B'NAI B'RITH
MAGAZINE
PUBLISHED SINCE 1886
WINTER 2026



MEET ISRAEL'S FLOOD CHASERS

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Editor's Note

Regular readers of B'nai B'rith Magazine will notice a few new names in this year's publication. After 27 years, Daniel S. Mariaschin retired as CEO of B'nai B'rith International; Evan R. Bernstein, our new CEO, lays out his vision for B'nai B'rith in his inaugural "From the CEO" column. Evan Carmen, director for legislative aging policy and housing development and co-director of the Center for Senior Services, writes about Social Security in his debut "About Seniors" column, taking over for Mark Olshan, who retired earlier this year. And finally, there is a new name at the end of this Editor's Note—my own.

For 16 years, this tan box has been the dedicated space of Eugene L. Meyer, longtime editor of this esteemed publication, who retired at the beginning of this year. I owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to Gene, who hired me to serve as the deputy editor of B'nai B'rith Magazine, a role I held from 2011-2014. Writing my first Editor's Note feels a little like moving into your parents' bedroom in your childhood home. This piece of magazine real estate still feels as if it belongs to its previous occupant.

As I strive to shake these feelings of impostor syndrome, I am reminded of my very first day at B'nai B'rith, on Aug. 23, 2011, which Washingtonians may remember for the 5.8-magnitude earthquake that shook the nation's capital. I hope to mark this new chapter with the magazine, not with an earthquake, but with a calm, steady transition. This year's publication should still feel like the B'nai B'rith Magazine our readers know, even as the stories themselves explore new subjects that challenge assumptions and upset the status quo.

Keren Peter, new deputy editor of the magazine, writes about the legacy of Jewish pirates, allegedly roaming the high seas in search of plunder and revenge. Keren examines the truth behind these stories and why they continue to captivate audiences.

Uriel Heilman once again takes readers on a voyage into Israel's natural wonders, this time exploring the flash floods that majestically appear in Israel's deserts, as he follows the thrill-seekers who traverse the country to find them.

Deborah Lynn Blumberg delves into nostalgic waters in her article about the Jewish entrepreneurs responsible for iconic American toys, and the influence these immigrants and children of immigrants had on the evolving notion of childhood in the United States.

Michele Chabin writes about Suzanne Tamar Dekel, an Israeli artisan who researches and experiments with ancient

continued on page 8

From the Vault

Emma Lazarus and B'nai B'rith's Magazines

By Cheryl Kempler

First published in 1886, B'nai B'rith's magazine, originally called The Menorah, was conceived by editor Benjamin Franklin Peixotto as an "official communication," offering a "summary of principal events affecting the interests of Jews throughout the world" and "instruction and information of our brethren."

Attracting educated American and German Jewish readers, The Menorah, which was renamed the National Jewish Monthly in 1924 and later B'nai B'rith Magazine, included essays exploring topics ranging from the music of composer Franz Schubert to the history of the Jews in France, and included both fiction and poetry, written by Jewish and non-Jewish male and female contributors.

continued on page 9



Credit: Library of Congress

Remembered today for her poem, "The New Colossus," Emma Lazarus, an associate of writers including Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry James, also maintained friendships with prominent members of New York society. Steeped in a love of classical literature, she later adopted Zionist beliefs and advocated on behalf of the rights of persecuted Jews who had immigrated to the United States.

12 Meet Israel's Flood Chasers

When winter storms strike, Israel's Negev desert may transform into a landscape of rushing rivers, cascading waterfalls and fleeting waterholes. Our cover story catches up with Israel's "flood chasers," who track storms, share tips and race across the country to glimpse these rare natural phenomena.

By Uriel Heilman

17 The Legend of Jewish Pirates: Fact, Fiction or Something in Between?

Legends of Jewish pirates claim that Jews sailed the seas, sinking and looting ships of empires that persecuted and expelled their ancestors. But how many of these stories are true? This article explores the documented history, disputed tales and enduring myths surrounding Jewish pirates, privateers and smugglers, and what these stories reveal about the Sephardi Jewish experience in the New World.

By Keren Peter

21 Iconic American Toys and the Jewish Immigrants Who Brought Them to Life

From the Teddy bear to Barbie, iconic toys developed by Jewish immigrants and their children redefined the idea of play in America. This article explores the stories of the Jewish entrepreneurs, inventors and creators behind these cultural icons, and how their experiences as immigrants helped transform American childhood.

By Deborah Lynn Blumberg

26 Looking Back to Move Forward: How an Israeli Woman Is Reviving Ancient Fashion Techniques to Make the Industry More Sustainable

After leaving a career in high-tech, Israeli natural dye expert Suzanne Tamar Dekel began to explore more sustainable approaches to fashion by turning to ancient textile techniques from the Bible. This article follows Dekel's journey from career change to international educator and researcher, and how her Orthodox Jewish values and cross-cultural collaborations shape her work.

By Michele Chabin

31 Students Confront Antisemitism on College Campuses in None Shall Be Afraid Essay Contest

For its fifth year, the B'nai B'rith None Shall Be Afraid essay contest asked college students to reflect on the rise of antisemitism on college campuses and in their communities. First-place winner Aviel Rabbani reflects on experiences that shaped his proud Jewish identity, from visiting Poland to marching in the Israel Day Parade, and the lessons he carries with him as he prepares to enter college in the years following the Oct. 7 attacks.

Printed with inks containing soy and/or vegetable oils

B'NAI B'RITH MAGAZINE

WINTER 2026

B'NAI B'RITH IMPACT

B'NAI B'RITH IN YOUR COMMUNITY AND AROUND THE GLOBE

33 Welcome to IMPACT!

34 As Middle East Hostilities Intensify, B'nai B'rith Advocates in Geneva and Paris

35 Trilateral Mission Explores Cooperation Between Israel, Cyprus and Greece

36 A Legacy of Service: My 50 Years Working on Behalf of Israel and the Jewish People

37 Remembering Bondi Beach

38 B'nai B'rith Israel Activities Benefit Soldiers and Civilians

40 B'nai B'rith Mission Surveys Latin America's Support of Jewish Causes

41 Center for Senior Services Spring Events

43 Young Leaders Connect with Wide-Ranging Activities

44 B'nai B'rith and JNS Chart Repercussions of the Durban Conference

45 2026 Wdzięczność-Gratitude-הכרת הטוב Awardees Honored in Lublin

46 B'nai B'rith World Center Honors Excellence in Diaspora Reporting

47 Harmony Day Awards Build Bridges Across Australia

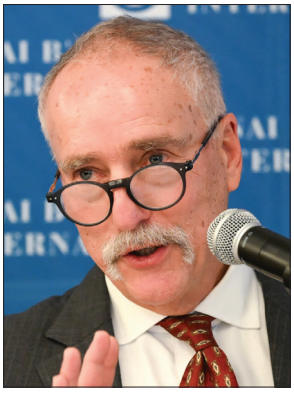
COLUMNS

From the Vault.....2
From the President.....4
From the CEO.....6
About Seniors.....52

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A Contemporary Blood Libel

By Robert B Spitzer
B'nai B'rith International President



Our people have been the targets of slander throughout history. One of the worst and earliest recorded cases occurred in Norwich, England, in 1144, after the mysterious death of a 12-year-old boy. Gentiles alleged, without any evidence, that Jews killed him, and later accused Jews of murdering Christian children to use their blood for religious rituals, including the making of matzoh. Historians now call that false and incendiary accusation a "blood libel." This lie quickly spread across Europe and inspired hatred and violent pogroms throughout the continent. The staying power of this lie was so great that the Nazis included this blood libel in its propaganda campaign against Jews in the 1930s.

In the wake of the Hamas brutality of Oct. 7, 2023, the claim that Israel committed "genocide" against the Palestinians, and specifically targeted children, is the latest and most nefarious version of the blood libel. The haters of Israel understand why the world rallied around the modern renewal of the ancient Jewish state and are working to undermine Israel using the very logic that led to its creation.

The Holocaust is the most egregious example of genocide in the modern world; in fact, the term "genocide" was created to describe this specific instance of depravity. The genocide against the Jewish people is at the core of the world's acceptance of the need for a Jewish state. In a cynical reversal of that sentiment, enemies of Israel, who realize the state cannot be defeated militarily, have launched a sophisticated campaign to delegitimize the nation state, and the worst and most insidious accusation is that it has committed genocide. Unfortunately, this most recent lie has been widely circulated and largely accepted as fact.

The world's media loves to inflame its consumers; violence and controversy are its bread and butter. The warfare in Gaza has produced regular photos of suffering Palestinians and a decimated Gaza that has created widespread sympathy for the Palestinians and hatred toward Israelis.

In many ways, the war has unfolded precisely how Hamas intended. Urban warfare in a densely populated country results in many casualties. Hamas strategically sheltered in tunnels below schools, mosques, residential buildings and hospitals to increase the death toll among its people. In effect, the Palestinian citizens were used by Hamas leadership as human shields. The constant barrage of images of suffering civilians fed right into the radical Islamic propaganda machine and led to the world's easy acceptance of this big lie.

One of the world's greatest experts on urban warfare has clearly rejected the claims of genocide. Retired Army Maj. John Spencer is the chair of urban warfare studies at the U.S. Army's Modern War Institute at West Point. He was an infantry soldier for 25 years, including two combat tours in Iraq. He has concluded that he knows of no modern urban conflict where the civilian-to-combatant ratio was lower than in Gaza. Here's his analysis:

"I am not a lawyer or a political activist. I am a war expert. I have led soldiers in combat. I have trained military units in urban warfare for decades and studied and taught military history, strategy and the laws of war for years. Since Oct. 7, I have been to Gaza four times, embedded with the Israel Defense Forces. I have interviewed the prime minister of Israel, the defense minister, the IDF chief of staff, Southern Command leadership, and dozens of commanders and soldiers on the front lines. I have reviewed their orders, watched their targeting process and seen soldiers take real risks to avoid harming civilians. Nothing I have seen or studied resembles genocide or genocidal intent.

"War is hell. It is inhumane, destructive and ugly. But it is not automatically a crime. Nations must not target civilians. They must follow the rules of distinction, proportionality, and take all possible care to avoid civilian harm. Israel is doing that. I have seen it.

"What is happening in Gaza is tragic. But it is not genocide. And it is not illegal."

The accusation of genocide has been given credence in large measure because it has come from sources that the unsophisticated mistakenly believe are unbi-



President Ronald Reagan signed the Genocide Convention Implementation Act on Nov. 4, 1988, 40 years after the 1948 U.N. Genocide Convention, the name given to the international treaty that criminalized mass execution. The word "genocide" was coined by Rafael Lemkin, a Polish Jewish human rights activist and Holocaust survivor, who dedicated his life to the act's adoption into law by the United States. After Lemkin's death in 1959, William Korey (far left), B'nai B'rith director of the U.N. office and the international policy research department, successfully led his organization's campaign for ratification, leading to this historic moment.

ased arbiters of truth, such as the U.N. Human Rights Council, which, in recent years, has included human rights abusers among its members, including Cuba, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, China, Qatar and Sudan. The UNHRC has only one permanent agenda item, which is the "Human rights situation in Palestine and other occupied Arab territories," when Muslim members and their allies routinely castigate Israel. Almost all of their resolutions condemn Israel, which diminishes the body's credibility. The world's major media outlets accept unfounded claims of famine and genocide without question, and social media repeats these lies.

Let's not forget the insidious global propaganda campaign from Qatar, which has been reported to exceed $400 billion, aimed at influencing the U.S. government, media, universities and social media companies. Qatar, you may recall, supported Al Qaeda and hosted the leadership of Hamas before and during the Gaza war, funding much of its operations in Gaza before Oct. 7. Its state-sponsored global television network, Al Jazeera, spews the Muslim Brotherhood brand of radical Islam. No wonder the blood libel has spread around the world.

We cannot let this lie go unchallenged. The Israel Defense Forces are not perfect, but they have ethically outperformed every other military organization in the world in dealing with a brutal foe bent on Israel's destruction. There is only one side in the Israel-Hamas war that has singled out one ethnic group for destruction: the perpetrators of the Oct. 7 brutality.

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One Jewish People, Many Front Lines: B'nai B'rith Must Serve Its Chapters More Directly

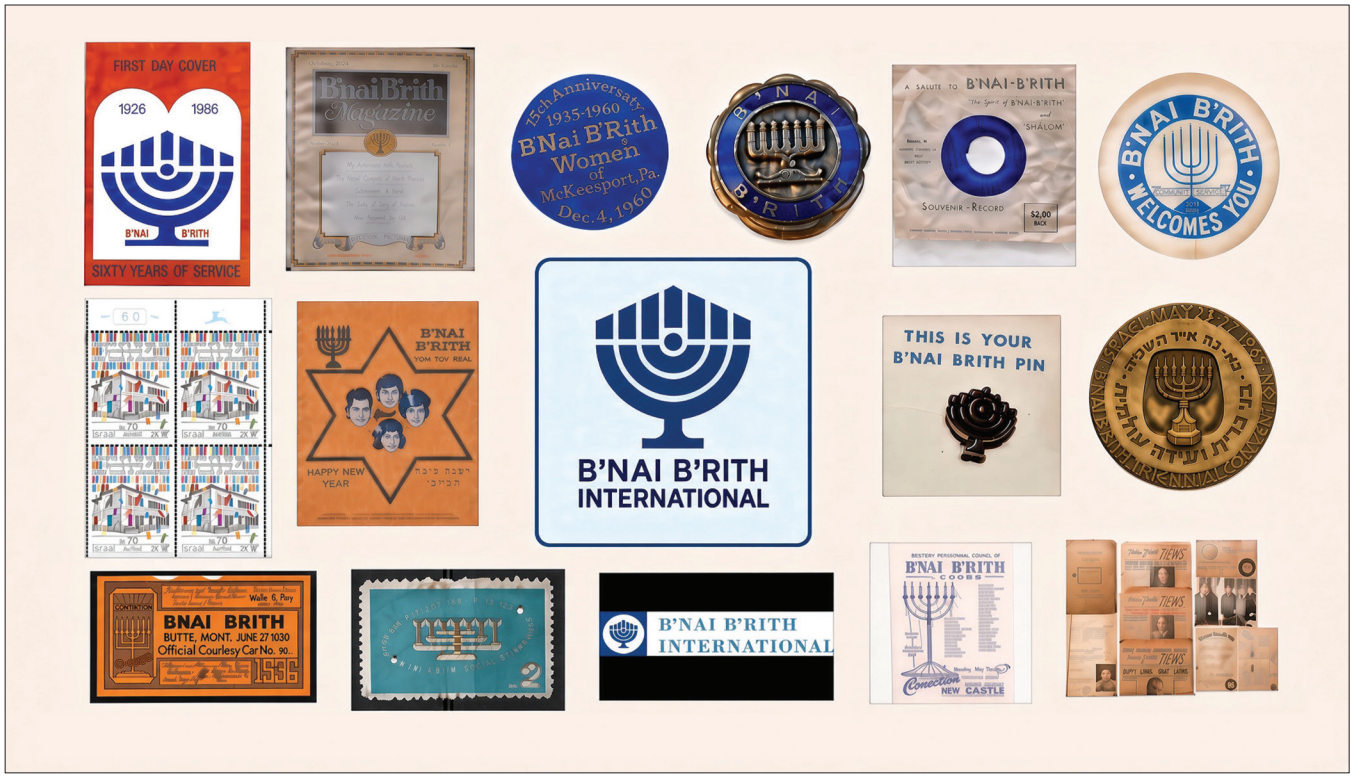


By Evan R. Bernstein
B'nai B'rith International Chief Executive Officer

On Aug. 24, I began my work as chief executive officer of B'nai B'rith International during one of the most demanding periods for Jewish communities in decades. Antisemitism has surged. Israel remains under sustained assault in the court of public opinion. Jewish life around the world feels less secure than it did just a few years ago. At the same time, our people continue to build, educate and show up for one another.

