israelis

on October 7th. After all, it is clear that kidnapping civilians of all ages, and brutally attacking women, men, children, babies, and the elderly, all the while viciously raping women, is abhorrent.

Instead, I'm shocked and horrified by too many national and global women's and children's advocacy groups—none worse than UN Women. After remaining virtually silent since the October 7th atrocities, on November 25th it published an Instagram post condemning the attacks and calling for the release of all hostages only to replace it with one that says they “remain alarmed by the reports of gender-based violence on October 7 and call for rigorous investigation, prioritizing the rights, needs and safety of those affected.” An investigation? What happened to “believe women?”

There is video footage and survivors' testimonies that bear out the claims of rape—so when did it become OK for women's groups to become rape apologists? Surely women's organizations shouldn't be allowed to continue to exist while they ignore or second-guess hundreds and hundreds of Israeli women who were slaughtered in their homes, in the streets, and at a music festival.

To be sure, I know many are worried about the death and suffering of Palestinians in Gaza. I am, too, but does this mean that they cannot express sympathy for

the Israeli women who were brutalized and murdered, and for those of us who grieve for this devastation?

This conflict is personal. My family and I were in Israel when the war started. My children, extended family, and hundreds of friends live in Israel. My relatives, my friends, my friends' kids, and my kids' friends all serve in the Israeli military. From the moment the war broke out, not a single person in there—myself included—was immune from the horror and loss. Between death tolls and injuries, every single person in Israel attended funerals, *shiva* houses, and made hospital visits. My worry for my loved ones there keeps me up every night.

When the groups I've worked with over the years fail to speak out against these atrocities committed against women, I take it personally. I hope my former colleagues' hearts will open up. I hope my own heart will heal. I'm not optimistic, but I'm hopeful they will come around and try to reconcile.

As a Jewish person of faith, and an activist who looks for the good and seeks out justice, my work in this space to fight for a fairer world for all girls and women is not

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When the groups I've worked with over the years fail to speak out against these atrocities committed against women, I take it personally.

After October 7th, Jewish Unity Must Include Queer Jews

By Gila Romanoff

This article was previously published by ejewishphilanthropy.com, May 7, 2024.

In the days, weeks, and months after October 7th, I was inspired to see how the Jewish people rallied together to support our siblings in Israel. I was added to new group chats every day, coordinating thousands of donations to Israeli soldiers and families. It was beautiful and hope-inducing to keep hearing messages of “*Am Ehad b’Lev Ehad*” (“One Nation with One Heart”) and “*B’yahad Nenatzeah*” (“Together We Will Persevere”) from all corners of the Jewish diaspora.

Yet, when I look a little bit deeper, it’s clear to me that the ideals of unity, unfortunately, do not extend to everyone within the Jewish community. As we mark seven months since Hamas’s October 7th attack, the Jewish community must find a way to stand together against hate, violence, and antisemitism in true unity—and that means including queer Jews.

Many queer Orthodox Jews (and youth in particular), who have historically been ostracized by their communities, need that embrace even more so now. In the past, they have turned to queer-friendly spaces outside the Jewish community for love and support when they have felt abandoned by Orthodox families and institutions. For months, however, many of those same queer communities have felt hostile and unwelcoming to Jews.

A Trip for Jewish Educators

In February, I visited Israel on a trip for Jewish educators organized by UpStart and iCenter. It was an opportunity to bear witness to the horrors that happened on October 7th and to give love and support to the people of Israel. Because of my work for JQY, an organization that supports and empowers LGBTQ+ Jewish youth from Orthodox, Hasidic, and Sephardi/Mizrahi communities, I framed the trip for myself through the lens of the queer Jewish experience, paying particular attention to what I could impart to the queer community with whom I work upon my return.

Instead, I came back with a message for the greater Orthodox community.

While traveling around the country, I would see “*Beyahad Nenatzeah*” plastered everywhere—on sidewalks, buildings, lamp posts. As in America, it inspired a feeling of hope in me to see these signs and all of the tremendous acts of *hesed* (kindness) taking place all over the country.

Sadly, however, it became clear through conversations

with some Israelis that this message of unity did not always ring true. I met many Israelis, parents especially, who felt abandoned and angry at a government that was supposed to protect them. Despite these feelings, they still kept their main focus on the health and wellness of the children.

This determination to continue caring for their youth in these difficult times really resonated with me and my work at JQY. The queer Jewish community is feeling more ostracized and isolated than ever, especially when they see the Jewish community rally together for those in need but not for queer Jews. Teen participants at JQY’s drop-in center in New York City and in our online groups have expressed feeling extreme loneliness. As one recent anonymous commenter on a JQY social media post put it: “It’s so painful; I don’t feel like I belong anywhere.”

We have already seen too many tragedies of queer Jewish youth losing their lives to suicide. The risk of suicide for LGBTQ+ teens alone is four times higher than for their peers, and data from JQY shows that number is even higher among queer Jewish teens: Close to 70 percent of queer Jewish teens have reported suicidal ideation.

There is a mental health crisis in this community, and current events are only exacerbating the issue.

If queer Jews cannot rely on support and solidarity from the broader LGBTQ+ community at this moment, then the Jewish community must make it known that they accept queer Jewish youth and will welcome them with open arms.

From many private conversations that I have had with friends, family and rabbinic leadership, I know that there is certainly more acceptance and support of queer Jewish people in the Orthodox community than others realize. But people are often hesitant to express that support publicly and proudly, often due to their own fear of ostracization, which means that teens don’t know they could be accepted in these communities. It is not enough to have quiet, individual acceptance. There needs to be a communal move towards acceptance, which will expand our community and unite us further in times of tragedy.

With antisemitism on the rise worldwide, and American Jews reportedly feeling more fear for their lives, there has never been a more important moment to embrace every Jewish person, regardless of sexuality and gender identity.

The queer Jewish community is feeling more ostracized and isolated than ever, especially when they see the Jewish community rally together for those in need but not for queer Jews.

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Lessons Learned from the Legal Battle Against Campus Antisemitism

By Alyza D. Lewin

As president of the Louis D. Brandeis Center for Human Rights Under Law, I speak nearly every day to students on campus confronting antisemitism. In my nearly seven years running a legal advocacy organization dedicated to protecting the civil and human rights of the Jewish people, I have observed and learned the following:



1. What is taking place on campus is not a good-faith political debate. University administrators and the general public often mistakenly think that what they are witnessing is a debate about Israel's policies. It is not. What is actually taking place at universities (and beyond) is the vilification, marginalization, and shunning of Jews. The demonstrations, encampments, and BDS campaigns put Jews who believe Israel has a right to exist on the wrong side of the social and racial justice equation. For years, these campaigns have equated with evil any Jew who defines their identity as part of a people indigenous to Judea. Former Knesset member Einat Wilf refers to this phenomenon as the "placard strategy." The signs contain a simple message: Star of David = Zionist = evil concept. (You can pick the evil concept: apartheid, ethnic cleansing, colonialism, famine, genocide, etc.) These concepts are not presented in order to discuss or even debate their accuracy. Is it really apartheid? Or a genocide? No, the evil concepts are there for the equation. The Jew, represented by the Star of David, is a "Zionist" and therefore evil.

