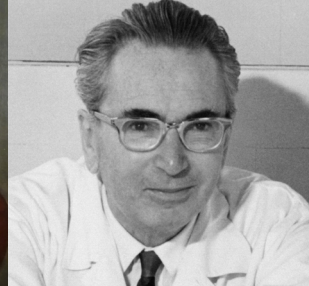


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'MAKE FOR YOURSELF A RABBI'

Recently, my three-year-old began starting every sentence with the qualifier “I feel like”: “I feel like I had a good day at school,” “I feel like we should go to the park now,” “I feel like I want to color.” I couldn’t understand where this linguistic hedging came from until I realized she was mimicking me. All day long in Zoom work conversations or personal chats I tend toward this verbal tic, qualifying my opinions and thoughts. While it’s just a small detail, it made me realize how closely she follows my words and actions. After all, I am one of only a handful of adults in my daughter’s world. I’m her model of how to go through life, which means I need to be cognizant of how I model frustration, how I model kindness, leadership and everything else. As she gets older her world will expand, and she will be able to choose whom she wants to model herself after.

Even as adults, how we choose our role models is largely unconscious; we even have “mirror neurons” that help us copy behavior we witness and build empathy. Yet there is something to be said for proactively choosing figures we admire and aspire to be like. It can provide us with road maps to possible futures and encourage us to think of what we truly value. In *Pirkei Avot* (*Ethics of Our Fathers*) we are instructed “*asah lecha rav*,”

or “make for yourself a rabbi.” Some view this passage as a commandment to find yourself one rabbinical figure to follow absolutely, but a more expansive interpretation is an instruction to energetically seek out for yourself a teacher, a mentor, someone to learn from.

Learning from someone does not mean following them without question. After all, in Judaism we don’t sanctify or deify people. Even the Bible shows our founding figures with shortcomings—Sarah’s cruelty toward her maidservant Hagar, Moses’s quickness to anger—and rabbinical commentaries discuss these biblical characters’ faults openly. But we are still encouraged to view them as holy and to try to emulate their *middot*, or virtues. This is a helpful message to keep in mind at a time when we are frequently being challenged to reassess our heroes. As times and mores change, people who were once thought of as role models are being criticized for their racism, their sexism, their choice of words and more. (Admittedly, these criticisms have always existed but were often made by people in the margins and ignored.) Holding people accountable for their actions is the right thing to do. It is also right to acknowledge what good they have done in the world. Seeing and accepting a full person, failings and all, is much better than viewing them through rose-colored glasses or writing them off entirely.

Which brings us to this issue’s “Big Question”: “Who are your role models, and why should future generations know their names?” Rabbis, philosophers, activists, scholars and others, such as Marge Piercy, Evgeny Kissin and Alexander Vindman—whom many consider role models themselves—weigh in on the people who helped shape who they are today. The answers vary widely, covering figures from the biblical Esther and Baruch Spinoza to the Lubavitcher Rebbe and Gilda Radner. (It is worth noting that men almost exclusively chose other men as their role models while women chose both men and women. But that’s for a different column.) The

answers were so rich and nuanced that we are running the feature over two issues. We hope Part I inspires you and gets you thinking about your own role models. Please let us know who they are at editor@momentmag.com.

Turning to politics, midterm elections are on the horizon, and while these often serve as a referendum on the party in power, the specter of Donald Trump and the Supreme Court’s recent overruling of *Roe v. Wade* have made the outlook less clear-cut. In this issue we check in with our Jewish Political Voices Project (JPVP). In the lead-up to the 2020 election we followed 30 Jewish voters from ten battleground states for more than a year as they navigated whom to vote for. Now we speak with some of those voters about the most important issues influencing their vote, how they view their party, and if they consider Joe Biden or Donald Trump political boons or liabilities. The answers are surprising and don’t break neatly along party lines. Just like the project as a whole, these interviews demonstrate that voters are more than data points and that political decisions are shaped by many aspects of our lives.

Role models can provide us with road maps to possible futures and encourage us to think of what we truly value.

We also take on an issue roiling the Jewish political world in “Moment Debate”: “Are there dangers in the increase of Israel-related money in American electoral politics?” This question rose

to prominence during the most recent primaries when some candidates were backed by Israel-related PAC money even when Israel wasn't on the agenda. In "Perspectives," Paul Scham shows how the usual self-images of Israelis and Americans seem to be in role reversal; Shmuel Rosner dares to ask whether anything would really change if Benjamin Netanyahu were not part of Israel's political future; and Sarah Posner looks at the GOP's Christian supremacy problem, which, she notes, is also an antisemitism problem. In "Ask the Rabbis" we ponder, "Can Jews married to non-Jews be considered spiritual leaders in the Jewish community?" It's a question that ignites a lot of emotion, and we expect to receive passionate responses from you, our readers.