B'nai B'rith's 183-year history gives us a distinctive vantage point. We are not only an advocacy organization in Washington, D.C., or at the United Nations. We are a global family of chapters, units and lodges. That structure can be our greatest asset.

The Jewish people are one nation. Our challenges, however, are not the same everywhere. The antisemitism that Jewish students encounter on American campuses is not identical to the



"I am excited to honor our past and build for our future!"—Evan R. Bernstein, CEO, B'nai B'rith

B'nai B'rith's record of philanthropy and service to others, both locally and internationally, has been recognized since the organization was founded in 1843.

pressures facing a small community in Latin America. The security needs of a synagogue in suburban New Jersey differ from those of a congregation in Argentina or Uruguay, where historical trauma, political volatility and complex relationships with its government shape daily reality. Communities in Europe confront street-level violence and political parties that traffic in centuries-old hatred. Others wrestle with isolation, assimilation or the simple difficulty of maintaining Jewish life with limited numbers and resources.

A one-size-fits-all approach will fail us. Fortunately, B'nai B'rith is uniquely suited to provide highly tailored support to individual communities around the world.

We must do two things at once. We are, even now, connecting our members across borders so they can collaborate and share blueprints of what is working for them. A district that has built effective interfaith partnerships in one country can teach another. Volunteer security models refined in the United States can be adapted, not copied, elsewhere. Advocacy strategies that succeeded in one political environment can inform another. In isolation, best practices have limited utility; when we build bridges from one community to another, great ideas may blossom into transformational, global change.

Second—the harder and more important shift—we cannot remain a primarily macro-level organization and hope that the benefits trickle down to our members. Hope is not strategy. While B'nai B'rith's more global focus has proven effective and necessary, it is time to return our concentration to the local level. We must return to the roots of our organization and serve communities more directly than we ever have.

We have to listen first and then take action. That means understanding what a Latin American chapter needs that a North American or European chapter may not. That means providing practical resources—training, materials, connections to experts, targeted advocacy support, and programming ideas that fit local cultures and capacities. That means showing, in concrete terms, why belonging to B'nai B'rith can provide on-the-ground value and make a material difference in people's lives.

I have seen this principle play out in my own career. My work in Arizona, New York and New Jersey, followed by national efforts to strengthen community security, and later with Federations across North America, taught me that Jewish life is intensely local even when the threats feel global. The late Abe Foxman, who hired me at the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), understood that relationships and local knowledge matter as much as national strategy. Daniel S. Mariaschin, B'nai B'rith's former CEO, spent decades representing B'nai B'rith on the world stage while never losing sight of the organization's grassroots character. I intend to honor both of those lessons.

The founders of B'nai B'rith in 1843 created a covenant of mutual aid among people who needed one another. In 2026, we must rededicate our organization to that covenant and renew it in practice. As members of B'nai B'rith, our people should not only feel a sense of pride in being associated with such a historic institution; they should also believe that we equip them, connect them and show up for the specific realities they face.

That is the work ahead: tighter global connections and more direct, tailored service. We will fight antisemitism together, but we will do it with the perception and empathy to recognize that the fight looks different in different places. We will share what we learn, and

continued on page 8

B'NAI B'RITH
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continued from page 7

One Jewish People, Many Front Lines: B'nai B'rith Must Serve Its Chapters More Directly

we will deliver resources that chapters, lodges and districts can use.

The Jewish people have always been strongest when we remember we are one family with many households. B'nai B'rith's job is to strengthen those households, one at a time, while keeping the family together.

I appreciate the weight of this moment and the privilege of serving as the CEO of an organization with a tremendous history and a promising future. I have already hit the ground running, and I look forward to continuing this journey together.

Editor's Note

continued from page 2

textile dyeing techniques in an effort to make today's fashion industry more sustainable.

In his column, B'nai B'rith President Robert B Spitzer explores the history of the "blood libel" and its modern-day incarnation against the State of Israel.

In her Vault column, archivist Cheryl Kempler takes us on a fascinating ride through the history of B'nai B'rith Magazine and the publication's decades-long interest in the poet who wrote the immortal words inscribed on the Statue of Liberty.

And don't miss Daniel S. Mariaschin's farewell address in the IMPACT section of the magazine.

Thanks for reading!

—Seth Shapiro

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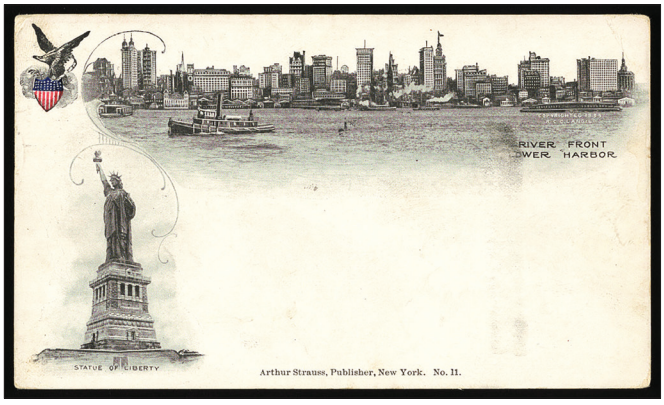


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continued from page 2

Emma Lazarus and B'nai B'rith's Magazines





Credit: Library of Congress

The Statue of Liberty was identified as a symbol of New York's freedom and egalitarian values as early as 1890. This postcard underscores the emotional impact of Lady Liberty for those who were arriving as refugees.

Periodicals would become an essential component of B'nai B'rith's history. Their contents not only reported on, and are records of, the organization's activities but, just as important, included features that reflected members' interest in Jewish thought, philosophy and history, as well as culture, so important to their daily lives. Some of the information about art, literature and music was never documented anywhere else. Available at schools and libraries, as well as in the homes of lodge members, B'nai B'rith Magazine was valued as a source of information, even for people who were not Jewish, evidenced by their letters to the editor. B'nai B'rith lodges in Europe and Asia republished articles from B'nai B'rith Magazine in their own periodicals. It was a reminder of home for thousands of young Jewish men and women in the military, who received the magazine free of charge during World War II.

One of the most popular subjects over the years has been the American Jewish novelist, translator, playwright and poet Emma Lazarus (1849-1887). Descended from the wealthy Sephardic Seixas family, the highly educated Lazarus was steeped in classical literature, and her early writing is filled with imagery referencing her love of Greek and German myths and legends. She focused her writings on Jewish themes after 1881, when she was deeply affected by violent pogroms in Russia; at the same time, she became an advocate for Zionism and Jewish causes. Lazarus' acclaimed 1883 sonnet, "The New Colossus," celebrating the Statue of Liberty and the ideals of freedom behind its creation, gave voice to the downtrodden:

"Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore,
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost,
to me.
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"

Important aspects of Lazarus' personal life have been revealed through 21st century analysis of her letters and diaries. In these earlier articles, the journalists who wrote about her were focused on the meaning of her poetry and the ways that her writings have resonated over time.

Reviewing an 1889 anthology of Lazarus' verse, which "certainly [should] be in every Jewish home," an anonymous Menorah writer characterized her classical and Jewish-themed periods "as though written by two different authors." Her poem "The Banner of the Jew" was praised as "…linking the spirit of the Maccabees and the song of the prophets," as the critic wistfully observed in light of her early death: "To those who were fortunate to know her, any biographical sketch [is] inadequate to convey…her earnestness, her enthusiasm and her power."

Honoring the golden anniversary of Lazarus' death, "After 50 Years," a 1937 tribute in B'nai B'rith Magazine by the prolific author Elma Ehrlich Levinger assessed the still-meaningful impact of her poetry. Commenting on Lazarus' feelings about her heritage, Levinger wrote that Lazarus' elite upbringing had distanced her from the people she grew to care about: "…if Jewish suffering moved her, it is as though she felt the throb of sympathy every sensitive soul must feel at the woes of a romantic and alien people." As in 1889, the poem "The Banner of the Jew" is discussed.

continued on page 10

continued from page 9

Emma Lazarus and B'nai B'rith's Magazines

"…With Moses' law and David's lyre,
Your ancient strength remains unbent.
Let but an Ezra rise anew,
To lift the Banner of the Jew!"

The specter of Jewish suffering in Nazi Germany was evident as Levinger concluded: "…the light she brought to her people, like the lamp in the hand of her Wandering Jew [a recurrent motif in her poetry] still burns on, our legacy and our hope."

Commemorating the Statue of Liberty's 80th anniversary, Bernard Postal's 1966 B'nai B'rith Magazine story, "Miss Liberty and Miss Lazarus," detailed the genesis of "The New Colossus" and its later identification with the iconic monument. Lazarus, who had viewed segments of the sculpture when she was in Paris, was reticent when her friends asked her to contribute a poem for a souvenir book whose sales were intended to raise funds for the statue's pedestal. Lazarus acquiesced when one of them suggested she "think about the Goddess of Liberty holding the torch out to those Russian refugees you are so fond of visiting on Wards Island." (Close to Manhattan, this location at that time sequestered sick or destitute immigrants waiting for clearance to enter the United States.) Postal noted that the poet was not invited to the statue's dedication ceremony. Although it is not known why this slight occurred, she would have already been too ill from cancer to attend.

Postal wrote that when "The New Colossus," long forgotten in the years since its 1883 publication, was rediscovered (by a friend of the poet, who saw the original souvenir pamphlet in a secondhand bookshop), the poem was literally reunited with the Statue of Liberty itself. In 1903, its words were engraved on a plaque affixed to the monument, where they can be seen today.



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MEET ISRAEL'S FLOOD CHASERS

By Uriel Heilman

It's an overcast, blustery morning in Israel's Negev Desert. Rain has been falling on and off for most of two days; some roads are closed due to flood hazards, and the floors of a gas station convenience store near Kibbutz Sde Boker are covered with khaki-colored mud tracked in from the wet desert sand.

For enthusiastic locals and other Israelis who have come to southern Israel from points north, the conditions are ideal for what in recent years has become a hot wintertime pursuit: flood chasing.

The flood hunters come out to see the rare desert sights that materialize with significant rainfall: mocha-colored waterfalls pouring off desert cliffs, normally dry streambeds suddenly swollen into rushing rivers, hidden desert spots with evanescent lakes and waterholes.

When a storm arrives and others see peril, the flood chasers find delight. After a rare late-season deluge toward the end of last March, I headed south from my home in central Israel for my own bout of flood chasing, and I was bowled over by what I encountered (not literally).

"On the news, they warn of a 'fear of floods.' But that annoys us; we say there's a 'chance for floods,'" said Ofir Tsimring, a resident of the desert town of Yeruham, who manages a couple of WhatsApp groups that track floods. "You don't have to be afraid of it; you can enjoy it. If you're careful, it's a holiday. The first time you encounter a flood and see the huge power of nature, and your insignificance compared to it, you see how special and beautiful it is, and you want to experience it again and again."



In the aftermath of a downpour, an ephemeral river flows in En Avdat National Park, a Negev Desert canyon.

Zin River flooding at En Avdat

Sde Boker bluff

Yeruham Lake dam

Nahal Og

Nahal Mamshit

Ein York'eam



All photos (with the exception of the photo provided by the Jewish National Fund) by Uriel Heilman.

At En Avdat National Park, more than a dozen cars are parked at a point on the road into the canyon where a fast-moving river that materialized only hours earlier has rendered the thoroughfare impassable. People mill about, dipping their hands into the water, photographing it from berms, sitting on boulders and gazing enraptured as the water moves swiftly through the desert brush. The flood chasers span the gamut: Israelis clad in winter hats and rain gear; a couple with an infant; young men in hoodies; whole families with grandparents in tow; religious women wearing traditional hair coverings; men in blue jeans and boots.

"Every time there is a flood, people flock to this spot," said area tour guide Arthur Du Mosch, who has brought a pair of tourists in his 4x4 Jeep with a spare tire mounted on the hood.

A bit farther up the windy road from the Sde Boker bluff, an overlook offers a distant view of an incredible waterfall some 100 feet tall rushing off the desert cliff. Before spectators get back into their vehicles, they trade tips about where else they can find floods nearby.

In addition to word of mouth, flood chasers use social media—Facebook groups, WhatsApp text chains and Instagram reels—to get the word out. They post photos and videos of the rare phenomena, trade tips and crowdsource questions about where to go to catch the flow.

"Se'ifim waterhole is filled with water!" wrote Yaffa Basch in a Hebrew Facebook group called Pursuers of Peace, Serenity and Floods, which has 125,000 members.

"We chased floods and we got a lot of love from nature!" enthused Shoshi Eiloz in another exuberant post filled with emojis. "I waited all night for Mador Stream, and, in the early morning hours, it kissed Zin Stream," she wrote in Hebrew, describing how the streams merged.

The holy grail of flood chasing is catching what's known as the first wave: the moment a flood materializes at a given point in the desert. In a dry riverbed, it looks like water filled with cocoa powder, appearing suddenly from around a bend and quickly overwhelming everything in its path. At desert overhangs, it's as if God suddenly turned on the faucet: It takes just seconds for the power of a flash flood to form a roaring waterfall off a previously dry desert bluff, sending earth-hued water over a cliff to crash onto the rocks below.

Experts know where the drainage routes meet and where the water may

accumulate into a rushing torrent. If it rains hard enough in Hebron, HaBesor Stream, east of Beersheba, will flow hours later. If it's pouring in Jerusalem, head 30 minutes away to the canyon at Nahal Og, just north of the Dead Sea. It may be sunny and clear at Qumran (where the Dead Sea Scrolls were found some 80 years ago in a cliffside desert cave), but if it rained enough in the southern Judean hills, you may see a mammoth waterfall spray off the western escarpment of the Dead Sea Rift Valley.

One of the more enthusiastic flood chasers I interviewed was Ido Frommer, a member of a 400-person WhatsApp group called Yeruham Floods that closely tracks forecasts for flooding in his corner of the Negev. With a background in meteorology honed during his 25 years in the air force, Frommer knew where to go when the rain comes.

"I really love nature and hikes," Frommer said. "There isn't a lot of rain in the desert, and when there is it's a celebration. Floods are a very special natural phenomenon. It lifts the spirit. My children love it and know where to go, and now even my granddaughters are getting into it."

[Weeks after we spoke for this story, tragically, Frommer was killed in a desert windsurfing accident on Israel's Independence Day.]

Flood chasing isn't necessarily dangerous, but Israelis routinely get into trouble in the winter, sometimes with deadly results.

"Most people don't understand the awesome power of the water," said Tsimring, who is a member of the Har HaNegev Search and Rescue Team, one of about a dozen all-volunteer teams around the country. "You say, 'Oh, I'll just drive through the flooded road with my big car.' There can be holes in the road that trap cars. Water can kill the engine. You don't know what's in the water, which

Credit: Courtesy of the Jewish National Fund

Volunteer members of the lifesaving Har HaNegev Search and Rescue Team. They are often praised for their heroic efforts in extricating over-enthusiastic flood chasers from dangerous situations.



is the color of chocolate. There could be boulders. You might not even have enough strength to open the car door because of the power of the rising water. Even if you see a car succeed in coming the opposite way, it may be different in your lane, or that car might be higher than yours, or a wave may come that will sweep you away."