2. Administrators and the general public do not understand Jewish identity. For decades, school administrators have pigeon-holed Judaism as only a faith and Jews solely as members of a religious community. They recognize that Jewish students may need kosher food or a Yom Kippur accommodation, but that is all. These administrators do not understand that Jews are also a people with a shared ancestral and ethnic heritage deeply rooted in the land of Israel. As a result, administrators have a blind spot when it comes to understanding contemporary forms of antisemitism that target Jews on the basis of their shared ancestral and ethnic identity; they fail to recognize when Jewish students are being bullied and pressured to disavow their ancestral heritage in order to fully engage and be accepted on campus.

3. Today's "scholarship" increasingly erases Jewish history and denies Jewish identity. According to an ethnic studies narrative becoming entrenched in K-12 lesson plans and increasingly promoted on university campuses, the Jews are not a people indigenous to the land of Israel. This narrative acknowledges that Jews, Christians, and Muslims have lived in Israel over the centuries, but

it claims that these are just faith-based, *religious* identities. The narrative defines the *ethnic* and *cultural identity* of all the people living in the region (throughout history) as Palestinian. Those who promote this narrative differentiate between "Jews" and "Zionists": "Jews" define their Judaism solely as a religion, whereas "Zionists" (who recognize the Jews as a people indigenous to Judea) are accused of "Judaizing" Palestinian history and heritage by claiming it is Jewish. According to this fabricated narrative, the Jews' shared ancestral identity and heritage connected to the land of Israel is completely erased and hijacked. Jewish history is whitewashed and re-framed as Palestinian, and Jewish peoplehood is denied.

4. Title VI of the Civil Rights Act requires universities to protect Jewish students from antisemitic harassment and discrimination. According to Title VI of the Civil Rights Act, universities that receive federal funds (nearly all institutions of higher education in the United States) are compelled to protect students from harassment and discrimination that is so severe or persistent that it denies the student an equal educational opportunity. Although Title VI does not include "religion" as a protected category, for the last 20 years the statute has been interpreted by the Department of Education to cover Jews and members of other faith-based communities when they are targeted on the basis of their actual or perceived shared ancestry and ethnicity rather than their religious practice. Universities, therefore, have a legal obligation to protect Jewish students when they are being bullied, shunned, marginalized, excluded, or assaulted on the basis of their shared Jewish ancestry and ethnicity. If universities fail to meet this obligation, they risk losing their federal funding.

What is actually taking place at universities (and beyond) is the vilification, marginalization, and shunning of Jews.

The Department of Education demonstrated this understanding of the law when it announced a campus antisemitism resolution in a case involving anti-Zionist harassment and discrimination at the University of Vermont (UVM). The complaint in that case, filed by the

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Lessons Learned *continued from page 21*

Brandeis Center and the Jewish on Campus student advocacy group (JOC), described how Jewish Zionists were being excluded from two UVM student groups and how a university teaching assistant repeatedly harassed Jewish Zionists online. The Department of Education Office for Civil Rights (OCR) treated the harassment as a form of national-origin discrimination on the basis of shared ancestry, and required UVM, among other things, to revise its policies, procedures, and training to ensure they address it. Jewish students at UVM reported to me that they quickly saw a marked improvement in the way the university responded to their concerns.¹

A further example involves a complaint filed by the Brandeis Center and JOC against SUNY New Paltz. In that case, two Jewish students were kicked out of a group of sexual-assault survivors and then bullied, harassed, and threatened online on the basis of their Jewish and Israeli identities. Leaders of the student organization removed the Jewish students (one of whom had founded the group) after the Jewish students shared on their personal Instagram accounts an infographic that said “Jews are an ethnic group who come from Israel” and “you cannot colonize the land your ancestors are from.” The students were canceled, stalked, intimidated, and harassed so intensely that they felt compelled to leave campus for their safety. Coming on the heels of the UVM resolution agreement and the release of the Biden administration’s National Strategy to Counter Antisemitism, the opening of the SUNY New Paltz investigation sends a clear message that OCR is taking this form of antisemitism seriously.

Students have recognized that the best antidote to bigotry and discrimination is self-confidence and pride.

5. Universities are increasingly recognizing that Zionism is an integral component of Jewish identity. Jews do not only share a common faith; we are also a people with a shared history and heritage rooted in the land of Israel. During our Jewish holidays, we reinforce our shared collective memory. We tell the stories, for example, of our ancestors who were liberated from slavery in Egypt and who wandered in the desert on the way to the Promised Land. King David designated Jerusalem, also known as Zion, as the capital of Israel. His son, King Solomon, built the Jewish Temple on the Temple Mount. Our holidays

¹ This paragraph and the following one are adapted from an article by the author in SAPIR. *Anti-Zionist Harassment is Against the Law Too* (Volume 10/Summer 2023). <https://sapirjournal.org/antisemitism/2023/08/anti-zionist-harassment-is-against-the-law-too/>.

are linked to the agricultural cycle in Israel. For centuries Jews have not only prayed facing Jerusalem; they have prayed to return there. It is impossible to separate our religious, cultural, ethnic, and national identity from the land of Israel. Those who recognize this history and understand that the Jews are a people indigenous to Judea are Zionists. They appreciate that, as an indigenous people, Jews have a right to self-determination in their ancestral homeland. Fortunately, universities are also beginning to understand this truth. Some schools, including NYU, University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign, and Columbia, and the recommendation report prepared by Judge Lippman for the CUNY school system, have recently explicitly acknowledged that, for many Jews, Zionism is a part of Jewish identity and that, therefore, harassment and discrimination targeting “Zionists” violates university policy when the term is being used as a substitute for “Jew.”

6. Jewish engagement on campus is at an all-time high. Hillel International and Chabad on Campus report that record numbers of students are engaging in Jewish programming on campus. Students are leaning in and learning more about the beauty and richness of our Jewish history and heritage. That, perhaps, to paraphrase the late Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, is the “blessing within the curse.”² Students on campus today are exhibiting courage and confidence and pushing back against those who demand that they hide or shed their pride in the Jewish people, their history and their ancestral homeland as the price for acceptance. These students have recognized that the best antidote to bigotry and discrimination is self-confidence and pride, and that the key to that self-confidence is knowledge and awareness about Jewish history and traditions.