In "Literary Moment," Gloria Levitas reviews the memoir of composer and scion of Broadway royalty Mary Rodgers. Maggie Anton, author of *Rashi's Daughters* and other historical fiction, reviews a groundbreaking collection of feminist midrash from Israel, while Robert Siegel looks at four generations of Morgenthau and how they helped create the America we know today. In "Visual Moment," Frances Brent examines the controversial Philip Guston exhibition that was initially put on hold due to the artist's use of Ku Klux Klan motifs, but is now on a four-city tour.

The High Holidays are just around the corner, which means menu planning. While we often focus on the meal that breaks the fast, in "Talk of the Table," Vered Guttman offers up pre-Yom Kippur food traditions from around the world. And if you need meal ideas for the entire holiday season, take a look at our new ebook, *The Delectable History Behind Your Favorite High Holiday Foods*, celebrating the rich cultural history of Jewish foods from across the globe and featuring mouthwatering recipes from venerated chefs. It's available for free when you give two gift subscriptions at momentmag.com/sweet-as-honey.

Wishing you a happy and healthy new year. Shanah Tova!

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WORD JEWISH?
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JEWISH WHEN IT
HAS A JEWISH
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the conversation

JEWISH WORD: SPECIAL EDITION

A MOMENT OF CONNECTION

“Over time, I’ve learned to honor words. To choose them carefully. To consider their journeys and stories. To harness their power....” These are Nadine Epstein’s own words (“From the Editor-in-Chief: Learning to Honor Words,” Summer 2022), and they are sheer poetry. I enjoyed and admired her piece, which served as an introduction to “The Making of a Jewish Word” (Summer 2022), as much as I appreciated the article itself. I thank *Moment* for continuing to inspire me and your readership with your remarkable literary gifts. Amos Oz once wrote that ours is not a bloodline but a textline. To this I would add: Every text has a context. I recall the power of both from my first arrival in the United States from Tel Aviv in 1954.

I was 13 years old. None of my family yet spoke a word of English, so as the eldest child I was assigned the responsibility of booking a flight for our family, from New York to San Jose, California. To the agent, I proudly identified our destination as “San Joe-see,” knowing neither the English nor Spanish pronunciation. This was met by the agent with confusion, then hilarity, then understanding and recognition. I have never forgotten that moment of connection when word became meaning. It was my first introduction to a new language and a new home. Text is defined by context. What makes a word Jewish? Every word is Jewish when it has a Jewish story to tell.

Uri D. Herscher

Founder, Skirball Cultural Center
Los Angeles, California

ECH! USE YIDDISH

I enjoy *Moment* very much, and the edition on Jewish words was no exception. As a Yiddish-language professional, I would, however, request that you use YIVO standard transliteration when rendering Yiddish (which is written in the Hebrew alphabet) in the Latin al-

phabet. Please don’t use German spelling for Yiddish words or simply default to the most popular American/English spelling. This does a disservice to the Yiddish language, and reflects poorly on *Moment*, a publication founded by Yiddish speakers and named after a Yiddish newspaper.

The entry on “*mensch*” states that it “can also be spelled *mentsb*—the more correct romanization of the Yiddish” and that *mensch* (the less correct romanization, again) comes “straight from German, where it means person or human being.” “Straight from German” is also a bit misleading, as the approximately 1,000-year old Yiddish language comes from Middle High German (with Hebrew, Aramaic, Slavic and Romance elements), not from modern German.

The saying spelled *a mentsh tracht und Gott lacht* is spelled *a mentsh trakht un got lakht* in standard transliteration. Yiddish does not use capital letters or double consonants, and neither does standard transliteration (except for names). *Und* is German; standard Yiddish uses *un*. And *mentsblekhhkayt* or even *mentsblekhhkeyt* is standard, not *menschlichkeit*.

As the article points out, words like *mentsb* take on a different meaning when used outside of their original language and context. There are many nuances, and spelling is just one of them.

Amanda (Miryam-Khaye) Seigel
Brooklyn, New York

GEOGRAPHY CLASS

In “The Making of a Jewish Word” you cite Moshe Waldoks on the term “Jewish geography” as saying, “It’s been around since the 1970s, perhaps.”