The Har HaNegev 70-person rescue and recovery unit, which covers over 1 million square acres across southern Israel, performed 18 rescues between January and the end of March 2026.

The best way to avoid trouble, according to Tsimring: "Just don't go in the water, whether by car or by foot."

The deadliest flooding incident in recent years occurred in 2018, when 10 students from a pre-military academy were killed by a flash flood in Nahal Tzafit canyon after their principal, Yuval Kahan, failed to cancel the planned trip despite warnings from Israel's meteorological service. Kahan was sentenced to seven years in prison for his negligence.

Israel's search and rescue teams comprise experienced hiking guides, paramedics and doctors. They locate missing hikers, carry out water rescues during flooding and rappel down cliffs when necessary. They have specialized vehicles, drones and horses, and they coordinate with the Israel Police when they need helicopters for a rescue or recovery.

"We know the terrain very well, so we're hard to replace," Tsimring said. "We train when it's raining and cold. We practice rescues on the Jordan River —to rescue someone from the roof of his car in flowing water or someone being swept away. We do search missions to find a body."

Despite these dangers, flood chasing isn't actually an extreme sport. If you don't enter the water or a canyon where flash flooding is possible, you'll be fine. The Israel Police are vigilant about closing roads when there are flood hazards.



A spectacular waterfall near Kibbutz Sde Boker in the Negev Desert is set in a landscape that eerily evokes a mystical, faraway world. The photo was shot through the lens of a pair of binoculars.



Torrents of rushing water engorge an underground desert spring at Ein Yorke'eam, located in southern Israel. A popular destination for hikers, Ein Yorke'eam features a natural pool and a set of ancient Roman steps.

You don't need special knowledge or experience to chase floods. What you need to know is where to go.

The waterfalls and rivers that appear in Israel in winter are beautiful all over the country, but the real drama is in the desert. Unlike in the greener central plains and northern mountains, where the terrain differs and the soil can absorb much more moisture, in the desert the rivers and waterfalls form almost instantaneously and are short-lived. Sometimes, they flow just for hours or a day. If you miss that window, you can still enjoy the waterholes and wildflowers that the floods leave behind.

To catch the fleeting, magical torrents, people like Tsimring closely track clouds and rainfall to determine where flooding will occur based on the location, duration and intensity of rainfall. If the rain falls west of a certain line, the flooding sites that lead to the Mediterranean Sea will flood. If to the east, the waterfalls and rivers leading to the Dead Sea valley will materialize. The water moves at an average of four kilometers per hour; flood chasers plan accordingly.

It helps if you live in the desert and can move quickly to catch a flood, but the country is small enough to allow amateurs from anywhere in Israel to find them simply by consulting one of the crowdsourced flood-chasing groups for guidance.

If you plan it right, you may even catch a first wave. I haven't yet had that pleasure, but I'm eyeing the sky and praying for rain.

The Legend of Jewish Pirates: Fact, Fiction or Something in Between?

By Keren Peter

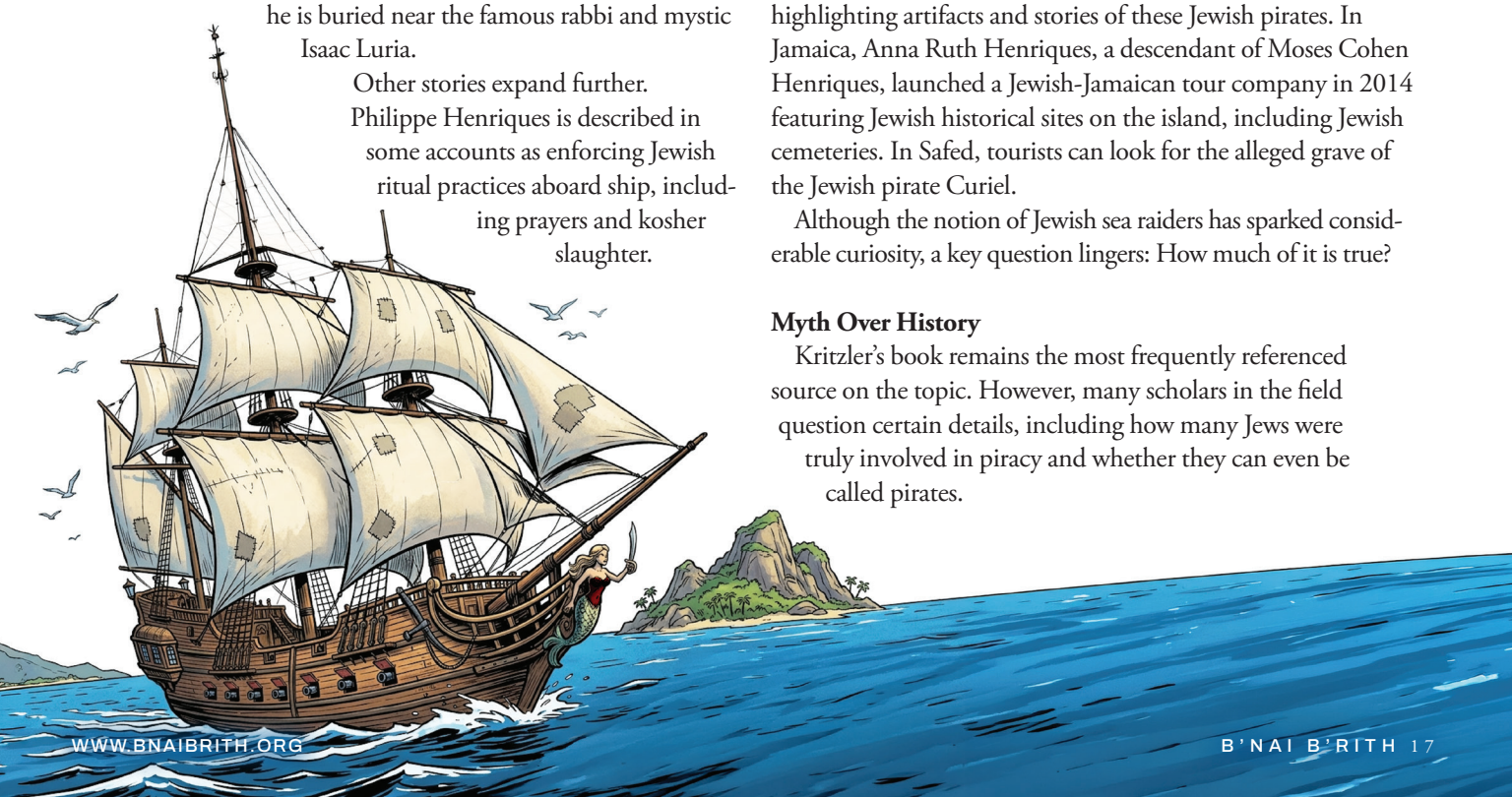
Legends of Jewish pirates raiding the ships of rival empires in the 16th and 17th centuries have become increasingly popular over the past two decades, fueled in large part by tales in the award-winning 2008 book "Jewish Pirates of the Caribbean" by the late Edward Kritzler.

Among the figures often referenced is Moses Cohen Henriques, who is believed to have worked with the infamous Captain Henry Morgan and taken part in the capture of a Spanish galleon, looting treasure that is estimated to be worth $1 billion today.

There is also Samuel Palache, described as the diplomatic right-hand man of the Sultan of Morocco before becoming a triple spy for rival empires and later turning to piracy.

Yaakov Curiel is believed to have traveled to the ancient Jewish town of Safed (located in present-day northern Israel) to study Kabbalah and repent for his piracy. Legend has it that he is buried near the famous rabbi and mystic Isaac Luria.

Other stories expand further. Philippe Henriques is described in some accounts as enforcing Jewish ritual practices aboard ship, including prayers and kosher slaughter.



Broader legends have also emerged around Jewish pirate life more generally—ships said to be kept kosher, crews that avoided raids on Shabbat and vessels with apparently Jewish names, such as the King David, the Queen Esther and the Young Abraham.

The "Jewish Pirates of the Caribbean," which was translated into five languages and quickly became a bestseller, continues to be frequently referenced in newspapers, scholarly articles and more. Inspired by Kritzler's book, Zina Segal, senior director of community impact and engagement at the Pozez JCC of Northern Virginia, engages audiences with the history of Jewish pirates through synagogue lectures, costume parties and educational programs. She says, "It's fun to mix the stories of Jewish pirates with what they already know about the Age of Exploration."

In different parts of the world, travelers can enjoy tours highlighting artifacts and stories of these Jewish pirates. In Jamaica, Anna Ruth Henriques, a descendant of Moses Cohen Henriques, launched a Jewish-Jamaican tour company in 2014 featuring Jewish historical sites on the island, including Jewish cemeteries. In Safed, tourists can look for the alleged grave of the Jewish pirate Curiel.

Although the notion of Jewish sea raiders has sparked considerable curiosity, a key question lingers: How much of it is true?

Myth Over History

Kritzler's book remains the most frequently referenced source on the topic. However, many scholars in the field question certain details, including how many Jews were truly involved in piracy and whether they can even be called pirates.



Credit: http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/. Courtesy Wellcome Library, London

Pirates' playground. An engraving depicting the harbors of Port Royal and Kingston, Jamaica, a well-known hub for pirates before Britain seized the island from Spain in 1655.

Stanley Mirvis, the Harold and Jean Grossman chair of Jewish Studies at Arizona State University, and Oren Okhovat, a postdoctoral associate and lecturer at Yale University, assert that although the book is entertaining, many of the stories are unverifiable and, in some cases, may even be dramatized.

"The topic of Jewish pirates is controversial among scholars," says Mirvis. "It often becomes a canvas for sensationalized storytelling that is not sufficiently grounded in historical sources."

Due to the clandestine nature of piracy and the incentive to conceal one's Jewish identity for fear of persecution, there is often a significant lack of reliable documentation to verify claims of an alleged pirate's Jewish identity.

Additionally, the term "pirate" itself raises questions. Mirvis explains that "many so-called pirates were in fact privateers, commissioned by governments to harass enemy shipping, though they were often treated as pirates by those on the receiving end." However, he emphasizes that there is a lack of reliable evidence proving Jews were either pirates or privateers.

Presentation of the Evidence

Even through layers of controversy, disagreement and limited documentation, there is still evidence that helps establish pieces of the historical puzzle.

Most alleged Jewish pirates and smugglers operated in the Caribbean. Significant Jewish migration to the region occurred in the 1600s, when Dutch Caribbean colonies welcomed Jews, many of whom had fled the Spanish Inquisition of 1492 and the Portuguese Inquisition of 1536.

Josette Capriles Goldish, a Curaçao native and author of "Once Jews: Stories of Caribbean Sephardim," found that as Jewish populations grew across the Caribbean islands, maritime professions became central to Jewish life, including trade, shipbuilding and navigation, with a handful engaged in piracy. Many port cities—including Willemstad, Curaçao; Bridgetown, Barbados; and Port Royal, Jamaica—a notorious pirate hub—were home to significant Jewish communities.

Okhovat notes that "being a merchant was tied both with Jewish mobility, but also with restrictions on what kind of professions Jews could do," adding that smuggling was a far more common practice among merchants than previously assumed, with trade laws often leaving room for informal or illicit exchanges.

While evidence suggests there were Jewish pirates, the scale of their presence is ambiguous. For example, ship records retrieved in the study "History of the Jews of the Netherlands Antilles" by Isaac S. and Suzanne A. Emmanuel (1970), list a variety of ships with Jewish-sounding names that sailed throughout the Caribbean during the 16th and 17th centuries. Despite the documentation that these ships existed, Okhovat argues it is difficult to verify whether they were pirate ships or whether they were captained or crewed by Jews. Many non-Jewish merchants would have also named their ships after figures from the Bible.

There are also historical records implying that many of these figures were Jewish. Palache was arrested in Plymouth on charges of espionage and piracy in November 1614 after being accused of acting as a triple spy for Spain, England and the Netherlands. Excerpts from the manuscript of the English Privy Council document the Spanish ambassador to England attempting to prosecute Palache, stating: "Whereas upon complaint heretofore made unto this Board…that one Samuel Palache, a Jew, lately arrived at Plymouth had committed piracy and outrage…."

Records show that Palache continued espionage and piracy after his arrest until settling down in a Jewish village in the Netherlands. Palache's grave is located in the Beth Haim Portuguese Jewish cemetery in the town of Ouderkerk aan de Amstel, with inscriptions written in Hebrew.

Sinan Reis, a high-ranking privateer and second-in-command to the Ottoman naval admiral Hayreddin Barbarossa, is referred to as "the famous Jewish pirate" in a letter sent to the Duke of Norfolk in 1533, and as "the Great Jew" in a 1528 document written by the governor of Portuguese India.

There is also documentation that Philippe Henriques was arrested in 1699 by the Cartagena Inquisition for allegedly attempting to convert his crew to Judaism, until his connections with political leaders in Cartagena and Curaçao led to his release. Sections of Henriques' trial in the Inquisition's archives are lost, but a letter he sent requesting assistance from Governor Bernagie of Curaçao and the West India Company is preserved in the Koninklijke Bibliotheek van Nederland.



Credit: Dolly442/www.wikipedia.org

Established in 1651, Curaçao's Mikvé Israel-Emanuel Synagogue is the oldest continuously functioning Jewish house of worship in the Western Hemisphere. The white sand covering its floors is thought to replicate the conditions of the desert, where the Israelites were exiled for 40 years, or to honor secret Jews (conversos) who muffled the sounds of their forbidden religious activities with sand.

While Philippe Henriques was open about his Judaism, he denied the charges of which he was accused.

Myth and Misinterpretation

Halfway across the world in Safed, Shraga Shmaidler, a tour guide, tells the story of Yaakov Curiel on his YouTube channel, where he describes Curiel as a Spanish-born descendant of conversos, who fled during the Inquisition, later converting to Judaism and voyaging to Jamaica to create a Jewish army to take revenge on Spain, before finally arriving in Safed to study Kabbalah.

However, it is difficult to verify whether or to what extent the story is true. While records of a Yaakov Curiel exist, Okhovat says multiple individuals with the same name appear across regions, making it challenging to fully confirm a single continuous biography.

Jean Laffite, a mysterious figure, is best known for his activities as a privateer during the War of 1812. Originally involved in piracy in the Caribbean, he later cooperated with the U.S. against the British, receiving a pardon and subsequently working as a privateer. In 1817, Laffite established a base on Galveston Island, Texas, where he carried out smuggling and privateering operations.



Credit: courtesy of Annie Wright, ©www.anniewrightphotography.com

The gravestone of Samuel Palache (c. 1550-1616), who is interred in the cemetery of Holland's oldest Jewish cemetery, Beth Haim at Ouderkerk aan de Amstel.

While much of Laffite's origins remain uncertain, his supposed memoir "Journal de Jean Laffite," surfaced in the 1950s, reportedly published by a relative. The text claims he was born to Sephardic Jewish parents whose ancestors had fled the Spanish Inquisition. Some historians question the authenticity of the memoir, though it has not been definitively disproven.

A major theory popularized in Kritzler's book is that Jewish piracy was an act of revenge against Spanish and Portuguese persecution. However, scholars, including Mirvis and Okhovat, argue that Jewish smugglers continued to work with these same countries, suggesting that their activities were more likely driven by economic opportunity and shaped by displacement, trade restrictions and shifting imperial alliances, rather than piracy.

Okhovat noted that although Jews were expelled from Spain and Portugal, they still had longstanding ties to businesses under their crowns. He added that their knowledge of Spanish and Portuguese helped them conduct trade and serve as middlemen between rival empires.