All of us should be inspired by the students’ example. By listening, learning, reading, experiencing, and celebrating the richness of our faith, history, culture, language, traditions, and values, we will make sure that the Jewish people not only survive, but thrive. By embracing, strengthening and taking pride in our Jewish identity, we will ensure that we emerge from this difficult period as a stronger, more united, more resilient, better educated, more empathetic people, with renewed energy and determination to enhance and improve the world in which we live for the benefit of the Jewish people and all humankind. *Am Yisrael Hai*.

Alyza D. Lewin is president of the Louis D. Brandeis Center for Human Rights Under Law (“Brandeis Center”) and a founder and partner of Lewin & Lewin, LLP. The Brandeis Center is not affiliated with the Massachusetts university, the Kentucky law school, or any of the other institutions that share the name and honor the memory of the late U.S. Supreme Court justice.

² Turning Curses into Blessings. *Covenant & Conversation – Shemot*. <https://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/shemot/turning-curses-into-blessings>.

The Seven Essential Features of Anti-Judaism

By Malka Z. Simkovich

The events of the past year have led to a new examination of the essential nature and sources of antisemitism. What characterizes its appeal in its different manifestations? The following summary is excerpted from an article published by 18forty on April 5, 2024. The full article is available at <https://18forty.org>

What Makes Anti-Judaism Unique?

1. Jewish control is cunning.

Anti-Judaism doesn't merely hinge on the conviction that Jews bring suffering and evil into the world, but that they are brought in devious and sneaky ways. This form of anti-Judaism claims that Jews recognize the truth of Christianity or Islam but deceive and mislead others to advance their own material interests, bring confusion into the world, and bring suffering upon the innocent. This is all done behind the scenes by Jews who appear to be good citizens and neighbors.

2. You don't need Jews to hate Jews.

The accusations that Jews are powerful but hidden, dangerous but devious, and puppeteers of universal chaos have allowed anti-Jewish discourse to flourish in the absence of Jews. From the second century, when Christians began to develop *Adversus Ioudaiois* ("Against the Jews") literature, up until today, some of the most anti-Jewish countries in the world have few or no Jewish residents. Note, for instance, the recent story about a cocktail drink in León called "Kill Jews." Jews have not lived in León for centuries.

3. "Jew" can become a dangerous accusation.

In the absence of Jews, discourse about Jews became a set of ideas that Christians and Muslims put to work to argue with interlocutors who lived within their own faith traditions. The charge that one was a Jew had less to do with actual Jewishness than with how Christians and Muslims believed that one could embody Judaizing tendencies by embracing material, literal, and fleshly elements that threaten to estrange people from God and from salvation.

4. Ideas about Judaism fall onto real Jews.

Conversations about Judaism as an idea that sowed suffering and evil were often projected back onto real Jews. This projection was extraordinarily dangerous for Jews of medieval Europe, particularly during Holy Week. Christians attending church would listen to homilies accusing Jews of killing Jesus (and in some cases, of imitating Jesus's crucifixion by ritually murdering young Christian children). Some of the Christians who heard this accusation would then leave their church and kill local Jews.

5. The "Jewish problem" is a global problem.

The battle against figurative Judaism and real Jews was rarely framed as a regional or national conflict. Jews, not land, were perceived as purveyors of suffering and conflict, regardless of where they lived. The most famous example of this attitude successfully proliferating took place in Nazi Germany. If Hitler only cared about Jews in Germany, he would have focused only on eradicating Jews in Germany. His goal, however, was to annihilate Judaism by killing all Jews everywhere.

6. Jew-hatred operates through modern means.

Jew-haters seeking to isolate Jews as dangerous and satanic employ the most modern technologies available to them to spread their ideas. From the printing press to TikTok, those who propagate myths and conspiracies about Jews are often experts of information dissemination. Perhaps counterintuitively, their messages have been most potent in places where Jews do not live. These ideas have been effective not only because of the exciting technology employed but also because of the widespread receptiveness to interpret human suffering through the lens of anti-Jewish ideas.

7. Jew-hatred spans the political spectrum.

Jews are accused of the very things that a given group or society fears most. When capitalism is seen as the source of all oppression, Jews are accused of controlling commerce and exploiting the working class. When a society views communism as the source of all suffering, Jews are accused of infiltrating stable governments to topple political structures. These accusations boil down to one idea: The suffering of good and innocent people derives from the scheming Jews. Because this accusation spans the political spectrum, Jews are weaponized as pawns in broader debates between opposing groups, who accuse one another of being manipulated and exploited by Jewish power.

Why the Jews?

This is a question that can barely be limited to a book, let alone an essay, but one answer concerns the unique theological problem that Jews and Judaism have posed to Christians and Muslims. To defend their theological claims, Christians and Muslims needed to reject Jews and Judaism while maintaining the correctness of Jewish scriptures, prophetic teachings, and ethical traditions. This demand has produced unique problems and solutions. One such solution is to demonize Jews while asserting the truth of their tradition. According to this approach, Jews fundamentally misunderstand their own traditions. Jewish survival, moreover, is explained not as a reflection of God's covenantal love for the Jewish people,

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Holding One Thing

By Esther Altmann

This article was originally published in the Times of Israel Blog, February 12, 2024.

Even before sitting in their cafe chairs, the Israeli women I met for coffee were already apologizing, either that they had no reason to complain or that they were not doing enough, often saying both in the same breath.



The awful truth is that they had far too many reasons to complain and that they were doing far too much, holding unremitting fear about the safety of loved ones in the army, distress about the hostages, and excruciating pain about the overwhelming loss that surrounded them. What possible response could there be to such an emotional load? How much loss, anxiety, and distress can one person hold? How does one prioritize one's own worry list while carrying a whole country's heartache?

As I listened, the mantra that began running through my head was: You can only hold one thing at a time.

When your son is fighting in Gaza, that is what you can hold.

When your husband is in the north, and you are caring for a newborn and three other children, that is what you can hold.

When your four sons and two sons-in-law are in tunnels and tanks, north, south, and places you can't imagine yet, can't stop thinking about, that is all you can hold.

When your nine-year-old son wakes up thinking that people are shooting at him through the window or your ten-year-old daughter needs you to walk her to school because she is afraid that there isn't a nearby shelter along the route, that is all you can hold.

When your three-year-old daughter cries for her Abba, who came home and is now gone again, that is all you can hold.

When you prepare meals for hostage families and listen to their anguish for 126 days, that is all you can hold.

When you facilitate a support group for survivors of the Nova festival or for 18-year-olds who were locked in a shelter for three days, that is all you can hold.

When you have five grandsons fighting, and one is injured, that is all you can hold.

When you have led an Oneg Shabbat service in Hostage Square for 16 continuous weeks, that is all you can hold.