I can confirm that the term has been around at least that long. As a senior at Hofstra University in the mid-1970s I had a humor column in the student newspaper. I wrote one featuring courses that “didn’t make the course catalog.” One was named “Jewish geography.”

Kalman Socolof
Ilion, NY

THE PINK HOUSE

Your mention of “Jewish geography” in your Jewish Word symposium instantly brought back a memory. I was at a college dance for Rutgers and Douglass students in September 1960, and when I returned to my dorm room, my new friends asked me how it went. I distinctly remember telling them, “I met a cute girl, and after we played Jewish geography for a while, I found out her aunt owns the ‘pink house’ in Deal near the ocean.”

Jim Berg

Egg Harbor Township, NJ

NEW GENERATION OF JEWISH FARMERS

HE IS THE EGG MAN

The excellent article “A New Generation of Jewish Farmers Returns to the Land” (Summer 2022) brings back memories of when I was a child in the late 1940s and 1950s. We lived in Brooklyn with about 100 grandaunts and granduncles, aunts, uncles and cousins living in a ten-block radius. The center of family life was my grandparents’ house with a big side yard where we would gather on Saturdays and Jewish holidays. My mother and her sisters would go there during the week to help prepare for the Shabbat meals, and always the question would be asked: “Did the egg man arrive yet?” There was a weekly delivery of eggs from the Jewish farmer in New Jersey. When I asked my mother why they bought eggs from him instead of the local supermarket, she answered something like, “He’s a *landsman*, a fellow Jew.”

My wife’s family had a more direct connection to the egg farmers in New Jersey. Her uncle was a doctor in Mays Landing. After the war, he helped settle some of the Jewish refugees in the area around Vineland, and many were egg farmers. These included a cousin and my wife’s family. As a preteen and teenager, her older brother would work on the egg farm, during vacations and summers. By the time I met my wife in 1960, the family had left the egg farm, and within a few years the doctor and his family left rural New Jersey.

Jay Stonehill

Chicago, IL

**“To save one life is to
save the world entire.”
— *The Talmud***



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THE CRIMEAN EXPERIMENT

In a quotation from the piece on Jewish farmers, Jonathan Dekel-Chen points out that the *Am Olam* movement (the wave of Jewish utopian communal farms in North America in the 1880s) paralleled the *Hibbat Zion* movement that led to the first agricultural settlements in Palestine.

Both movements were preceded, by almost a century, by the Russian government's establishment of a handful of Jewish agricultural communities in the Crimean Peninsula. They were led by Nokhem Finkelshteyn of Shklov and populated initially by Jews from Moghilev in Lithuania—a hotbed of traditional Judaism and opposition to Hasidism—who maintained their rigorous Jewish observance on their new farmsteads.

This experiment in “Jewish agriculture” was described around 1806 in the journal *Shulamit* and treated fictionally by Joseph Perl, a champion of Haskalah (Jewish Enlightenment) in Galicia. It was in no way connected to the land of Israel.

The reimagining of Jewish life represented by the new wave of agricultural experiments in North America may reflect, as Phillips suggests, “the intersection of Jewish values, environmental

sustainability and social justice,” but it is about neither *national* life and culture à la the *Hibbat Zion* movement nor transferring traditional religious observance to an agricultural setting, as was attempted in the Crimea.

*Dov Taylor
Woodstock, Vermont*

HARVESTING HISTORY

I found the article by Noah Phillips interesting, but with some important omissions. Anyone writing about Jewish farmers should start with *Paths in Utopia* (1949) by Martin Buber, because he discusses the utopian socialists and origins of the kibbutz in Israel, which is also important to Jewish communal farming in America. The other significant omission is a complete lack of information about Jewish communal farms in the 1960s and 1970s. Mike Tabor, for instance, started a Jewish communal farm in Pennsylvania [Licking Creek Bend Farm] and has been selling produce from his farm in the Washington, DC area for more than 50 years. He was part of a network of Jewish communes and communal farms for many years.

*Tom Rose
Palm Harbor, Florida*

MOMENTDEBATE

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In an era of deep political turmoil, we ask a difficult question: Are We Losing our Democracy? @dahlialthwick and @TeviTroy debate at bit.ly/3z3uQ2E Let us know what you think below, results will be published in our next issue.



In the previous issue, Moment asked if we are losing our democracy. We asked Moment's Twitter followers to weigh in. Yes won.

CORPORATIONS OWN US ALL

The question asked in the most recent debate (“Moment Debate: Are We Losing Our Democracy?” Summer 2022) presupposes that we have one. But the reality is that nothing gets through Congress without having a corporate sponsor. The lack of antitrust enforcement has produced powerful oligopolies [when a few companies exert significant control over a given market] in most industries. Most regulatory agencies have been cap-

tured by industry. The media that most Americans have access to are sponsored by large domestic and foreign entities. Money in politics keeps a check on anyone set on upsetting the status quo.