A Part of Jewish History

Segal, the Jewish educator with the Pozez JCC in Virginia, understands the questions surrounding the stories of Jewish pirates. She cross-references sources and stories before including them in her programs, noting that there are many inconsistencies. "You can see what is questionable, but there are also documented facts," she says. "I try to be as historically accurate as possible, but I am not a historian and I disclose that at the beginning of my presentations."

Nevertheless, she believes in the importance of sharing these stories. "After Oct. 7 and all the antisemitism, people just need some topics that are fun and engaging and that are about us [Jews]," she says. "I think it's giving people hope and reassurance of our creativity and resilience. You can see that the whole journey of Jews and Jewish pirates in the New



Credit: © Polona National Library/Wikipedia.org

Sinan Reis (prior to 1533- c.1556), referred to as "Sinan the Jew" and "the famous Jewish pirate," fought second-in-command to Ottoman naval admiral Hayreddin Barbarossa.

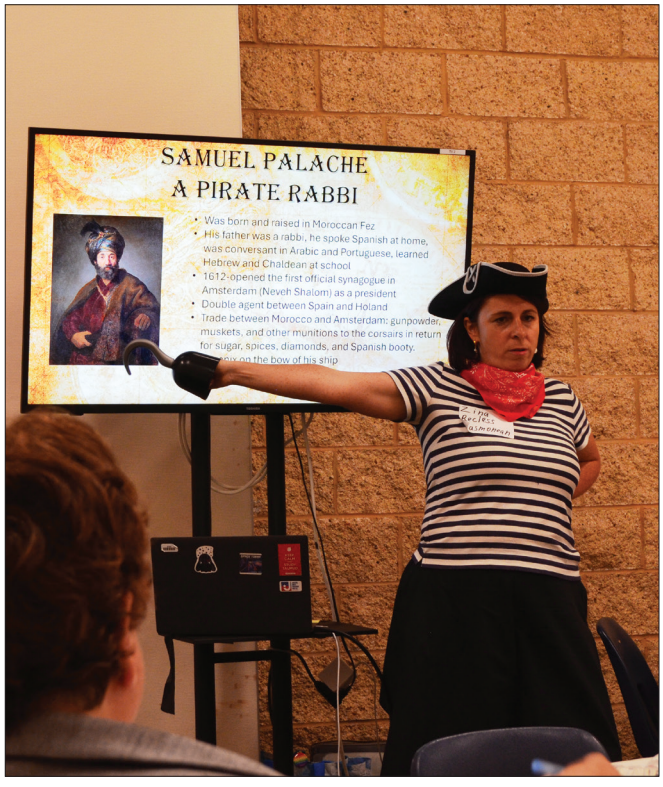


Photo credit: courtesy of Andrew Rice

Decked out in pirate garb, Zina Segal, senior director of community impact and engagement at the Pozez JCC in Fairfax, Virginia, "hooks" audience members with her colorful, historically accurate talks on the lives of the Jewish pirates.

World was mostly happening because we were expelled from so many places."

Despite casting doubt on the historical accuracy of Jewish piracy, Mirvis believes in the value of scholarship on the subject of Iberian Jews in the Caribbean. "I do think this work has relevance for today," he says, "particularly in thinking through issues like religious versus ethnic identities among Jews and the complex interplay between these two porous categories, or the ways Jews develop hybrid identities in diaspora."

Segal believes Jewish pirates provide a valuable lens for understanding Jewish history in the Americas. "You can learn the whole history of exploration of the New World through a Sephardi Jewish lens," Segal asserts. "Speaking about Jews in North America now, there is this notion of 'Ashkenormativity' and that Jews in North America are Ashkenazi, which is not true. The first Jews who helped found this New World were Sephardi."



Iconic American Toys and the Jewish Immigrants Who Brought Them to Life

By Deborah Lynn Blumberg

Jewish immigrant Morris Michtom, who fled Russian pogroms and arrived in America penniless in 1887, hung a cartoon of President Theodore Roosevelt in the window of his Brooklyn shop, which sold candy, sewing notions and other penny goods.

The 1902 caricature famously depicted Roosevelt refusing to shoot a bear, captured and tied to a tree by his hunting companions. To accompany the clipping, Michtom's seamstress wife, Rose, created a 2.5-foot bear from clothing scraps, stuffed it with sawdust and added button eyes. Displayed in the store window, "Teddy's bear" became a bestseller.

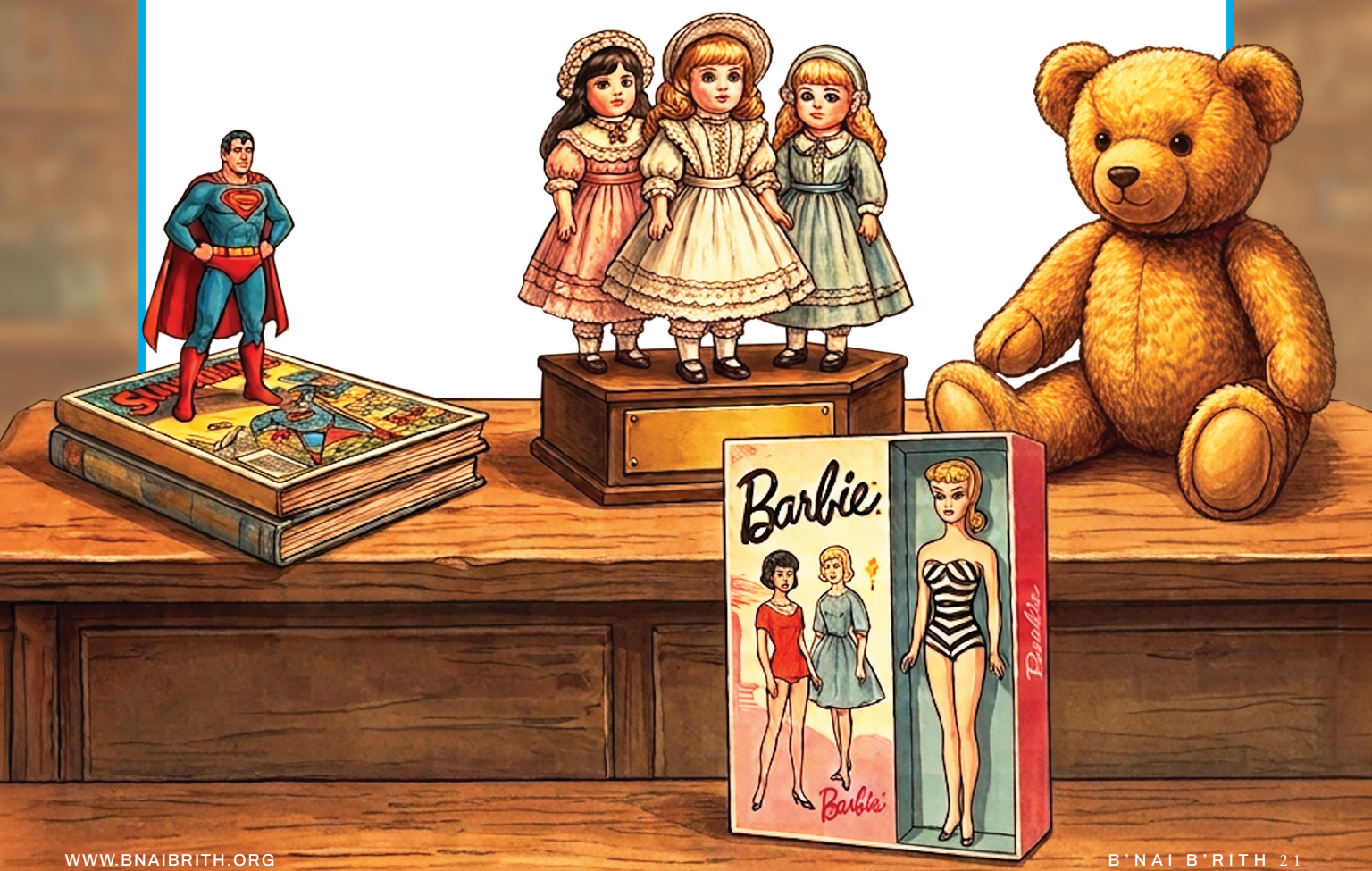




Photo: Library of Congress

Jewish people who experienced life's hardships created a burgeoning American industry that catered to the notion of a carefree childhood, a concept advanced by educators, psychologists and physicians, and social reformers. Prior to the 20th century, impulsive behavior was suppressed, and discipline imposed. Sons and daughters of impoverished parents were considered adults and expected to take on dangerous farm and factory work, like the little girls in this Lewis Hine photo.

Widely credited with inventing the teddy bear in the United States (designer Richard Steiff created a plush bear in Germany at roughly the same time), the Michtoms went on to found the Ideal Novelty and Toy Company. The business grew beyond bears to include dolls like Flossie Flirt in the 1920s and Betsy Wetsy in the 1930s, as well as action figures and board games, becoming one of the largest U.S. toy companies of its era. And it was far from the only successful Jewish-owned business in the industry.

Ideal was one of dozens of toys and comics businesses launched in the 20th century by Jewish immigrants or their children. The list spans companies like Toys "R" Us, toys such as Mr. Potato Head, cultural icons including Superman and Popeye, and even Barbie. With imagination, resourcefulness and hustle, these often poor, struggling first-generation Jewish entrepreneurs helped transform American childhood from one of farm or factory work into a modern, mass-market culture of play and imagination. A childhood they themselves had been denied in poverty-stricken Europe and the crowded tenements of their youth, but one they created for others.

"These Jews came to the U.S. with little more than a suitcase held together with string," says Michael Kimmel, a SUNY distinguished professor emeritus of sociology and gender studies, and author of "Playmakers: The Jewish Entrepreneurs Who Created the Toy Industry in America," who happens to be the Michtoms' great-grandnephew. "They came with an idea of childhood that was more progressive and that challenged the prevailing view, and they ended up creating the material culture of our childhoods."

Having grown up in poverty or fear, the Eastern European Jews who arrived en masse on America's shores from the 1880s to about 1920 believed childhood should mean safety and imagination rather than labor or survival, a vision they were determined to build despite immigrating with limited resources. Outsiders, shut out from traditional industries like law and finance, they turned to entrepreneurship.

"The bias against Jews then was strong," says Chris Byrne, editor in chief of Global Toy News. "You couldn't get a



Photo: Smithsonian Museum of Natural History

A teddy bear made by Morris and Rose Michtom in 1903 is on view at the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History. According to "Playmakers" author Michael Kimmel, boys from a nearby yeshiva helped make the toys in their early years. Later, Michtom's Ideal Novelty and Toy Companys produced an upscale version featuring "champagne velvet paws" and "golden mohair joints."

corporate job being a foreign-born Jew. So, a lot of these people created their own toys."

In his book "From the Lower East Side to Hollywood: Jews in American Popular Culture," historian Paul Buhle suggests Jews' marginality at the time drove the "edge" they needed to create, improve and invent.

The toy industry was particularly ripe with possibility. For much of the 19th and early 20th centuries, Germany—especially cities and towns like Nuremberg and Sonneberg—was the global center of toy manufacturing, exporting most commercial toys and dolls to the United States. In 1910, Germany sold 40 million dolls abroad, while its metal factories made up to 100,000 toy soldiers daily. That dominance was disrupted by World War I, which fueled anti-German sentiment and led to tariffs on toy imports into the U.S. Suddenly, American entrepreneurs had to fill a gap long supplied by foreign imports.

The U.S. toy industry was new, lightly regulated and largely absent the exclusionary networks pervasive in more established industries. Success in this emerging market depended less on elite credentials and more on creativity, ingenuity and entrepreneurial drive. At the same time, driven by falling birth rates, urbanization and educational reforms, the American notion of childhood was rapidly shifting from one defined by work to one increasingly shaped by play. The National Child Labor Committee, founded in 1904, fought child labor and advocated the idea of playing to learn.

"Jewish people were overrepresented in the founding of early American toy companies, and there was a lot of innovation coming from these creators," says Stephen Jacobs, scholar-in-residence at the Strong National Museum of Play in Rochester, New York. According to him, some 40% of the 101 Toy Industry Hall of Fame inductees were born into Jewish families.

Many immigrants started out making products unrelated to toys before shifting their business model. "A majority of founders during these early decades of the 20th century had a small- or medium-sized business doing something else," Jacobs adds. "Then, they made a toy that really took off, and that shifted things for them."

For example, brothers Hillel, Herman and Henry Hassenfeld left modern-day Moldova in 1903 and began a business by lining pencil boxes with cloth in Providence, Rhode Island. That operation evolved into pencil and box manufacturing, then into toy nurse and doctor bags, and eventually into toys. Their company, Hasbro, helped popularize the term "action figure" with G.I. Joe, launched in 1964, and later produced hits like Transformers and My Little Pony.

Ruth Handler collaborated with her husband, Elliot Handler, and his business partner on a company that began making plastic furniture for dollhouses and picture frames from leftover airplane materials. Mattel Creations was founded in 1945. Toy guns came next for Mattel, with its Fanner 50 breakout cap gun in 1957, then an iconic doll in 1959 that would become a global phenomenon: Barbie.

For Ruth Handler, the toy industry opened unexpected doors. "Jewish women were able to have leadership positions they couldn't have in other companies and industries," Byrne says. "Toys were very trailblazing for these women."

Years before Mattel, Bertha (Beatrice) Alexander Behrman, later known as "Madame Alexander," founded the Alexander Doll Company in 1923 at age 28. The daughter of an Austrian Jewish mother and Russian-born father, she was raised on New York's Lower East Side and grew up around dolls; her stepfather, Moritz Alexander, sold toys from a pushcart and worked as a "doll doctor" opening a doll hospital the year she was born, repairing fragile European porcelain dolls.

When the post-World War I embargo on German products threatened to put doll hospitals out of business, Bertha



Photo: Gabe the Pianist/Wikipedia

Mme. Alexander used innovative materials and technology to create the high-quality, elaborately dressed dolls her brand became known for. Often modeled after movie stars, royalty and literary heroines, the dolls remain popular with children and collectors. Born on New York's Lower East Side, Alexander grew up watching her stepfather repair porcelain dolls.



Photo: UCLA Library/Wikimedia Commons

Mattel's Ruth Handler (née Mosko) created Barbie, a teenage doll whose appearance reflected American beauty standards. Joined by her boyfriend, Ken, Barbie encouraged girls to imagine lives beyond the kitchen and nursery.

Alexander and her sisters made and sold Red Cross nurse dolls at their stepfather's shop, which took off. Bertha continued to reimagine dolls, creating less-fragile ones for girls and boys and introducing innovations like sleeping eyes.

"Dolls should contribute to a child's understanding of people, other times and other places," she said in a 1978 interview. By the 1930s, Madame Alexander's company was the country's third largest doll manufacturer.

And the list of toy companies launched by Jews goes on. Joshua Lionel Cohen, born on the Lower East Side to Polish Lithuanian immigrants, invented an electric-powered model train that expanded into Lionel Trains, still the world's most prominent toy train manufacturer.

Ohio-born toy inventor Reuben Klamer, the son of Romanian Jewish immigrants, created the Game of Life. George Hansburg, born in Ukraine in 1887 to German Jewish parents, came to America alone, where he learned English and put himself through night school at age 18 before inventing the pogo stick. Milton Levine, the son of Russian Jews, created Uncle Milton's Ant Farm, a hit that put his three kids through college.