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Therapists Post-October 7th and the Courage to Be Human

By Dablia Topolosky

Being a psychologist whose profession is to support others, I, like so many therapists, froze with fear after the October 7th massacre in Israel. Overwhelmed by horror at the suffering of those who were brutally murdered and those taken hostage, I remember that right after the holiday of Simhat Torah I doubted whether I would have the strength to return to work. How would I be able to listen to my clients when my brain felt so flooded and focused elsewhere? I was worried that the tears would start flowing during a session. I didn't know how I could appear ok when I wasn't.



Would my non-Jewish clients say anything to me about Israel? Should I check in with my Jewish clients and ask how they were holding up, or wait for them to bring the subject up? Would my Jewish clients even mention the war?

After speaking with many Jewish therapists during those first few weeks of the war, I realized that we were all struggling together, trying to grapple with what it meant to be a professional when the world outside the therapy space seemed to be falling apart. Tools of mindfulness and reframing, which I so often use with my own clients, didn't seem sufficient, but I tried. My days were filled with calling friends and family in Israel, seeing clients, figuring out which organizations I wanted to donate to, saying *tehillim* (psalms), signing up on multiple sites to give mental health support to both therapists and English-speaking Israelis, and just trying my best to focus on what I was able to control. I struggled daily with feeling that I wasn't doing enough and wishing I were in Israel.

About a week after the war began, I was on my way to a *shiva* visit when I received a call from a rabbi at one of the local colleges. A therapist was supposed to facilitate support groups for the students, but had just canceled. He wanted to know if I could be there in an hour to run the group. Without hesitating, I said, "Of course. I will be there as soon as I can." After I left the *shiva* house, I jumped in my car not knowing what I expected to be doing once I got there. When I arrived, I entered a room with about 30 college students, all really struggling to function. I sat and listened to them for about an hour and a half. Many shared feeling unsafe as Jews on

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Therapists Post-October 7th *continued from page 24*

campus with the increase in antisemitism. Some had the white boards outside their dorm rooms filled with the words “From the River to the Sea.” Graffiti calling for another Holocaust were found on campus walls. Some students were confused about who their friends were. Others were worried when they saw their professors at anti-Israel protests. Many were worried about friends their own age who were in Gaza, and others felt guilty that they were not in Israel or in the army. Many felt the pressure of social media, believing that it was their duty to use those platforms to support Israel.

I have also learned that it's ok for a therapist to tear up in a therapy session.

When I left campus that night, I realized the unique emotional experience of being a college student in the United States during this war and the myriad of emotions these students were navigating. I immediately contacted one of my colleagues and asked her if she wanted to co-run virtual groups for college students with me. I felt that it was meant to be when I was called by the rabbi that night and felt driven to find ways to support Jewish students on campus. I spent the next few days contacting rabbis, Hillel directors, and college students and posting in many Facebook groups about the support groups I was running.

Meaningful Support Groups

These support groups have been very meaningful to me and felt like my own small way of giving during these painful times. Some of the students who joined our Zoom meetings were from colleges with large Jewish populations who felt empowered by the way their communities responded, while others were from smaller campuses and felt alone, with very little support. Students had a space to share their fears and anxieties about the war, as well as to talk about what steps they were taking to stand up against antisemitism on their campuses. I was inspired every week by the strength of these young adults who were navigating their academic responsibilities and their social lives, some living away from home for the first time, all while also trying to process the atrocities that began on October 7th.

I have learned so many lessons these past few months as a clinician, but one of the most important has been to be able to give myself space for my own humanness and my own emotions. Like all therapists who hold space for others, I am generally able to be fully present for clients in their pain and in their struggles. And at times when I may be triggered, I am appropriately able to check in with myself and seek consultation so that I remain an objective presence for my clients. With the devastation of October 7th, however, it's been much more difficult. I

Holding One Thing *continued from page 24*

When you are counting the minutes until your son will be released from his high-risk unit so that you can walk him down the aisle to his *huppah*, that is all you can hold.

And how do you hold a teenage girl who cannot stop reading the life stories of hostages? And what do you say to your 23-year-old son, who is home from the army for two days before going back to Gaza, or to your neighbor whose son was killed in the war? How do you decide which *shiva* to attend and which one to forgo? How do you work and do the laundry while holding your breath that your doorbell doesn't ring next? And how do you manage the traumas from previous wars, acts of terrorism, or sexual assaults that you assumed were safely locked away in the vault of your memory and are now breaking through?

Israel's mental health needs are and will be enormous. The heavy psychological toll of holding intense distress requires at least some specialization to mitigate the risk of either being chronically overwhelmed and flooded or becoming numb and shutting down.

As a psychologist, I know that you can reasonably hold only one overwhelming thing at a time. So I have a fantasy that perhaps this national task of heavy emotional labor can be distributed—hold one soldier, one child with nightmares, one hostage, one grieving parent, or one mother caring for her family alone. A friend shared that she thinks about the hostages each night as she gets into bed and pulls up her cozy blanket. If you knew everyone was holding someone, could you let go of something?

It is disorienting to be back in my New York routine after spending two weeks in Israel. I can't complain, and I am certainly not doing enough. So I am here with these pained voices in my head and this mantra in my ears: *You can only hold one thing*. Between work and tears, I struggle to follow my own good advice.

Esther Altmann, Ph.D., is the Director of Pastoral Training at Yeshivat Maharat and a psychologist in private practice.

have had to take many more deep breaths and take time to process after sessions, both with my clients and my college support groups. And while I still think I generally do a good job at keeping very strong boundaries, I have also learned that it's ok for a therapist to tear up in a therapy session. That doesn't make me unprofessional. It makes me human.

Dahlia Topolosky, Psy.D., is a clinical psychologist who works with adolescents and adults in Rockville, Maryland, and provides virtual support groups for college students. She is also a musician and rebbetzin of Kehilat Pardes, where she provides spiritual programming and learning opportunities for women.

I Believed *continued from page 19*

complete. But I can't continue to work with those who don't see me in the same light, as someone deserving of love and respect, no matter how they feel about my Judaism or Israel. My attempts to engage former colleagues have been hurtful and fruitless because of their unwillingness derived from ideological differences or a defensiveness of long-held views. Those groups' attempted mind games to decide who is worthy of care and who is entitled to protections need to end—or they will become irrelevant.

We are people who are worthy of care. Full stop. At this moment I am reevaluating my relationship with the people and organizations I engage with. I can say with certainty that we can and will recreate a community of coalitions that will not deny our humanity and our Jewish and Zionist identities. Either way, their silence will neither erase me nor deter me from fighting the good fight.

Daphne Lazar Price is Executive Director of Jofa. She is also an adjunct professor of Jewish Law at the Georgetown University Law Center.

Include Queer Jews *continued from page 20*

I urge Orthodox community leaders and rabbis to speak up in this moment and make it perfectly clear that these teens have a place in your community—that they are still part of the family. Even just a small gesture like affixing a safe space sticker in your office or to the front door of your *shuls*/schools can do so much to create feelings of acceptance and welcoming for queer youth.