*Harlan Levinson
Los Angeles, CA*

LITERARY MOMENT

FOR THE LOVE OF LOX

Memories of long lines outside Zabar's on Saturday night came back while reading Gloria Levitas's review "The Temple of Whitefish and Lox" (Summer 2022). I also remember *The New York Times*' obituary for a longtime Zabar's counterman who was deemed "the dean of American lox slicers."

*Avrom Jacobs
Jamaica Plain, MA*

MOMENTLIVE!

A COURAGEOUS CONVERSATION

Thank you so very much for featuring the wisdom of Judea Pearl on your recent MomentLive! Zoominar ("Zionophobia: A Wide Open Conversation"). I was very pleasantly surprised that *Moment* would have chosen to do this program with him, since I imagine that many of your readers don't agree with a number of his ideas on Israel.

I appreciate that the interviewer, Editor-in-Chief Nadine Epstein, allowed him to offer his opinions, even though she may not have agreed with everything he said.

I believe that it takes courage to not only feature ideas with which you do not agree but also to be willing to stand up to what may be severe criticism from *Moment* supporters. I applaud you! Thank you again!

*Judy Goldman
Maale Adumim, Israel*

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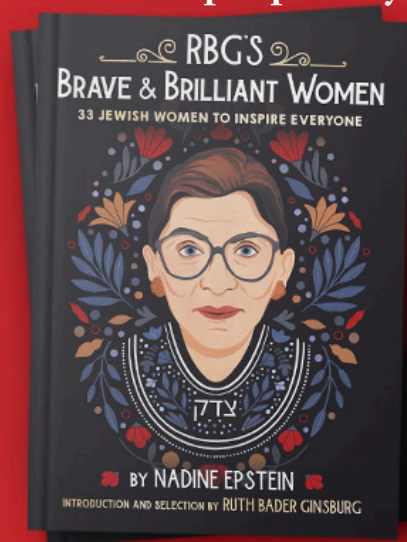
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WHY IS ISRAEL DEADLOCKED?

The Netanyahu factor may not explain the ongoing election stalemate.

The prospect of Israel's fifth election in less than four years does not seem promising. It's not promising for anyone, because nothing much seems to have changed. Israel is still politically deadlocked, and whether what emerges from this cycle is a short-lived new government or an immediate sixth election will mostly be a matter of luck and coincidence. Maybe a party fails to cross the electoral threshold, giving one of the camps a slight advantage. Maybe Arab voters, who currently seem completely uninterested in this election, will suddenly rise up and vote, giving the edge to another camp. Maybe. But even if so, not much will change. The basic tie is still with us. The polls barely move. No wonder—after four cycles, most Israelis pretty much know what they want. They aren't suddenly going to regret their previous choice and move to the other camp.

With such a depressing outlook, one question remains: Is the constant tie a cause or an effect?

The one consistent feature of the five almost consecutive cycles of election is the division between the two main camps in Israel. These camps aren't exactly ideological. They have social characteristics, they have certain geographical structures, they clearly separate the more traditional from the less so. But by and large, their main expression is the tendency of one camp to insist on one leader—former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu—and the tendency of the other camp to insist on anyone *but* that one leader.

Thus, the obvious question: What happens if we take Netanyahu out of the equation? Suppose Netanyahu decides to step aside, or his party, Likud, decides to turn the page and elect a new leader. Or suppose some parties in Netanyahu's camp (maybe one of the ultra-Orthodox

parties) decides to jump ship and dismantle the camp as we know it. What happens then?

Americans might face a similar question if or when Donald Trump is removed from the scene, whether by his own choice or by losing an electoral battle. This isn't a suggestion that Netanyahu is anything like Trump, because he isn't: Netanyahu is a thoughtful, serious intellectual and was an effective leader of Israel for many years. Rather, it is a question that ought to bother all Israelis who conveniently assume that their problem is a nagging yet essentially uncomplicated one—having to deal with one controversial leader whom some admire, almost worship, and others can no longer tolerate.

This assumption is convenient, because if it's so, Israel's current problem is temporary. A fifth election, a sixth, a seventh—eventually, Netanyahu will get tired, or his opponents will, or circumstances will force his departure. If Netanyahu is the cause, then our ongoing political crisis has an expiration date. We do not know the exact date, but it exists. It could be as near as the upcoming election.