Decades later, that same immigrant-driven ethos could still be found on factory floors. Jay Foreman, CEO and founder of Basic Fun!, a Florida toy company known for reviving brands like Care Bears, Tonka trucks and the more-than-100-year-old Tinkertoys, joined the family-run plush toy company, Fable Toys, in Brooklyn in the 1980s. There he encountered founders in their 70s, Eastern European immigrants who still worked the cutting tables and ran sales. Their hands-on approach reflected the same hustle and resourcefulness that defined the industry from the start, he recalls.

"They had amazing energy and work ethic," Foreman says. "If you had a little bit of money and were dedicated to working hard and with a bit of luck, you could make it, and so many did."

But Jewish entrepreneurs didn't just shape toys. In the 1930s and 1940s especially, their creativity spilled into comic books and popular media as well. "The world of comic book creators reads like the attendance list at a local yeshiva," Kimmel writes in his book. Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster created Superman,



Photo: Wikipedia/Warner Brothers Games

Superman was sent to Earth by his parents on an intergalactic Kindertransport, when he became the nebbishy Clark Kent. He concealed his identity (and his biceps) using his extraordinary powers to purge Metropolis of evil. In the 1930s and 1940s, Superman battled Nazis and fascists in the comics. Kimmel writes that he was "a distinctly American Messiah, created by American Jews."

described by scholars as a distinctly "Jewish" superhero, while Jack Kirby, the son of Austrian Jewish immigrants, drew on the grit of the Lower East Side to bring Captain America to life.

Excluded from the advertising industry, comic book artists created stories and characters their toymaking Jewish counterparts would ultimately produce, and other Jewish entrepreneurs would sell, including Charles Lazarus, who opened his first Toys "R" Us store in Maryland in the 1950s.

For Kimmel, one of the most remarkable stories of Jewish entrepreneurs who shaped American childhoods is that of Hans Augusto Reyersbach and his wife, Margret Rey. In Paris in 1940 after the Nazis marched in, the Jewish couple built two makeshift bikes from spare parts, fled France for Spain and ended up in New York.

In their backpacks, they carried early drawings for a children's book about an impish monkey called Fifi. Their eventual, reimagined book, "Curious George," became a quick bestseller and helped define the modern picture book.

According to Kimmel, the mitzvah of sharing these origin stories is that parents can pass them on while reading a "Curious George" book or playing with a Barbie alongside their children. "It enriches their own experience, and gives them something extra, real added value, to share with their children."

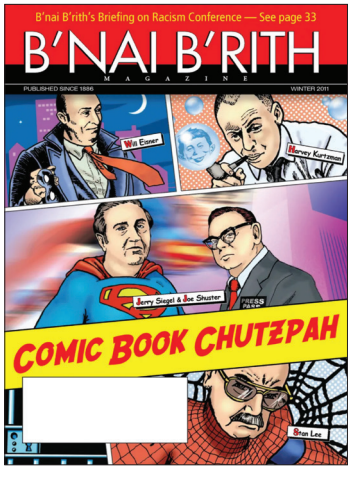
That sense of connection across generations has long given toys their enduring power. Classics created decades ago by Jewish entrepreneurs, from train sets to dolls, are still played with today, allowing parents and grandparents to revisit pieces of their own childhoods. As Foreman puts it, these toys "bring generations together," turning play into a shared language between past and present.

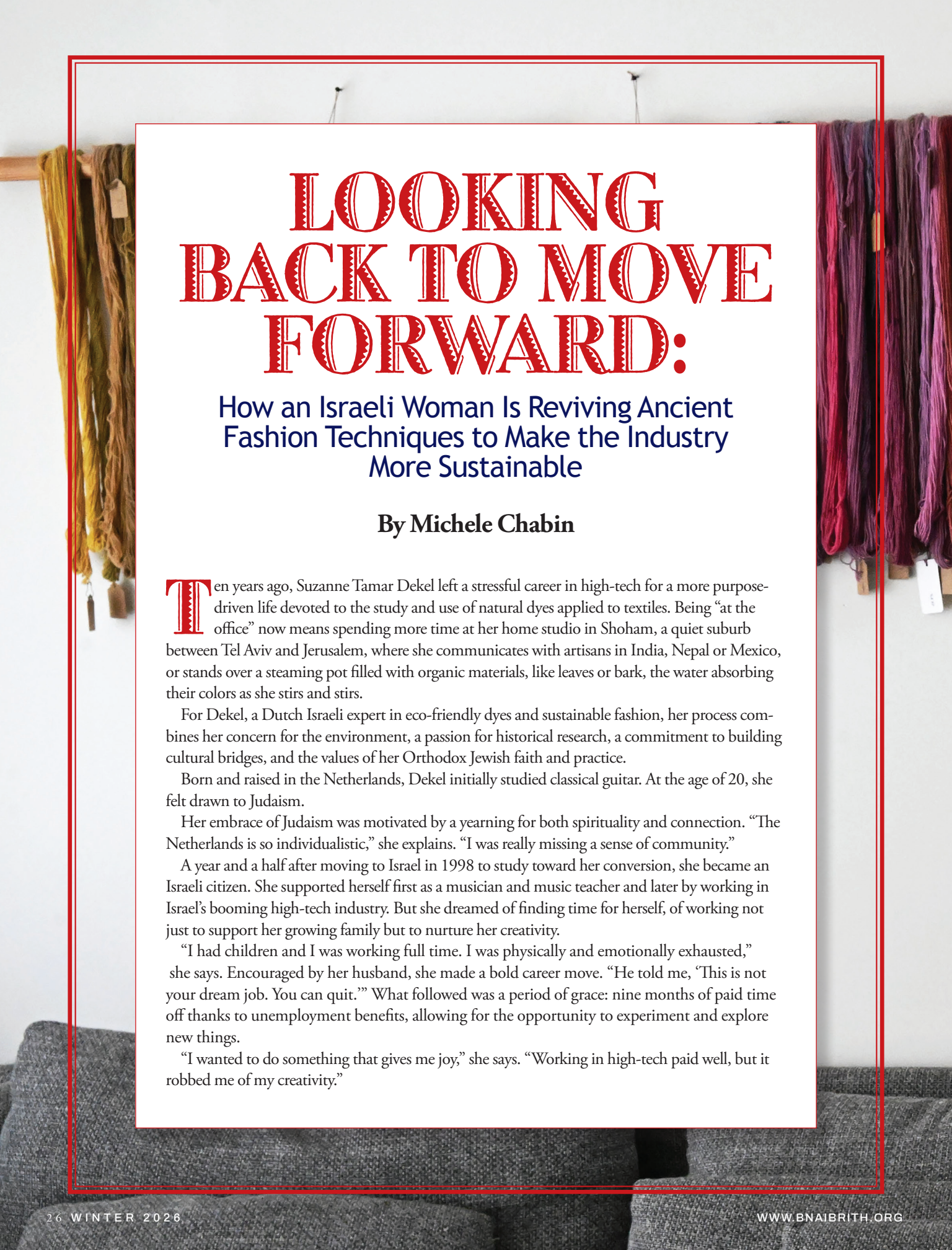


Photo: Owen3droblox/wikipedia

Shapeshifting bots, the Transformers were invented to combat dark forces, calling to mind the legend of the Golem, a mythical creature fabricated by the Rabbi of Prague to protect the Jews during pogroms. Kimmel notes that their powerful leader, Optimus Prime (above), commands a spaceship called "the ark."

Most of us know the alter egos of such iconic comic book heroes as Superman, Spider-Man and Batman. But what about the men behind the men behind the masks—who were these creative artists and writers? Well, many of them were Jewish. Read about the Jewish pioneers in comic books and how their Judaism may have influenced key characteristics of these American heroes, in the Winter 2011 issue of B'nai B'rith Magazine.





LOOKING BACK TO MOVE FORWARD:

How an Israeli Woman Is Reviving Ancient Fashion Techniques to Make the Industry More Sustainable

By Michele Chabin

Ten years ago, Suzanne Tamar Dekel left a stressful career in high-tech for a more purpose-driven life devoted to the study and use of natural dyes applied to textiles. Being "at the office" now means spending more time at her home studio in Shoham, a quiet suburb between Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, where she communicates with artisans in India, Nepal or Mexico, or stands over a steaming pot filled with organic materials, like leaves or bark, the water absorbing their colors as she stirs and stirs.

For Dekel, a Dutch Israeli expert in eco-friendly dyes and sustainable fashion, her process combines her concern for the environment, a passion for historical research, a commitment to building cultural bridges, and the values of her Orthodox Jewish faith and practice.

Born and raised in the Netherlands, Dekel initially studied classical guitar. At the age of 20, she felt drawn to Judaism.

Her embrace of Judaism was motivated by a yearning for both spirituality and connection. "The Netherlands is so individualistic," she explains. "I was really missing a sense of community."

A year and a half after moving to Israel in 1998 to study toward her conversion, she became an Israeli citizen. She supported herself first as a musician and music teacher and later by working in Israel's booming high-tech industry. But she dreamed of finding time for herself, of working not just to support her growing family but to nurture her creativity.

"I had children and I was working full time. I was physically and emotionally exhausted," she says. Encouraged by her husband, she made a bold career move. "He told me, 'This is not your dream job. You can quit.'" What followed was a period of grace: nine months of paid time off thanks to unemployment benefits, allowing for the opportunity to experiment and explore new things.

"I wanted to do something that gives me joy," she says. "Working in high-tech paid well, but it robbed me of my creativity."



Dekel's Process

From her home in Shoham, in central Israel, Dekel experiments with and employs natural dyes dating back to ancient civilizations, where plants and minerals (as well as insects) were the primary sources of color. She has observed that: "eco-dyeing has become an art form, combining traditional techniques with modern sustainability principles to create textiles that are both beautiful and environmentally friendly."





All photos by Debbie Hill.









Changing Careers

Freed from the daily grind, Dekel had time to make clothes and toys for her young son. While choosing fabrics, she began to worry about the dangers of synthetic dyes and materials, knowing that small children put everything in their mouths. That concern led her to the world of natural botanical dyes.

Soon, her days took on a different rhythm. She would take her son to daycare, then go to the nearby Shoham forest to forage for plants and leaves. Once home, she placed these organic materials in a pot, where they simmered for hours, to learn exactly what colors she could produce through days and nights of experimentation. For a time, she created delicate scarves and other textiles with leafy patterns made from the leaves she foraged and sold them at local craft fairs around Israel.

"It was self-soothing," she says of the natural dyeing process. "It restores the soul."

Dekel explains that natural dyes can be made from plants, including flowers, hardwood, berries and leaves, as well as insects and snails. But it takes more than simply boiling a flower; it requires a knowledge of chemistry.

"Fabric and plant materials don't stick [together], so I'm using metallic salts or mordants—salts that appear in the crust of the earth—to bind them," she explains. "It's really not complicated."

Today, Dekel's professional life is focused on supply, research and education.

She runs a specialized online shop, the Natural Dye Store, which offers rare and historically significant supplies and materials for natural dyers, including individuals, businesses, nonprofits and museums. Here, one can find organic dye sources and hard-to-find substances such as murex, a snail-derived pigment associated with colors mentioned in the Bible, and dyes used by the Mayans and other ancient civilizations. She studies pre-modern dyeing techniques—sometimes working from 16th-century recipes or extrapolating from the Torah—and attempts to recreate them.

Living in Israel has influenced Dekel's aesthetic sensibilities. She speaks of an

"Israeli palette" defined by earth tones and subtle shades of gray and green. Yet, despite the muted tones often depicted in the costumes of Bible-themed Hollywood productions, the people of the ancient world produced and used brightly colored dyes.

"Then, like now, people liked to dress up and feel beautiful," she says, referencing ancient Egyptian art as a more accurate portrayal of ancient clothing. On a ritualistic level, the Torah instructs the Children of Israel to attach a thread of tekhelet (a brilliant blue derived from snails) on the fringe of each corner of their tzitzit.

Today, Dekel's shop mostly sells dyes and textiles made by others. In recent years, she has focused more on her research, which is driven by curiosity and the belief that pre-modern dyeing methods offer viable alternatives to today's environmentally destructive practices.

She is appalled at the way the fashion industry manufactures garments and by its overarching message that clothing should be bought, then discarded, in an endless loop of consumerism.

"The industry is the number one or two polluter of waterways," she says. Synthetic fabrics like nylon, polyester, spandex and acrylic, which are derived from petroleum, are nonbiodegradable. "You're not throwing it away. You're just moving the problem somewhere else."

For this reason, she rarely buys new clothes, relying instead on quality handmade or secondhand items made of natural materials like wool, linen and silk.

Judaism as Inner Compass

Dekel's Orthodox Jewish values guide her in everything she does, both personally and professionally.

She does not work on Shabbat or Jewish holidays and declines professional opportunities that conflict with her observance. "Sometimes that makes me very sad," she admits, "but I understand that the world doesn't revolve around me." She keeps kosher, even if it means subsisting on rice and bananas in far-flung locations.

Judaism also informs her ethics and teaching style. She speaks of an "inner compass" that governs her business practices: paying artisans upfront, avoiding aggressive bargaining and maintaining integrity in all dealings.

She bans lashon hara (harmful speech) from her workshops by explicitly telling participants not to gossip or discuss politics.

"I tell them: The world is confusing right now. But here, we focus on what we can influence, which is color." Instead of upsetting workshop participants, her strong values have engendered respect, she says. "People know I'm consistent. That builds authority."

War, Antisemitism, Sexism

Despite Dekel's intention to "leave all the politics at the door," as she says, the outside world often disrupts her work.

During the 40 days that Iran fired ballistic missiles at Israel, beginning on Feb. 28, 2026, one of those missiles landed a few hundred feet from her home. The war prevented her from working in her warehouse 16 miles away.

Global antisemitism has negatively impacted Dekel's business; some clients refuse to take her workshops or purchase her products because she is an Israeli citizen.

She has also encountered sexism in traditionally patriarchal academic and religious circles.

Some rabbis have told Dekel what a color mentioned in the Bible should be, without understanding the dyeing process. "I'm a dyer. I know certain things, and I know when something is impossible," she says. Dekel is co-writing a paper for an international journal on the use of the color red during the First and Second Temple periods.

Rather than losing sleep over these problems, she puts her energy into her own research and quietly serves as a consultant to rabbis, archaeologists and others who seek her expertise.

"I prefer to be in my studio and workshops," she says.

Nevertheless, she still seeks opportunities to venture outside them—especially to collaborate with others around the world who share her passions and priorities.

Cross-Cultural Collaborations

One of the most rewarding aspects of Dekel's work is cross-cultural collaboration. She has taught workshops in Mexico, Indonesia, Israel, the United States, France and the Netherlands, collaborating with local women. She shares technical skills and her commitment to sustainable living. These workshops emphasize cultural exchange, bringing together participants and local artisans.

In Mexico, for example, she invited village women to join her workshops to share their unique embroidery techniques, but also to learn how to dye their own threads. Dekel paid them for their time and expertise and asked them to set their own price.

"I want them to feel that their craft has value," she says.

Some of her collaborations involve Muslim artisans. She is planning a 2027 cultural tour in Indonesia with a Muslim partner, a project she describes as both meaningful and joyful.

Inen Kurnia, Dekel's Muslim workshop partner in Indonesia, says her Israeli colleague is a "talented artist and a caring and generous person. I deeply respect her passion for empowering women and preserving traditional textile knowledge.

"One of the beautiful things in our collaboration is how we embrace religion and cultural differences with openness, respect and curiosity," Kurnia says. "We learn from each other's religion, culture and values, and ways of working. That diversity has made our friendship and collaboration even stronger."

By focusing on work rather than politics, Dekel is able to build connections across religious and cultural lines.

"You would be surprised how amazing we get along," Dekel says. "We focus on what connects us and not what divides us."