If we don't find a way to welcome them, we risk losing them forever—and that is not a price the Jewish community can afford to pay.

Let's use "*Beyahad Nenatzeah*" as a rallying cry in these times, and make sure that the "we" truly means everyone. I pray that with our complete unity, we will be *zoheh* (meritorious) to welcome all the hostages home and live in peace.

Israeli American Gila Romanoff is the teen and community program manager at JQY, a nonprofit mental health organization supporting LGBTQ Jewish youth, with a special focus on teens and young adults from Orthodox, Hasidic and Sephardi/Mizrabi communities.

Seven Essential Features *continued from page 23*

but as a fulfillment of the specific role in the theological lives of God's true people.

Other theories about what spurs anti-Judaism have to do with the notion that there is a long-standing, deep-seated envy against Jews, upon whose scriptures and innovations Christianity and Islam rest. According to this view—advanced by ancient writers such as Josephus and Philo, as well as some modern thinkers today—this dependence, combined with the Jews' unlikely economic and political resilience despite limitations placed upon them, has bred envy and resentment.

Perhaps the most widespread explanation concerning anti-Judaism is that there is no explanation. This position, which appeals to many Jews of faith, presumes that the Jewish people's story lies at the center of an inscrutable divine plan that shuttles humanity toward a universal redemption. This approach treats anti-Judaism as a divinely ordained phenomenon that is illogical by design, and necessary for fulfilling this plan.

Where Does That Leave Us?

We are left with a pragmatic question: What's a Jew to do? One approach is to focus on the internal work that Jews can do within their own communities. In particular, [this means] ... investing in the cultivation of a distinctive, unassimilated identity that refuses to dissolve the boundaries that separate Jews from other peoples. This approach provides Jews with the agency to define themselves on their own terms rather than to accept the role that others have assigned them, which has Jews play an antagonizing role on the theological stages of others.

Perhaps the most effective way for Jews to respond to Jew-hatred, then, is to continue the work of imbuing their communities with dignity, strength, and confidence in their own goodness—especially when others deny them of these very traits. This work, and the radical optimism of believing in the inherent goodness of most people, can help Jews to confront the scourge of Jew-hatred with confidence and strength.

Dr. Malka Z. Simkovich is the editor-in-chief of the Jewish Publication Society, as well as the author of three books and over a hundred articles. Her first book, The Making of Jewish Universalism: From Exile to Alexandria, was published in 2016, and her second book, Discovering Second Temple Literature: The Scriptures and Stories That Shaped Early Judaism, was published by JPS in 2018 and received the 2019 AJL Judaica Reference Honor Award. Her most recent book, Letters from Home: The Creation of Diaspora in Jewish Antiquity, was published in June 2024.

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Let's Not Demonize *continued from page 7*

body so that I could engage with students outside of my own community, knowing that I would encounter beliefs different from mine. I am sure that every parent on every campus tour has run into the Hillel desperate to know what Students for Justice in Palestine is like on campus. I can answer that. SJP is vocal and outspoken. SJP has chalked words calling for Palestinian liberation in highly trafficked campus areas, and at times I passed words calling for a global intifada and students wearing keffiyehs and holding Palestinian flags on my way to class.

Many of my Jewish friends found this particularly distressing, and I do not blame them. However, I want to urge people who see this happening at universities to accept this discomfort. Groups should not be removed from campus for having opposing views, and a safe place to express all views is vital. Hearing a different perspective on campus does not constitute a bias incident and does not warrant doxing. I chose to go to a public university because I wanted to be exposed to perspectives different from mine, and this is no different. I was grateful to be a student in a university that protects freedom of speech.

This is not to say that the months after October 7th have not been distressing for everyone involved. The conflict may have been thousands of miles away, but there was reason to be afraid. On October 25th, 2023, Jewish students were barricaded at the Cooper Union Library as Palestinian protesters pounded on the doors. On November 3rd, an Arab Muslim student was struck in a hit-and-run incident that authorities called a hate crime. Over Thanksgiving break, three Palestinian college students were shot in Vermont, leaving one paralyzed from the chest down.

There is no shortage of people scared and distressed due to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Students at Rutgers have family who were taken hostage by Hamas, family who were killed on October 7th, and family who are serving in the Israel Defense Forces. Students at Rutgers also have family members who were killed in Gaza by bombs dropped by Israel and family members who were attacked in the West Bank. There was a shroud of fear and mourning surrounding both Jewish and Palestinian students at Rutgers who felt powerless to help their family and friends, and isolated because so many on our campus lacked this personal connection that we had. Our situations were not so different, yet we continued to antagonize each other and we were left with more fear. In response, I have tried to find space for conversation, understanding, and dialogue.

During the past year there was no space for nuance on campus. As I walked past the SJP rally on the way to the library (quite inconvenient that Hamas attacked Israel right around midterm season), I encountered Chabad, one of many Jewish organizations at Rutgers, tabling on the other side of the street. They recognized me, and one of the people tabling quipped: "Stay safe." I kept walking, but I wanted to reply that, quite frankly, I did not feel unsafe. I knew that students protesting for SJP and for Palestinian liberation were not my enemy.

These students did not attack Israel, and I did not contribute to Israel's violent response in Gaza after the attacks on October 7th. I, just like them, was grappling with the repercussions. I do not have to agree with their understanding of a twisted narrative to sympathize with their pain and to believe that there is a space for them to exist and to have a voice.

I know that this can be a difficult perspective to grapple with. It is hard to hear another perspective and to allow and encourage people to speak this perspective when it is so different from our own and we are still mourning our losses. I still shudder when I hear the word intifada and the phrase, "From the river to the sea." In response, I have reconsidered the language used to refer to Palestinian liberation to understand what it could mean to Palestinians as opposed to my initial reaction when hearing it.

It is here that the distinction between free speech and antisemitic language needs to be made clear. SJP should not be permitted to call Jewish people Nazis or to call for the death of Jewish people, but they should be allowed to rally for their liberation. I choose to allow for my discomfort because dialogue is important to me, and I believe that peace will always begin with a commitment towards understanding. I hope that my fellow students attempt the same because when we demonize each other and ignore one another's perspectives, we are hurting ourselves more. It was when I entered spaces looking for a resolution that I felt the safest on campus and that I felt that I could contribute the most to helping my friends and family in Israel. I want other students to experience this as well.

On November 10th, Columbia suspended SJP from its campus, and many of my friends rejoiced and hoped that the same would happen at Rutgers. I did not, and do not, hope for this. SJP at Rutgers has been protesting within university guidelines and, as I have explained time and time again to my friends, their inflammatory language is not inherently hate speech. On a United States campus, we are in a unique position to have conversations that our family and friends in the Middle East are unable to have.

We are not fearing for our lives, and it is my hope that we stop seeing each other as a threat. The students protesting across the street are our classmates and peers. It is when we think otherwise that leads to the terrifying events that occurred at Cooper Union Library and in Vermont. I hope that as college students, and as parents, family, and friends of college students, we look for spaces to mourn together and to have dialogue. If we cannot yet achieve peace in the Middle East, at the very least we can strive towards peace and understanding on campus.

Rebecca Raush graduated from Rutgers University in 2024 with a major in English and a minor in international and global studies. She is an Avodah Jewish Service Corps Fellow and is working as a Domestic Violence Program Assistant at the Southeast Louisiana Legal Services.

Circumventing the Law: Rabbinic Perspectives on Loopholes and Legal Integrity

By Elana Stein Hain

University of Pennsylvania Press, 2024, \$59.95

Reviewed by Liz Shayne

In the past few years, the traditional selling of *hametz* to a non-Jew before Passover has been having what I can only describe as “a moment.” As more rabbis turn the sale itself into a ritual experience to which congregants are invited, our most well-known loophole is coming into its own.

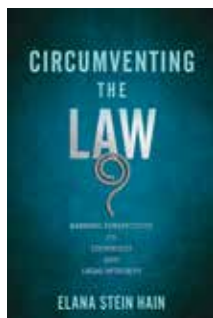
It is no surprise, then, that Dr. Elana Stein Hain’s introduction to her book *Circumventing the Law* contains an anecdote about her childhood concern surrounding the sale of *hametz*, foreshadowing the tension at the heart of the book. If the sale is not meant to be real, then we are cheating. And if it is meant to be real, then why do we not just get rid of our *hametz*? As she puts it, “how legitimate is a sale that implicitly anticipates its countersale?” Stein Hain does not answer the question, except insofar as the entire book is an answer to the question of what it means for a loophole to be real and still be a loophole.

But the sale of *hametz* is her second opening to the book; the first comes when she invites her readers to think about what exactly a halakhic loophole is. Right at the beginning, Stein Hain introduces us to the wonderful portmanteau word *avoision* to describe experiences that seem to toe the line between legal and illegal attempts to get around the law. To legally get around the law is to avoid it, to illegally circumvent it is to evade it, and the fuzzy middle ground that does not seem to come down on one side or the other? *Avoision*, of course.

For Stein Hain, evasion, *avoision*, and avoidance are all captured in the Hebrew term *ha’aramah*, which means both wisdom and cunning. By bringing prudent avoidance and tricky evasion to bear on the same word, Stein Hain brings us back again to the animating question: Having defined *ha’aramah*, why does Jewish law allow it to work? Why do we accept these workarounds as real?

Stein Hain constructs a fascinating chronological narrative of the history of loopholes in rabbinic literature, tying it—along the way—to theological values, historical context, and contemporary legal theory. Some of her observations are particularly illuminating; when she explains how Roman legal theorists saw themselves more as jurists responsible for deciding what the law is, in contrast to the rabbis who saw themselves as lawyers advocating for what is and is not within the boundaries of the law, I felt as though she were saying clearly something I had only dimly sensed before. Of course a group of people who saw the law itself as reflecting the Divine will would relate differently to changing the law than a group that saw the law as an instrument of their own will.

Stein Hain does her best in this book to write for an



audience that is both academic and lay and, overall, succeeds in her project of writing a book with academic structure that is still accessible in its use of language. To the lay reader unfamiliar with how academic Jewish literature is written, but familiar with rabbinic literature and Jewish practice, *Circumventing the Law* is approachable in terms of language without modifying the structures of academic literature.

Despite the fact that most of the examples she discusses are of situations completely foreign to contemporary Jewish life, this book deftly navigates the relationship between what rabbinic literature says and how much we can know about the mindset of those making the decisions. Stein Hain is extremely careful to speculate and wonder rather than to claim, but the book succeeds in making the question of avoiding (or possibly avoising) paying the 25 percent markup for redeeming *ma’aser sheni* (the second tithe) a compelling question across multiple chapters precisely because the question itself is used as a lens through which to see the macrocosm of rabbinic values and perspectives across centuries.

Stein Hain observes that the attitudes towards *ha’aramah* in the *Yerushalmi* and *Bavli* are shaped, albeit never exclusively, by Roman and Sassanian culture and the importance which each of those cultures assigns to an individual’s intention and internal thoughts. When reading this discussion, I found myself hoping to see a similar conversation about contemporary legal theory and modern halakhic use of loopholes. What I read instead was a fascinating entry into one of my favorite rabbinic conversations: Is *halakhah* a formal system or a reflection of reality? What Stein Hain offers, through the lens of *ha’aramah*, is a short but deeply satisfying overview of legal theories that explains why loopholes are not merely present, but integral to the halakhic system. Appropriately used, *ha’aramah* allows for a legal system that is morally coherent—meaning that it is consistent in its values and does not either throw away a good law because of some exceptional cases or refuse to find ways around those cases. And *ha’aramah* offers a flexibility that allows us to remain in relationship with Jewish law when a strict and unyielding interpretation might break a person’s commitment. What Stein Hain articulates in this book is a system for thinking about not simply *ha’aramah*, but the entirety of *halakhah*. *Ha’aramah* is simply the place where the rubber of halakhic values meets the road of legal application to individual situations.

As much as I enjoyed her analyses of rabbinic law in context and conversation with the times and circumstances in which it was developed, I was disappointed not to see her offer the same exploration for modern times; I wanted her to put modern legal theory in conversation with current halakhic approaches to *ha’aramah*, but she focuses solely on how contemporary legal theory illuminates the logic of the talmudic rabbis.

In her final paragraph, Stein Hain says that “the rabbinic establishment saw (and continues to see) loopholes as affording the possibility of holding values and authorities in tension for the good of their two most

precious clients—the law itself (perhaps as a proxy for God) and Jews attempting to observe the law.” As one of the latter, I wished that she had offered space for examples of the loopholes that she sees used in contemporary *halakhah*.

This book is an invitation, especially to those of us whose jobs and callings require ongoing engagement with the process of *halakhah*, to reflect on the values that get expressed in every answer we research and every halakhic choice we make. Where Stein Hain leaves off is precisely where the interesting contemporary halakhic questions begin.

Rabbanit Dr. Liz Shayne is a writer of Neurodivergent Torah, a lover of complicated halakhic questions, and a graduate of Yeshivat Maharat, where she currently serves as a teacher and the director of academic affairs. She is also a fiber artist, newbie gardener, and resident of Riverdale, along with her husband and two children.

Why Rain Comes from Above: Explorations in Religious Imagination

By Devora Steinmetz
Hadar Press, 2024, \$24.00
Reviewed by Ilana Kurshan

Why Rain Comes From Above, a new anthology of essays by masterful scholar and teacher Dr. Devora Steinmetz, offers a way of engaging imaginatively with the texts of our tradition. Steinmetz explores how we might read these texts not literally—as if they express propositional truths—and not metaphorically—as if they give expression to our deeply-held values—but rather as exercises in religious imagination. She argues that as canonical texts and as foundational texts of our tradition, biblical and rabbinic sources exert a powerful hold on us and leave space for us to engage with them; our challenge is to step inside the stories, images, and teachings of our tradition and open ourselves to the experiences and understandings they afford us.