Congratulations to us! B'nai B'rith Magazine's Winter 2025 edition has won top prizes at the American Jewish Press Association Rockower Awards for Journalistic Excellence.



- **FIRST PLACE: Award for Journalistic Excellence in Covering Zionism, Aliyah and Israel**—*"A Dead Sea journey: Biking through the Negev"*—Uriel Heilman
- **FIRST PLACE: Award for Excellence in Writing about Jewish Heritage and Jewish Peoplehood in Europe**—*"YIVO at 100: Preserving Ashkenazi culture of the past for the present and future"*—Beryl Benderly
- **FIRST PLACE: Award for Excellence in North American Jewish History**—*"Ain't No Back to a Merry-Go-Round: Desegregating Glen Echo amusement park"*—Deborah Lynn Blumberg
- **HONORABLE MENTION: Award for Excellence—Publication Design**—Simeon Montesa and B'nai B'rith staff
- **SECOND PLACE: Wild Card Category—Award for Excellence in Long-Form Writing**—*"A Dead Sea journey: Biking through the Negev"*—Uriel Heilman and Simeon Montesa

B'nai B'rith would like to recognize and thank the Ruby Diamond Foundation for its recent generous contribution.

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Students Confront Antisemitism on College Campuses in None Shall Be Afraid Essay Contest

As antisemitism in the United States has reached unprecedented levels, universities are now flashpoints where Jewish students face increasing hate, hostility and exclusion. Through the fifth annual None Shall Be Afraid Essay Contest, B'nai B'rith invited college students to examine the current climate of antisemitism in the United States, particularly on college campuses or within their own communities, and reflect on how this new reality shapes their sense of responsibility as students.

Students from across the country submitted powerful essays on their experiences, the challenges they have faced, and the ways they have responded to rising antisemitism. The top three essay writers were awarded scholarships of $2,500, $1,000 and $500.

In his first-place winning essay, Aviel Rabbani, now a freshman at the University of Maryland, reflects on experiences that shaped his proud Jewish identity, from visiting Poland to marching in the Israel Day Parade, and the lessons he carries with him as he begins college in the years following the Oct. 7, 2023, Hamas terror attacks.

Second-place winner Kayla Chamoy, a student at Stony Brook University, describes how experiencing antisemitism in high school and college led her to found her school's Students Against Antisemitism chapter and deepen her involvement in Jewish campus life. Despite facing hostility, including the vandalism of her campus Hillel, she expresses her commitment to education, advocacy and journalism as tools to combat antisemitism.

Sydney Bailis, a student at Towson University, earned third place for describing how rising antisemitism after Oct. 7, 2023, has made Jewish students, including herself, feel unsafe and self-conscious about expressing their identity on campus. She reflects on her concerns about displaying a mezuzah on her dorm room doorframe and argues that love, kindness and moral integrity can guide students through violence and uncertainty.

Learn more about B'nai B'rith's None Shall Be Afraid initiative.

2026 WINNING ESSAY BY AVIEL RABBANI

Freshman, University of Maryland

Every day I wear my Star of David necklace and tzitzit without thinking twice. It has always just been part of who I am, something that felt completely natural. Now, though, it carries a different weight: it is a symbol I'm more aware of as I start a new chapter on a college campus and think about what it means to be openly Jewish in today's world. Being openly Jewish has shifted from feeling natural to feeling like an act of courage. My necklace and tzitzit remind me to stay true to who I am, even as my surroundings change.

I grew up in a vibrant Jewish community. There were kosher supermarkets and restaurants, Jewish schools, and many community events. On Shabbat and holidays, the streets were quieter, and "Shabbat Shalom" could be heard everywhere I went. By now, I have realized that this comfort was a privilege. Outside that bubble, I've come to understand that for many Jews, living openly as Jews is rarely easy and often requires a level of strength I never had to think about.

continued on page 32



Photo courtesy of Aviel Rabbani

Aviel Rabbani
Freshman, University of Maryland

2026 WINNING ESSAY BY AVIEL RABBANI

continued from page 31

According to the ADL, antisemitic incidents have reached record highs in recent years, and this has been especially visible on college campuses following Oct. 7, 2023. This is not just something I have read; I have seen it firsthand.

Every year, I march in the Israel Day Parade in New York City, a peaceful celebration of identity and community. Yet standing there, I have heard chants of "death to the Jews" directed at us from the crowd. Not at a policy. Not at a government. At us for simply being proud Jews. This moment made what once felt distant feel immediate. We return each year to show that their hatred will not stop us from celebrating who we are.

What happened in the days after Oct. 7, 2023 can't be ignored. Students at colleges and universities all over the country, including Harvard, Columbia, NYU, UCLA and others were threatened, hostage posters were torn down, and protests were more about blaming Jews than mourning the tragedy. As Dan Senor, author of "Start-Up Nation" and "The Genius of Israel" and co-host of the "Call Me Back" podcast, pointed out, "The outrage was not directed at those doing the killing but at Jews for objecting to being killed." It was unsettling that the line between victim and target seemed to have disappeared.

A few months ago, I traveled to Poland with my gap year program to better understand the lived experiences of Jews during the Holocaust. There was no single moment that changed me. It was the accumulation of experiences: the silence, the scale of destruction, and the realization that those who were killed were people much like me. They lived openly as Jews, never imagining this to come. Walking through these places did not feel like just learning history; it felt like something I am supposed to carry with me. I came back understanding that Jewish survival is not a mistake; it exists because our ancestors refused to disappear. As I prepare to attend the University of Maryland, I am reflecting on the kind of student I would like to be and the contribution that I hope to make on campus. Identities are often put to the test during college. Some students grow more secure in who they are, while others become more guarded or even ashamed of where they came from. I want to be an active member of the Jewish community on campus, living with pride and resilience. I want to be someone who can explain what really happened when there's confusion or misinformation, and someone others can lean on when they don't feel comfortable speaking up for themselves.

My grandfather always said that being Jewish is not passive. March of the Living showed me why that has always been true, and the world I am stepping into makes it feel more urgent than ever. I carry this not as a burden but as a sense of purpose. The generations before me did not survive so that I could remain silent. They survived so that I would show up, speak out, and live openly as a Jew committed to keeping our story alive.

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B'NAI B'RITH IN YOUR COMMUNITY

IMPACT

AND AROUND THE GLOBE

Welcome to IMPACT!

In a rapidly changing world, staying informed matters. This issue of IMPACT brings together news, perspectives and stories from across B'nai B'rith's global network, connecting members and supporters with the work taking place in communities around the world.

Jump in to explore issues shaping our Jewish communities, along with thoughtful analysis and observations on the continuing rise of antisemitism and the challenges it presents. From advocacy and international affairs to programs making a difference locally, these stories offer a broader view of the work B'nai B'rith is doing every day.

IMPACT is more than a newsletter—it is a way for our worldwide community to stay connected, informed and engaged. In uncertain times, understanding what is happening around us helps us remain aware and alert, while reminding us that we are part of B'nai B'rith—a global network standing together for Jewish communities, Israel and a safer and stronger future. Thanks for reading.

With appreciation,
The IMPACT Staff

IMPACT is published quarterly online—posted on the home page, with back issues archived. Please visit the website to read new additional content.



As Middle East Hostilities Intensify, B'nai B'rith Advocates in Geneva and Paris

Delegation Engages with New Egyptian UNESCO Chief and Speaks at Human Rights Council on Iran Offenses



The delegates were in France for the run-up to a session of the Executive Board of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), with Shai Cohen (seated, right), Israeli ambassador to the Multilateral Organizations in Paris and David Nezer (standing, second from left), deputy ambassador for diplomatic affairs on behalf of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

A B'nai B'rith International leadership delegation has conducted a marathon of meetings with ambassadors in Geneva and Paris to advocate for the Jewish people as the United States and Israel pressed ahead in an unprecedented military confrontation with Iran. The nearly 60 meetings with senior diplomats from around the globe took place during the main yearly session of the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) and in the run-up to a session of the Executive Board of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

Over the course of the week, led by B'nai B'rith International President Robert B Spitzer and Honorary CEO and Senior Advisor Daniel S. Mariaschin, the organization's representatives from multiple countries descended on the two European U.N. hubs to underscore the genuine impediments to peace in the Middle East, demand an end to singular mistreatment of the Jewish state at the world body and urge action against a frightening wave of global antisemitism.

B'nai B'rith advocates in these and other U.N. settings on communal priorities every year, but the effort has taken on exceptional urgency by the current geopolitical conditions. On this visit, leaders of the delegation met with new UNESCO Director-General Khaled El-Enany of Egypt—who now heads an agency that has been responsible for preserving heritage sites and undertaken efforts, some in cooperation with B'nai B'rith and other Jewish groups, to combat antisemitism online and through education, and to promote Holocaust remembrance.



B'nai B'rith mission members, photographed with Deike Potzel (third from right), European Union ambassador to the United Nations in Geneva, traveled to Switzerland to attend the main yearly session at the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC).

Please scan to read more:

Trilateral Mission Explores Cooperation Between Israel, Cyprus and Greece



Leaders from B'nai B'rith joined forces with executives from two Greek American philanthropies for a mission to Israel, the Republic of Cyprus and Greece, where they met with Thanos Dokos (sixth from right, holding box), national security advisor to the prime minister of Greece.

B'nai B'rith International leaders, including President Robert B Spitzer and Honorary CEO and Senior Advisor Daniel S. Mariaschin, joined executives from the American Hellenic Institute (AHI) and the American Hellenic Educational Progressive Association (AHEPA)—Greek American philanthropies advocating on behalf of Greece, its culture and heritage—in engaging with high-ranking government and military officials during the sixth Trilateral Leadership Mission to Israel, the Republic of Cyprus and Greece. The program, initiated by the three groups and the Conference of Presidents in 2014, occurred this year in late February.

As in past missions, the delegation had a firsthand look at the progress of major economic, energy, defense and security initiatives resulting from partnerships forged by the three countries. Organized by the B'nai B'rith World Center-Jerusalem, the Israel portion of the trip included briefings with Greek, Cypriot and Israeli officers serving at the Civil-Military Coordination Center, as well as conferences with the nations' important leaders, including President Isaac Herzog. Mission participants attended official receptions at the Cypriot and Greek embassies; a special meeting was arranged with U.S. Ambassador to Israel Mike Huckabee.

Delegation members also visited the parents of Greek Israeli terrorist victim Ionas Karussis.

The schedule in Greece included meetings with Minister of National Defense Nikolaos Dendias; National Security Advisor Thanos Dokos; Deputy Minister of Tourism Anna Karmanli; Deputy Foreign Minister Ioannis Loverdos; and Israel Ambassador Noam Katz. Delegates were briefed at Greek Army headquarters by senior members of the general staff and visited the special forces training center in Nea Peramos, for land, sea and air exercises. B'nai B'rith leaders also were the guests of Athens' century-old B'nai B'rith Philon Lodge at a special event.

In Cyprus, the final destination, mission delegates conferred with Minister of Energy and Commerce Michael Damianos and other top cabinet members and exchanged views with Ambassador of the State of Israel to Cyprus Oren Anolik.

Mariaschin observed: "At a time when Greece, Cyprus and Israel are working even more closely together to promote peace and stability in the eastern Mediterranean, our joint visit was both timely and appreciated. We look forward to further cooperation with our friends in the Hellenic American community on issues high up on our mutual agendas."

A Legacy of Service: My 50 Years Working on Behalf of Israel and the Jewish People

By Daniel S. Mariaschin
Honorary CEO and Senior Advisor

No one has ever accused me of being at a loss for words.

But just thinking about writing this column put me into procrastination mode. What do you say after 38 years at B'nai B'rith and a career in Jewish communal service that is now beyond 50 years? I don't remember when I first learned about B'nai B'rith. There was no lodge in my New Hampshire hometown. Perhaps it was in graduate school, where I pursued a degree in contemporary Jewish studies. More likely, it was during my first job, in 1973, working for the Jewish Community Council in Boston. B'nai B'rith was a member of the council, and I soon learned from its longtime New England Director Irving Matross about the network of lodges in Boston and nearby states.

Irving and I became fast friends. Soft-spoken, with a sharp and insightful mind and unquestioned dedication to the mission of B'nai B'rith, he soon called on me to speak at lodge meetings. One week I was at Hardware and Housewares Lodge in Boston, two weeks later in Westerly, Rhode Island, and a couple of months later in Portsmouth, New Hampshire. And on to so many other B'nai B'rith gatherings throughout New England. In the process, I saw, from the inside, exactly what B'nai B'rith's dedication to community service was all about.



B'nai B'rith Honorary CEO and Senior Advisor Daniel S. Mariaschin and Michal Mariaschin. On the eve of his retirement, Mariaschin, his life and leadership, were celebrated in New York on May 27.

So much so that at a certain point I considered applying for a job with B'nai B'rith, hoping there might be something available that focused on public policy. That position did ultimately materialize, but only 15 years later. My career path then took me to head the Boston office of the American Zionist Federation, then to almost nine years at the ADL in New York, to AIPAC in Washington, D.C., and—after taking a brief sabbatical to work as spokesman for Gen. Alexander Haig Jr.'s 1987-88 presidential campaign—to B'nai B'rith, as director for public policy.

It was my dream job: working on domestic and foreign policy issues in the nation's capital, for an organization whose origins went back to 1843, and whose name was not only a household word, but a globally known and respected human rights organization.

After 11 years immersed in the world of issues affecting our community, traveling to Europe, Latin America, Israel, Canada and Australia, fighting for Israel's rightful place at the United Nations, combating antisemitism at home and abroad, advocating for free emigration for Soviet Jews and Syrian Jewry, and working for restitution and justice for Holocaust survivors and their families, an unexpected opportunity emerged that would see me offered the CEO position.

So here I am, 27 years after assuming the position of CEO, looking back and

saying for all to hear how very fortunate I have been to steer this magnificent legacy organization, which has made so many important contributions to Jewish life here in the United States and abroad.

One prominent historian has credited us with creating civil society in America: the hospitals, the orphanages, the local projects focusing on not just the Jewish community, but the broader community beyond. The efforts to aid the victims of natural disasters and the pioneering program that led to our sponsoring dozens of properties offering affordable housing to seniors. Some have called us the "great incubator of American Jewish life," giving birth to, and nurturing for decades, the ADL, the Hillel organization and BBYO.

We were at the U.N. at its founding in 1945, and we were a charter member of the Claims Conference in 1952. I will be forever proud of our support for a strong and vibrant Israel, the establishment of our first lodge in pre-State Israel in 1888, and our involvement to bring about a historic meeting between President Harry Truman and Chaim Weizmann, leading to the recognition of the new State of Israel by the United States. The list of accomplishments is a long one. Although some have heard it many times, I have never tired of repeating it at every opportunity.

I have worked with so many devoted volunteers and, if one includes my years at ADL, I've worked with 15 presidents of B'nai B'rith. Each brought his particular stamp, energy, creativity and dedication to the job, and I feel fortunate to have worked with them.

My nearly four decades with the organization have seen me working side-by-side with an excellent professional staff. The most successful organizations are those that create synergy between volunteers and professionals. My colleagues created a work environment that has been collegial and whose success can be attributed to the pride they have taken in their work. Going to the office each day, knowing they were there, made my efforts that much easier. I am in their debt.

I am deeply grateful to B'nai B'rith for the honor of attaching my name to our public policy program: now called the Daniel S. Mariaschin Institute for Leadership and Public Policy. I am truly appreciative for this recognition, which is so meaningful to me.