In the essay that gives this collection its title, Steinmetz demonstrates that, in biblical and rabbinic sources, rain is not merely a meteorological phenomenon; it is, rather, an instrument of Divine justice. She begins with a midrash on the creation story that makes the claim that God originally intended for the earth to be watered from below, like the spring that welled up from the earth in the Garden of Eden. By causing rain to come down from above, God encourages human beings to direct their gaze heavenwards, aware of their dependence. Moreover, the Talmud presents the lack of rain as a punishment for failing to share our gifts with others, a reminder that rain—which falls alike on the rich and the poor—is a great equalizer. When we share the blessings that God bestows, God showers down blessing upon us. Rain is

thus a way for God not just to judge our behavior, but also to ensure that the world is a place of justice.

Steinmetz explores the midrashic idea that rain causes people to direct their eyes upward, which, she argues, parallels the biblical image of God looking downward at humanity to determine whether to give or withhold rain. As Steinmetz puts it: “This reciprocal gaze suggests a kind of mirroring, in which people look upward to understand and emulate the just way in which God shares God’s gifts, and God looks downward, judging human action and responding justly.” Her argument, reminiscent of Israeli scholar Dr. Penina Neuwirth’s image of a cosmic water cycle in which human prayers rise up to the heavens like mist and God’s blessing descends on the earth like rain, demonstrates the centrality of rain in Jewish theology, a role that is not just literal or metaphorical, but richly symbolic and pregnant with meaning like a saturated cloud.

In another thought-provoking essay, Steinmetz explores the symbolic meanings associated with the nation of Amalek, which attacked Israel at their most vulnerable moment, when they were weak and tired after just having left Egypt. Amalek, as refracted through the midrashic imagination, represents the conviction that the way we are now—weak, exhausted, straggling—is the way we will always be. And Amalek represents everything that holds us back from the promised land toward which we direct our steps. Steinmetz shows how the Exodus story is a revisiting of the Genesis story, with God battling the forces of evil not to create a world, but to establish Divine dominion. She compares the biblical creation story with ancient Near Eastern myths in which the deity had to subdue the chaotic forces of the sea in order to create the world. She shows how echoes of this cosmic battle survive in the biblical text as well—in the references to God’s destruction of sea monsters in the book of Psalms, and in the subjugation of Amalek, who represents God’s primordial foe. Biblical scholar Avivah Zornberg has argued that midrash represents the biblical unconscious, giving voice to desires and anxieties that lie just beneath the surface of the text. But in this chapter, Steinmetz shows how the unconscious rears its head in the text of the Bible itself, with Amalek as the force of evil.

Despite repeated references to the religious imagination, Steinmetz’s book is animated by a sense of *moral* imagination and a vision of a world governed by justice. In the last of the six essays in this anthology, “The Hidden and the Revealed,” Steinmetz focuses on a verse from Deuteronomy (29:28) spoken by God just before the people enter the promised land: “The hidden things are for the Lord our God, but the revealed things are for us and our children forever to do all of the words of this teaching.” The “hidden things” is a reference to those sins which an individual conducts in secret, and which it’s possible that no one may ever discover. Drawing on an episode from the book of Judges, Steinmetz explores what it means for the members of a community to be maximally responsible for one another, such that all are

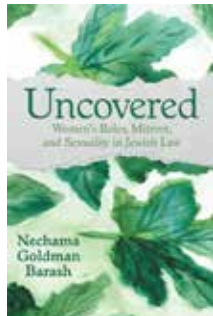


implicated in the sins of individuals. She invites us to imagine the ways in which we are all intertwined in a web of responsibility for the communities of which we are a part. By the end of this highly accessible and engaging book, we are left with a sense that rain may be the instrument of Divine justice from the heavens, but a sense of communal responsibility is a source of justice that wells up from human beings on earth.

Ilana Kurshan is the author of If All the Seas Were Ink, published by St. Martin's Press.

Uncovered: Women's Roles, Mitzvot, and Sexuality in Jewish Law

By Nechama Goldman Barash
Urim Publications, 2024, \$29.95
Reviewed by Talia Weisberg



Uncovered by Rabbanit Nechama Goldman Barash is a relatively compact volume that nonetheless manages to delve deeply into many issues relating to women's role in Jewish practice in the twenty-first century. Goldman Barash, a *yoetzet halakhah* and teacher of *halakhah* and Talmud at various educational institutions in Israel, is a masterful educator whose facility with texts from the Torah to twenty-first century responsa and everything in between truly shines.

The book is divided into three sections: broadly interrogating the role of gender in Jewish law; exploring the halakhic, historical, and sociological dimensions of women in Torah study and religious leadership; and analyzing various halakhic categories that pertain to women and the relationship between men and women. The meticulous manner in which Goldman Barash examines these topics clearly shows that this is the culmination of her many years of researching and teaching these topics.

The book's description of halakhic process and history greatly enriches the reader's understanding of modern-day religious practice. Goldman Barash cogently frames and explains sources and elegantly puts them into conversation with one another, clearly presenting biblical and rabbinic material and her methodically structured arguments about them. Her treatment of the halakhic dimensions of modesty in dress and behavior are especially valuable, as she maintains the integrity of the original source materials while realistically applying them to a contemporary context. In addition to her rigorous presentation of the sources, her own voice and those of her female colleagues provide a refreshing and important addition to a halakhic corpus of generations of male rabbinic opinions.

She does not shy away from a frank analysis of *sugyot* that feel problematic to the modern reader. She systematically explains how the cultural context of the Talmud and later halakhic works influenced the way the rabbis codified the text into law, and suggests various

ways our modern circumstances could impact our continued observance. For example, in her discussion of the statement in *Masekhet Berakhot* that an exposed *tefah* (a hands-breadth, generally about eight centimeters) of a woman's body is *ervah* (literally referring to exposed genitalia, but broadly referring to anything sexually inappropriate), she cites sources that limit *ervah* to those body parts that are normally covered in a particular society, and notes that these texts allow for a range of halakhic dress code norms. Yet she reminds us that in contemporary society, where suggestive clothing is widely accepted, "it is ludicrous to suggest that no objective boundaries exist."