At the event in May in New York marking my retirement, I closed my remarks by saying how truly blessed I have been these 40-plus years with B'nai B'rith:

"My parents, immigrants from Russia and Lithuania through Ellis Island, lived long enough to see their son working in the service of his people. For that, I should say 'dayenu'— (if it were only that.)

"I should say 'dayenu' for being able to speak truth to power to hundreds of diplomats, public figures, academics and journalists over the years. To say 'dayenu' for my many visits to Israel on behalf of B'nai B'rith, filling me with pride, and enabling me to truly get to know the land and its remarkable people.

"And most importantly: to say 'dayenu' for the privilege of being born Jewish."

The biggest "dayenu" and thank you goes to my wife, Michal. Her love, support, encouragement and her great interest in my work have been a comfort and an incentive to me over the years. Without her, these past five decades would not have turned out as they did.

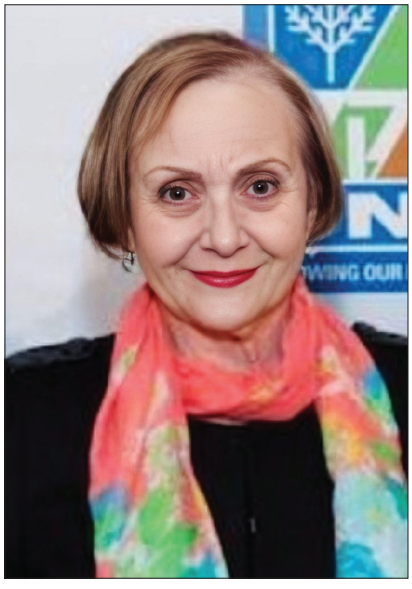
Finally, to B'nai B'rith, a great organization soon to celebrate 200 years of service to the Jewish people, which gave me the opportunity to be a part of its storied history and its illustrious present, thank you from the bottom of my heart.

Remembering Bondi Beach

The men and women of B'nai B'rith NSW joined guests and friends on Jan. 18 to mourn and honor the victims of the Dec. 14 Bondi Beach terror attack. Speakers paid tribute to B'nai B'rith member Edith Brutman, z"l, who was murdered during the antisemitic rampage.

After the attack, B'nai B'rith called on the Australian government—and all governments—to speak clearly and forcefully against antisemitism in all its forms, and particularly to condemn hatred revealed in rhetoric that dehumanizes Israel and, by extension, Jews everywhere.

Anthony Albanese, Australian prime minister, declared Jan. 22 a National Day of Mourning for the 15 victims of Bondi Beach.



Edith Brutman, z"l, killed at Bondi Beach on Dec. 14, was honored at a B'nai B'rith service in Australia on Jan. 18.

B'nai B'rith Israel Activities Benefit Soldiers and Civilians

Passover Outreach

B'nai B'rith Israel members have recently partnered with their brothers and sisters on two continents, to respond to the physical and emotional needs of people traumatized and displaced by terror attacks in their country.

Through a collaborative effort, B'nai B'rith International, B'nai B'rith Australia/New Zealand (BBANZ) and the B'nai B'rith Alliance (BBA) of Northern, Central and Southern Europe joined together in support of a B'nai B'rith Israel initiative to provide Passover food packages to families evacuated from Dimona, Beersheba and Petach Tikva.

A special contribution by the group to the Municipality of Rishon LeZion covered the food expenses for a collective Seder enjoyed by the community's 40 elderly residents.



B'nai B'rith Israel and Europe's B'nai B'rith Alliance (BBA) teamed up to fund Passover food packages for Israelis evacuated from their homes.



Monies were also provided for a Passover celebration for elderly residents in Rishon LeZion.

Ulpan classes

B'nai B'rith Israel volunteers are teaching conversational Hebrew to BBA members, as a gesture of thanks intended to facilitate communication with friends, mishpocha, especially grandchildren, and those in the B'nai B'rith family. The initiative was conceived and developed by Ariela Cassuto, BBA vice president for international affairs.

Sessions are customized to accommodate the language-speaking skill levels of the participants.

Emanuel (Mano) Cohen, B'nai B'rith Israel president, said: "This is an exciting project for us, and an opportunity to give back to our brothers and sisters, who are always ready to step up and offer their generous help in times of war and crisis. With so many B'nai B'rith members who are former educators, we are ready to expand this project to meet all needs."



B'nai B'rith Alliance members hone their Hebrew-speaking skills via online classes taught by B'nai B'rith Israel volunteers. The death of BBA President Solomon Bali, z"l, who appears upper right, was reported by B'nai B'rith on April 6.

Projects Serving the Military

A donation of 300 pairs of socks earmarked for soldiers stationed in Lebanon was included in a gift of basic supplies for servicemen and women made by B'nai B'rith Israel. Funds were also contributed for the procurement of a surveillance drone and takeoff and landing pads to the Be'eri Battalion, comprised of older veterans of elite units, deployed for extended periods across multiple battle sectors. At the request of Mateh Asher Regional Council, B'nai B'rith Israel also paid for 10 emergency and rapid response rescue training workshops, which were conducted in towns governed by the Mevo'ot Hermon Regional Council.



Peter Schattner (center), past president of B'nai B'rith Victoria in Australia, toured Ironi Yud Alef High School with Principal Tomer Gavish (left) and Rosa Schattner.

Israel and Australia/New Zealand Partner to Assist High School Graduates

For more than a decade B'nai B'rith Israel has funded scholarships and the costs of tutoring sessions for students at Tel Aviv's Ironi Yud Alef High School, offering academically promising young people who have quit high school a chance to earn a diploma. Many of them are from broken or impoverished homes.

Responding to the school's specific request, BBANZ has now also answered the call for help, donating monies to pay for backpacks, which are given to graduates entering military service. A backpack is considered an indispensable item for those who are embarking on their new lives as soldiers.

In a further effort to expand BBANZ's partnership with B'nai B'rith Israel and to support Ironi Yud Alef, Peter Schattner, an educator and former president of B'nai B'rith Victoria and coordinator for projects with Israel, made a visit to the school in May, where he met with its principal to learn more about its mission and needs.



FIGHTING ANTISEMITISM IS AT THE CORE OF WHAT WE DO.

Since our founding, B'nai B'rith has developed tolerance programs and spoken out strongly against antisemitism in all its forms. "None Shall Be Afraid" is our flagship response to the world's oldest hatred.

B'nai B'rith Mission Surveys Latin America's Support of Jewish Causes

Led by President Robert B Spitzer and Honorary CEO and Senior Advisor Daniel S. Mariaschin, a B'nai B'rith mission to Latin America in early May with participants from the United States, South America, Europe and Australia included engagements with high-level government and diplomatic personnel and with B'nai B'rith members from Argentina, Chile and Uruguay.

Mariaschin summarized the trip, saying: "The leadership mission to Argentina, Uruguay and Chile gave us an opportunity to reconnect with our B'nai B'rith brothers and sisters in South America's Southern Cone, and to meet with important political figures in each place, as well as with Jewish community leaders.

"The public policy agenda was a vital focus for our visit. The meeting with Argentina's President Javier Milei was especially meaningful. He continues to stand as a solid friend of Israel and the Jewish people. Our meetings with three former presidents of Uruguay, all friends of Israel and our community, were a good opportunity to again say 'thank you,' and to introduce ourselves to the country's current president. Interfacing with members of the Chilean National Congress aligned with its Israel-Chile Parliamentary Friendship Group also gave us new geopolitical insights as the country transitions to a new president."

Milei arranged a special session with Mariaschin and Spitzer, B'nai B'rith Argentina officers President Susana Chalón and Secretary Daniel Sporn, and executives of Delegación de Asociaciones Israelitas Argentinas (DAIA), the country's Jewish communal organization. Mission delegates also attended a meeting including members of both B'nai B'rith and DAIA.

continued on page 41



Photo: Casa Rosada

Argentine President Javier Milei (head of table) welcomed American and Argentine B'nai B'rith leaders and officers from the country's Jewish communal organization, Delegación de Asociaciones Israelitas Argentinas (DAIA) to a special meeting at Casa Rosada, the presidential office in Buenos Aires.



B'nai B'rith delegates in Montevideo, Uruguay. In the front row, President Robert B Spitzer and Honorary CEO and Senior Advisor Daniel S. Mariaschin are second and fourth from left.

Center for Senior Services Spring Events

B'nai B'rith's Center for Senior Services held its annual Housing Managers and Service Coordinators Meeting in Las Vegas in May.

Sessions this year focused on shared building programs, issues of food insecurity and economic affordability. A workshop devoted to formulating strategies for improving communication between staff and residents, and a series of networking events were also programmed. CSS staff and Annie Walters, Social Security Administration regional public affairs specialist, provided updates on issues concerning older adults. Attendees volunteered for the meeting's service activity at Three Square, the state's largest food bank, where they packaged frozen meals, stocked shelves and sorted produce.



The volunteer service activity for the B'nai B'rith Center for Senior Services (CSS) annual Housing Managers and Service Coordinators Meeting attendees in Las Vegas was conducted at Three Square food bank.

CSS Stays Involved with Senior Communities

Homecrest House personnel and Center for Senior Services staff led a tour of the senior residence in Silver Spring, Maryland, for Ricky Powell-Graves,

continued on page 42



Uruguayan President Yamandú Orsi (left) with B'nai B'rith Honorary CEO and Senior Advisor Daniel S. Mariaschin. Mission delegates had the opportunity to engage in dialogue with Orsi and with past presidents of Uruguay.

continued from page 40

Delegates met in Chile with Sen. María Loreto and Deputy Luis Sánchez of the Israel-Chile Parliamentary Friendship Group, and with Israeli Ambassador Peleg Lewi, B'nai B'rith Chile officers and local Jewish community members, furthering Israel-Chile ties.

In Uruguay, mission participants engaged with former Uruguayan presidents Luis Alberto Lacalle Herrera (1990-1995), Luis Lacalle Pou (2020-2025) and Julio Sanguinetti (1985-1990 and 1995-2000) on topics vital to the Jewish community, including the defense of Israel and the fight against antisemitism.

Addressing delegates, Uruguay's President Yamandú Orsi condemned terror and hate groups, reaffirmed his commitment to Uruguay's observance of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) working definition of antisemitism, and announced that Uruguay would participate in the IHRA conference in Argentina in June.

B'nai B'rith leaders also met with Israeli Ambassador to Uruguay Michal Hershkovitz and U.S. Deputy Chief of Mission to Uruguay Chris Andino. The discussions centered on the political challenges facing Uruguay's democracy.

Center for Senior Services Spring Events

continued from page 41



Ricky Powell-Graves, regional coordinator for central Maryland from the office of Sen. Angela Alsobrooks D-Md. (second from left) toured Homecrest House in Silver Spring, Maryland, with CSS staff and building personnel, and had the opportunity to speak with residents.

regional coordinator for central Maryland in the office of Sen. Angela Alsobrooks, D-Md. Those leading the tour included Janel Doughten, director of housing management and education and co-director of the Center for Senior Services, and Evan Carmen, director for legislative aging policy and housing development and co-director of the Center for Senior Services. Powell-Graves visited apartments and public spaces, including the gym and library, and spoke with residents.

The tours are designed to provide members of Congress and their staff with firsthand appreciation of the importance of affordable housing and its positive impact on a community.

CSS continues to be a proactive partner at its properties. This spring, Doughten coordinated a series of online and in-person meetings with senior community resident associations, offering her skills in developing programs, suggesting methods for enhancing relationships between apartment dwellers and building management, and providing expertise on a wide range of issues. She met with staff and residents at Sam J. Stone B'nai B'rith Covenant Apartments I/II in Peoria, Illinois, and later traveled to New York, where she led a discussion with personnel and resident association officers at the Adelstein Family-Project H.O.P.E. B'nai B'rith House in the Bronx, New York.

Advocating on behalf of the needs of older adults, B'nai B'rith is the largest national Jewish sponsor of subsidized housing for older adults in the United States. B'nai B'rith's Center for Senior Services coordinates and assists in the administration of 35 subsidized residential communities nationwide and engages political leaders at both the national and local levels on their behalf.

Read past issues of B'nai B'rith Magazine at our website.



Young Leaders Connect with Wide-Ranging Activities



B'nai B'rith/HUD Adelstein Project H.O.P.E. Senior Housing Building employees and Adelstein family members with B'nai B'rith staff and Connect members who helped assemble food bags for residents of the Bronx B'nai B'rith property.



Connect members celebrated Shabbat with IDF reservists, who described their experiences fighting for Israel and spoke about ways the Jewish community could help the country's cause.

B'nai B'rith Connect, the organization's young leadership group, extended its reach, as members participated in programs in the United States and Europe this spring.

In April, Connect also sponsored a Project H.O.P.E. event with the Blue Card Holocaust Survivors charity, as well as "Unto Every Person There is a Name" recitations taking place at the Austrian Consulate in Manhattan and on campuses in states including California and Arizona, in partnership with AEPi fraternity.

Connect members helped to assemble food packages at the B'nai B'rith/HUD Adelstein Project H.O.P.E. Senior Housing Building in the Bronx. Filling more than 100 bags, the food items distributed to residents were purchased through a fundraising effort initiated by Todd Adelstein, grandson of Bernie Adelstein, z"l, the building's founder.

A B'nai B'rith member, Todd Adelstein, who was on hand with his family, said that he wanted to honor his grandfather's memory and was proud to be a part of the building.

During a special Shabbat dinner at B'nai B'rith's New York headquarters, Connect members had the opportunity to hear and engage with IDF reservists Eliana Solomon, Ira Rosenblum and Brhan Worku Liebman, activists who spoke about ways to equip Jewish communities worldwide with the tools to stand stronger and navigate important and difficult conversations about Israel.

On May 12, Connect and AEPi conducted a virtual program spotlighting four young leaders, who served as delegates during the April B'nai B'rith mission to U.N. satellite organizations in Paris and Geneva. Moderated by B'nai B'rith Honorary CEO and Senior Advisor Daniel S. Mariaschin and Columbia University student and AEPi brother Noah Lederman, the discussion included presentations by Kevin Khadavi, Stanford University; Rina Isaac, Columbia University; Dylan Marks, Arizona State University; and Nate Neustadt, George Washington University.











Far left: Noah Lederman, a Columbia University AEPi member, served with B'nai B'rith Honorary CEO and Senior Advisor Daniel S. Mariaschin as co-moderators of the May 12 debriefing by student leaders who participated in the B'nai B'rith mission to Geneva and Paris in April. Speakers included (second from left to right): Nate Neustadt, Rina Isaac, Dylan Marks and Kevin Khadavi.

B'nai B'rith and JNS Chart Repercussions of the Durban Conference

B'nai B'rith International, in partnership with the Jerusalem News Syndicate (JNS), held a live program on Sept. 1 examining the lasting and harmful effects of the 2001 U.N. World Conference Against Racism in Durban, South Africa.

Held on the 25th anniversary of the Durban conference, the program explored how the event helped legitimize antisemitic and anti-Israel rhetoric, including the portrayal of supporters of the Jewish state as "racist." Speakers examined how the normalization of such rhetoric has contributed to apathy toward anti-Jewish attacks and violence, particularly in the aftermath of Oct. 7, 2023.

Hosted by B'nai B'rith Honorary CEO and Senior Advisor Daniel S. Mariaschin, the program featured Ambassador Danny Danon, Israel's permanent representative to the United Nations; Ambassador Jeff Bartos, U.S. representative for U.N. management and reform; B'nai B'rith CEO Evan R. Bernstein; 2001 delegation leader and B'nai B'rith Honorary President Richard D. Heideman; International March of the Living President Phyllis Greenberg Heideman; B'nai B'rith Director of U.N. and Intercommunal Affairs David Michaels; former Israeli Ambassador to South Africa Tova Herzl; B'nai B'rith Director of Latin American Affairs Eduardo Kohn; International Legal Forum CEO and former Knesset Member Michal Cotler-Wunsh; and London Centre for the Study of Contemporary Antisemitism Fellow Izabella Tabarovsky.