Goldman Barash is not afraid to ask difficult questions and seek out answers that are useful and relevant for the twenty-first century, whether from Jewish texts or the mimetic tradition. She does not shy away from taboo topics like premarital intimacy, or hot-button issues like women wearing *tefillin*. Particularly around issues of sexuality and *middah*, she delicately tries to find a balance between endorsing non-halakhic behavior and helping religious people find ways to live halakhically while struggling with various issues of observance. She also discusses and acknowledges value in both *mahmir* (stringent) and *meikil* (lenient) views, demonstrating that the corpus of *halakhah* is vast and has space for everyone, whether they find great meaning in a mitzvah or find its observance difficult.

Goldman Barash has lived in Israel for several decades, so I found some of her sociological conclusions more reflective of Judaism in Israel than what I am familiar with from living in the United States. For example, the topic of women as *mashgihot* (professional *kashrut* supervisors) is mentioned in the context of whether women may hold roles of religious authority, and Goldman Barash comments that "in practice, there are few women in the field." As a woman who has worked on and off for over a decade as a *mashgihah*, I can attest that we very much do exist, particularly in "out of town" communities in America! Having said that, I learned a lot from her analysis of halakhic issues and their interplay with public life in Israel. I particularly enjoyed reading about the halakhic and legal process that led to the Israeli Supreme Court's ruling that women must be allowed to immerse without an attendant in state-run *mikvaot*.

Because it is written in such a straightforward and organized way, *Uncovered* is accessible to those who are less familiar with traditional texts, but also contains wisdom and new perspectives that will benefit the most veteran learner. This book is an excellent addition to the Jewish bookshelf, and will add meaning and depth to the religious observance of both the men and women who read it.

Rabbanit Talia Weisberg is a community builder and teacher of Torah who is pursuing a Ph.D. in religion at Boston University. She received semikhah from Yeshivat Maharat and holds an AB in religion from Harvard University.

The Madwoman in the Rabbi's Attic: Rereading the Women of the Talmud

By Gila Fine

Maggid Books, 2024, \$29.95

Reviewed by Shana Schick

In her superbly written and deeply engaging book, Gila Fine takes us on a journey exploring talmudic stories, in particular those that feature six of the few named women who appear in *Bavli aggadot*. Although, as the author points out, a number of studies have examined women as characters in talmudic narrative, this book is noteworthy for the wide and diverse range of interpretive approaches from which it draws. Fine naturally considers how each story stands in relation to other rabbinic and biblical texts, but also offers keen insights drawing on scholarship from literary and film studies and feminist theory. The result is a unique mode of critical analysis, combining the author's close (re)readings with reflections on the religious and moral resonances of the various tales. This is all presented in a clear and relatable manner that will be accessible to readers of varying levels and backgrounds.

The book begins by recounting how Fine, as a girl on the cusp of her bat mitzvah, first encountered some of these narratives (and other aggadic pronouncements regarding women) and how their negative depictions were deeply hurtful and alienating. The book, therefore, is not simply a scholastic endeavor, but the culmination of the author's personal journey of contending with these stories, learning to read them in ways that see beneath the surface, and developing a relationship of ongoing negotiation with texts that speak to us from places and cultural milieus that are rather different from our own, but that nonetheless remain central to our religious lives.

The introduction proceeds with a very useful overview of the corpus of classical rabbinic literature, a summary of the different approaches to the study of *Aggadah*—from traditional interpretation to contemporary literary-critical readings—and then outlines the author's methodology, which includes the necessary qualification that talmudic stories are indeed literary works that were never intended as historical records of the events described therein. Fine's approach proceeds from the idea that a hallmark of aggadic storytelling is that tales are constructed so as to present a "false front"; in other words, the understanding and impression that one will come away with after a first cursory reading is at odds with the deeper meaning that emerges after a second, closer look at the text.

Each of the following six chapters centers on a single *Bavli* narrative with a female protagonist, who is presented as corresponding to a different archetypal female character that reappears in "narratives throughout history and across cultures." In each chapter Fine provides descriptions and colorful examples of each archetype



from biblical and rabbinic texts, ancient and classical mythology, historical personae, and a diverse selection of modern literature, theater, ballet, and film. Many are accompanied by pictures: Miss Piggy, Scarlett O'Hara, and Yentl all make appearances. Also included are short discussions of halakhic texts in which archetypal women are referenced. She then examines the aggadic narrative in question and suggests a "primary" reading in which the female protagonist conforms to the archetype and its negative connotations.

Fine then "zooms out" to reconsider each narrative's context, whether in terms of the local talmudic discussion in which the story appears, other references to the female character elsewhere in rabbinic texts, or broader thematic elements. This is accompanied by a literary analysis proceeding from several contemporary approaches that allows for, borrowing a term from Adrienne Rich, a "re-visioning" of the story and a reassessment of the female character. What emerges is a more complex, nuanced, and sympathetic understanding of the protagonists that stands in contrast to the dominant archetype. By examining the context in which each story appears in a talmudic *sugya* and subjecting the text to literary and structural analyses, Fine's readings reveal the story's subtle, deeper meaning and its function within the wider (typically halakhic) discourse—an approach to *Aggadah* advanced in academic Talmud study by Jeffrey Rubenstein, whom Fine credits throughout the book.

Fine's readings are compelling,
enjoyable, and wise.

By their nature, aggadic narratives admit to many different and competing interpretations, and, as Fine acknowledges, hers are not the only interpretations. But Fine's readings are compelling, enjoyable, and wise—the work of someone who is not only a careful reader of texts, but a skilled teacher who can take the student or reader along on a journey that is at turns insightful and delightful. Apart from its contribution to the literary study of *Aggadah* and our understanding of how women are positioned within classical rabbinic literature, this is a book that I suspect will strongly resonate with many women who share the same sentiments that are so beautifully and eloquently expressed in the introduction. It would also be a fitting gift for a recent bat mitzvah, who one day may turn to this book to begin her own process of rereading the women of the Talmud.

Dr. Shana Strauch Schick is a lecturer in Talmud and Rabbinic Literature at Bar-Ilan University and teaches Talmud and Jewish Law at Drisha Institute in New York. Her publications range widely on subjects in rabbinic literature and include two books: Intention in Talmudic Law: Between Thought and Deed (Brill, 2021), and an upcoming monograph Women in Rabbinic Law and Narrative: Vying Currents in Babylonian and Palestinian Texts (Brandeis).

Jofa.

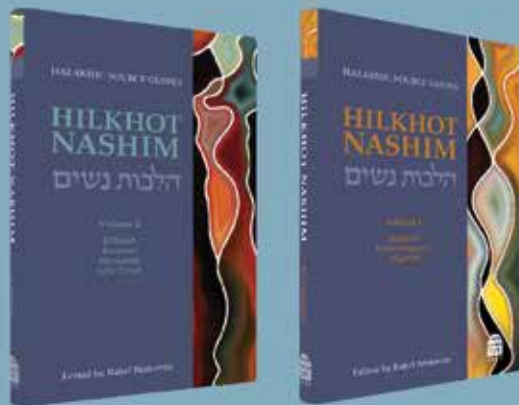
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