Read more about the program here.

Watch the full program here.



2026 Wdzięczność-Gratitude-הכרת הטוב Awardees Honored in Lublin



Winners of B'nai B'rith Poland's fourth annual Wdzięczność-Gratitude-הכרת הטוב Awards, flanked by B'nai B'rith Honorary CEO and Senior Advisor Daniel S. Mariaschin (left) and B'nai B'rith World Center-Jerusalem Director Alan Schneider (right). This year's ceremonies took place in Lublin.



B'NAI B'RITH INTERNATIONAL

B'nai B'rith International and B'nai B'rith Polin are honored to invite you to a ceremony marking the presentation of the fourth annual Marian Turski Memorial Awards

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In this year's fourth edition, we are recognizing the following individuals:

Father Wojciech Michał Lemański
for his unparalleled civic courage, bearing testimony in Treblinka, Jedwabne, Szczuczyn, Radziłów, Wąsosz, and at Radegast Station to the murdered Jews, victims of the Holocaust.

Zbigniew J. Nita
for Dialogue Bench, which he founded to take care of Jewish memorial sites, protect Jewish historical heritage, and strengthen Polish-Jewish dialogue.

Jakub Wójcik
for preserving the Jewish heritage of Grójec, near Warsaw, and initiating the Polish and English translations from Yiddish of the city's Book of Remembrance.

The institutional award goes to:

Social Initiative Fighting Against Anti-Semitism, SITWA
for the tireless fight this grassroots organization has waged against the rising tide of anti-Jewish and anti-Israeli hatred following the 7/10 massacre.

OUR SPEAKERS INCLUDE:
H.E. Yaakov Finkelstein, Israel Ambassador to Poland | Mr. Jarosław Stawiarski, Marshal, Lublin Voivodeship
Daniel Mariaschin, CEO, B'nai B'rith International | Alan Schneider, Director, B'nai B'rith World Center-Jerusalem
Andrzej Friedman, President, B'nai B'rith Polin
Maria Sławek will grace the ceremony with a violin recital
The program includes a tour of Jewish Lublin

RSVP by June 21, 2026: bnai.brith.polin@gmail.com

B'nai B'rith International hosted its fourth consecutive Gratitude Awards ceremony on June 28, at the Yeshivat Chachmei Lublin, in Lublin, Poland. The award, called Wdzięczność-Gratitude-הכרת הטוב in Polish, English and Hebrew, recognizes Polish citizens and institutions demonstrating exceptional commitment to preserving Jewish heritage in Poland and to cultivating Jewish Polish relations.

The award is presented in honor and memory of Marian Turski (1926-2025), a Polish Jewish journalist, historian, Holocaust survivor and B'nai B'rith Poland lodge member.

The ceremony included speeches by B'nai B'rith Honorary CEO and Senior Advisor Daniel S. Mariaschin, B'nai B'rith Poland President Andrzej Friedman and Israeli Ambassador to Poland Yaakov Finkelstein.

2026 Recipients of the award:

- **Individual category:** Wojciech Michał Lemański, Zbigniew J. Nita and Jakub Wójcik
- **Institutional category:** Sitwa Organization

Lemański, a Roman Catholic priest, was recognized for more than two decades of weekly commemorations honoring Holocaust victims. Nita, a historian, journalist and photographer, was recognized for preserving Jewish memory in Poland and for promoting shared Polish Jewish heritage through historical research, photography and educational initiatives. Wójcik, a local activist in Grójec, Poland, was honored for documenting the city's Jewish history, organizing Jewish cemetery cleanups and leading annual ceremonies commemorating the liquidation of the Grójec Ghetto. The Sitwa Organization was recognized for its efforts to combat antisemitism and anti-Zionism in Poland through public engagement, outreach to local authorities and community initiatives.

Nita said, "It is important, now, when brutal and primitive antisemitism is returning with renewed force, when racial, religious, political and social hate speech is becoming the hallmark of today's so-called elites, to say loudly, clearly and fearlessly, 'We do not accept this!' We must say this especially to the youth."

Read more about the 2026 honorees.

B'nai B'rith World Center Honors Excellence in Diaspora Reporting



B'nai B'rith World Center-Jerusalem honored the print and media reporters who won its annual award for journalism in June at the Konrad Adenauer Center.



Cultural icon, singer and composer Hanan Yovel, received a Special Citation for Fostering Israel-Diaspora Relations Through the Arts.

The B'nai B'rith World Center-Jerusalem presented on June 18 its 34th annual award for Excellence in Diaspora Reportage to Zev Stub, Jewish world reporter for The Times of Israel, and to Tamar Ish Shalom for her "Jewish Crossroads" podcast.

At the event, a Lifetime Achievement Award was given to Oren Nahari, anchor and editor of "Shabbat with Oren Nahari" on Kan Reshet Bet radio and foreign news editor from 1985 to 2016 at the Israel Broadcasting Authority. Tragically, Nahari passed away just months later after a battle with ALS.

A Special Citation for Fostering Israel-Diaspora Relations through the Arts in Memory of Naomi Shemer was also awarded to well-known Israeli singer and composer Hanan Yovel.

David Horovitz, editor in chief of The Times of Israel, delivered the keynote address, "My Dramatic Visit to Syria: Surreal or Harbinger of Change?"

The award is widely recognized as the most prestigious prize in the Israeli media industry for diaspora reportage and was established to help strengthen the relationship between Israel and the diaspora.

The award honors the memory of the late Wolf Matsdorf, editor of the B'nai B'rith World Center-Jerusalem journal "Leadership Briefing" and a journalist in Israel and Australia, and his wife, Hilda, a pioneer in social work in both countries.

The entire ceremony can be viewed here.

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Harmony Day Awards Build Bridges Across Australia

In 1999 the Australian government launched the country's first Harmony Day observance, a celebration of racial and ethnic diversity in the spirit of the United Nation's Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

In tribute to the holiday, B'nai B'rith NSW Alfred Dreyfus Unit leader Ernie Friedlander, a Holocaust survivor subsequently honored with the Order of Australia (OAM), initiated and organized a poster design competition for elementary and high school students, who responded with great enthusiasm and submitted their artwork in substantial numbers.

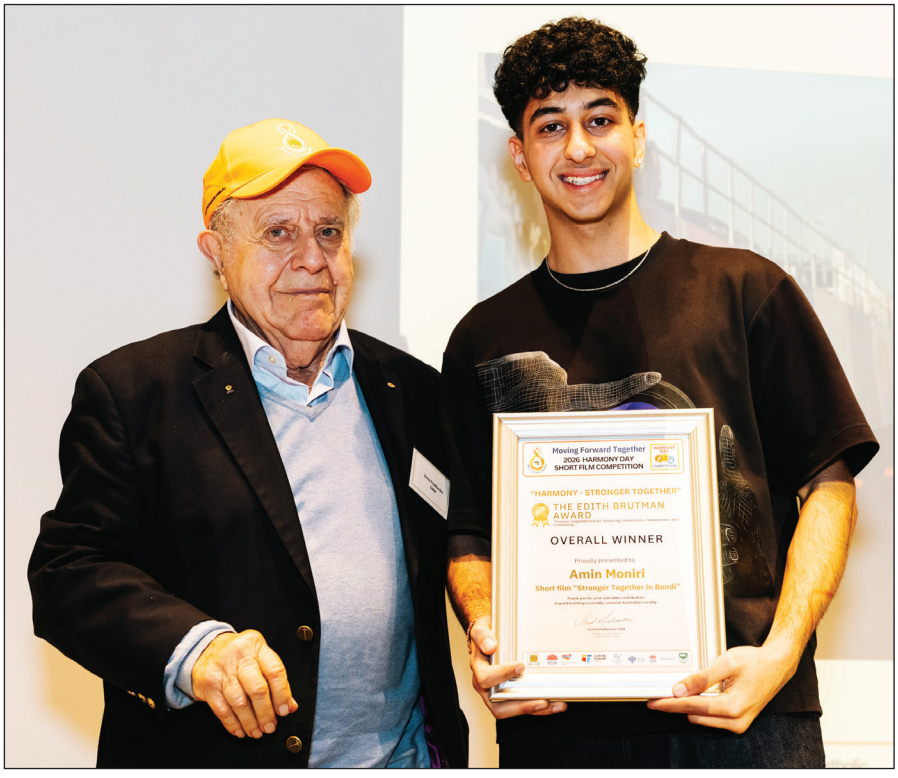
Over two decades, the annual Harmony Day Competitions have generated a significant body of art, demonstrating the remarkable creativity of children across Australia. A 2021 book published by B'nai B'rith NSW reproduces the prize-winning entries.

The contest now includes categories for song writing and filmmaking, with additional prizes and certificates awarded to students of all ages.

The annual Harmony Day awards exercises at Parliament House in June included speeches by Steve Kamper, minister for multiculturalism; Mark Coure, NSW legislator and shadow minister for multiculturalism; and other dignitaries, as well as presentations by the 2026 honorees.

Among them was high school student Amin Moniri, whose film, "Stronger Together in Bondi," inspired by the need for reconciliation after the heinous terror attack against the Jewish community in December 2025, received the Edith Brutman Short Film Award, named for B'nai B'rith member Edith Brutman, z"l, who was murdered during the antisemitic rampage.

He remarked: "What I learnt is that harmony isn't just something we celebrate once a year, but something you choose everyday through the way we treat each other. Winning this award means more to me that I can put in words."



Ernie Friedlander (OAM) and Amin Moniri, a student at Cabramatta High School and winner of the Edith Brutman Short Film Award.



High school student Hannah Lee's winning poster design.



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As a Duquesne student, Lily Berry felt encouraged by her professors to seek out information. She worked with community members to engage with experts, explored historical research and asked important questions in a supportive learning environment.

Lily Berry, '24
Master of Arts in Public History, Duquesne University
Audience Insights & Research Coordinator,
Field Museum, Chicago, IL

Read Lily's story at **duq.edu/LilyBerry**.

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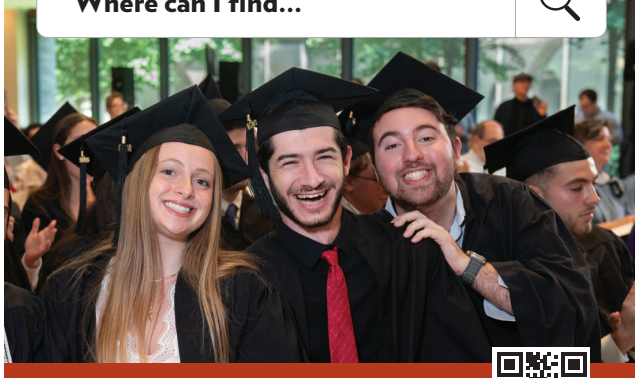
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Social Security: A Solemn Promise

By Evan Carmen
Director for Aging Policy & Housing Development
Co-Director, Center for Senior Services

I have been fortunate to call B'nai B'rith my professional home for the past nine years. My work here is centered on advocating for older adults through our Center for Senior Services (CSS), focusing on the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) senior housing program and healthcare, as well as food and income insecurity. Our advocacy efforts include meetings with personnel at congressional offices on Capitol Hill and arranging for lawmakers and their staff to visit properties in the B'nai B'rith Senior Housing Network, which operates in partnership with HUD.

For my first column in the B'nai B'rith Magazine, I wanted to focus on one of the programs that has the greatest impact on the lives of seniors: Social Security. Fifty-eight million seniors receive Social Security, lifting 17 million people out of poverty. For many seniors, Social Security is their only source of income. For about 24 million older adults, benefits account for half their income, according to the Social Security Administration (SSA).

Take a second to think about where those people would be without this program. According to the SSA, the average monthly benefit for a retired worker as of January 2026 was $2,071. Now, take that benefit away—how are these people going to afford the necessities of life? Not that it's easy living on $2,071 a month. The breadth and reach of Social Security can't be denied.

There is consensus Social Security must be kept solvent for future generations. However, I wonder how many people think it's possible. Too often I hear, "Social Security won't be around for my kids or grandchildren" or "Social Security is going bankrupt." So, what's the deal—is the program going bankrupt?



Credit: Social Security Online/Wikipedia.org

President Franklin D. Roosevelt signs the Social Security Act into law on Aug. 14, 1935.

According to the Social Security Trustees Report, the program can pay all its Social Security benefits until about 2032. After that, the program can pay about 78% of benefits from the revenue the government receives via taxes. Taken one step further, in 75 years, the program will have enough revenue to fund about 62% of benefits. Obviously, this is not an ideal prediction. However, this is a far cry from "bankruptcy."

Once again, Congress will be forced to confront Social Security's fiscal shortfalls. In 1983, Congress passed bipartisan legislation to extend the life of the program by agreeing to raise additional revenue through taxes and to increase the official retirement age from 65 to 67. Thankfully, Congress reached a deal, just as the program was only months away from not being able to meet all of its obligations.

Ideally, Congress would reach a compromise now to shore up future benefits. However, if the past is a prediction of the future, I expect Congress will not pass legislation to address the issue until

the last minute, immediately before the program faces a shortfall.

Ideas are already swirling around Capitol Hill, including a proposal to amend the Social Security contribution cap. In 2026, taxpayers only pay Social Security tax on their first $184,500 of income (the cap is adjusted annually based on wage inflation). To put this in perspective, in 2026, an individual with earnings of a million dollars stopped contributing to the program in early March, when his or her income reached $184,500. The proposal calls for contributions to Social Security to resume on wages over $400,000 a year. This means dollars earned between the current cap (which would adjust upward) and $400,000 would not be subject to Social Security contributions. However, money earned above $400,000 would be taxed and therefore available for the program's revenue.

In 2024, the University of Maryland reported this plan alone could solve approximately 60% of Social Security's long-term deficits. As only a small percentage of Americans would be subject to increased contributions, 87% of U.S. residents support this action according to a 2024 University of Maryland poll.

This will not be the only idea to improve Social Security that Congress will consider; I expect proposals from both sides of the political aisle to be discussed. However, increasing revenue collected from people who earn over $400,000 seems like a fair place to start. Raising the retirement age could be problematic, particularly for people who work labor intensive jobs.

Social Security is one of the bedrock programs in the United States. It's a solemn promise that if you pay into the system, you will be provided with a level of financial security in retirement. The program has overwhelming bipartisan support and must be made solvent for future generations. Passing legislation in Congress to shore up the program won't be easy; however, raising the cap is a beginning. At CSS, advocating for the fiscal solvency of Social Security and fighting for the economic security of seniors are pillars of our work.

Given Social Security's immense impact on seniors, ensuring the program's longevity is a must for a simple reason: Where would millions of older adults be without it? The consequences are unthinkable.

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You make a gift of cash or property to us and we agree to make fixed payments for one or two lives.

BENEFITS OF CGA
You want to make a gift to our organization and receive fixed income for the future. This plan works well with your gift of cash or appreciated stock that is providing little or no income.

CHARITABLE REMAINDER TRUST (CRT)
You transfer your cash or property to fund a trust that makes payments for your lifetime or a number of years and then passes what remains to our organization.

BENEFITS OF CRT
You own appreciated property that produces little or no income and would like to sell without paying capital gains tax. You may be desiring income for retirement.

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