Alas, there is another possibility. The debate about Netanyahu may not be the cause but rather the effect of much deeper currents. If so, then Netanyahu is merely shorthand for something else—a way to make the problem seem smaller, less threatening, in the hope that when the man goes, the political crisis goes with him.

It is possible. There are reasons to suspect that if Netanyahu is somehow removed from the scene, a stable coalition would become imaginable. Put someone else, with less baggage, at the head of the Likud Party; let that candidate negotiate with prospective coalition partners, right, Haredi and center; and voilà! You could have Prime Minister Yariv Levin



Benjamin Netanyahu

(just as an example—he came out on top in the recent Likud primary election), Defense Minister Benny Gantz, Finance Minister Avigdor Lieberman, you name it. Most of these leaders' ideological differences aren't going to be a problem. They all oppose a nuclear Iran, they all consider a Palestinian state an irrelevant issue, and they all favor a market-based economy with a social safety net. This should be an easy solution to Israel's need for political stability.

And yet, there's the other option: That Netanyahu exits the scene, and we suddenly realize that he wasn't the problem, he was just a stand-in for it.

What could be the problem, then? Any answer would be long and complicated, but here's a quick speculation. The problem could be a wide cultural gap between Israeli Jews in regard to their future vision for the country: a gap between those Israelis who want to see Israel as a Western liberal democracy with some Jewish characteristics and those who want to see Israel as a unique Jewish state with some characteristics of Western liberal democracy. Such a gap may sound fairly nuanced, but it's a gap that would take more than just a change in leadership to bridge.

Shmuel Rosner is a Tel Aviv-based editor and columnist.

WHO'S CRAZY NOW?

Compared to the United States, Israel seems almost 'normal.'

Anyone who spent much time in Israel before the last few years has probably heard this trope from multiple Israelis: "Everything here is crazy! Why can't we live in a normal country?" The "normal country" of their fantasies was almost certainly the United States.

No longer. And it's not only because of Donald Trump. Although Israel was one of the very few countries where majorities liked our former president, few Israelis could avoid noticing that "crazy" events in the United States have multiplied during the last decade. Mass shootings. Legislative gridlock. Eleven million undocumented immigrants. Increasing numbers of unhinged legislators. And, of course, January 6 and the whole litany of election denialism.

As a professor of Israel studies, I go to Israel pretty regularly. This summer was my first trip since pre-COVID times, and, apart from a conference, I mostly saw old friends. And virtually every one of them asked me, usually with a note of incredulity, some variation of: "What's going on in the U.S.?"

Not that Israel doesn't have its own *mishegas*, and plenty of it. Most notably, it's just entering its fifth general election in three and a half years. But that wasn't exactly unexpected, and people I spoke with took it in stride. Likewise the mini-war with Gaza in August, which was over and done with in a long weekend. Even the annual ritual of beginning the school year with a teachers' strike was avoided this time with a deal that is supposed to last until 2026.

My time in Israel was very pleasant. True, I could have found lots of issues if I'd looked. Evictions of Palestinians from the neighborhoods of Sheikh Jarrah and Masafer Yatta. Member of Knesset Ita-

mar Ben-Gvir, an Israeli Marjorie Taylor Greene. But people weren't storming the Knesset (it's never been stormed). There was no dispute about who had won the four previous Knesset elections (nobody had), nor is anyone predicting actual civil war. Sure, the left is asserting Israeli democracy would be seriously endangered if Benjamin Netanyahu wins again, or if avowed Kahanists become government ministers. Likewise, Bibi is warning that the left will (again) bring "terrorists" into the government (referring to Mansour Abbas's United Arab List, which supported the last government and the sky didn't fall). But these are par for the course, and few voters seem to be losing any sleep.

More seriously, though Israel still has daunting problems—particularly the occupation, and the presence of Iran as a seemingly permanent enemy—the sense of fragility that was attached to it for decades is gone. The rhetorical trump card for those who argued that Israel was uniquely endangered was always, "Israel is the only country whose right to exist is permanently threatened by its neighbors." It's hard to maintain that nowadays in the age of Ukraine and Taiwan. Meanwhile, the Abraham Accords, along with Israel's unofficial but seemingly solid relations with much of the Arab world, mean Israel is buttressed by the sort of alliances that other countries have long enjoyed.

Looking at the United States, it's hard to be so sanguine. With the politicization and weaponization of virtually every public issue, it's increasingly obvious that our most serious dangers come from within. The recent explosion of violent threats following the FBI search of Mar-a-Lago dwarfs anything going on in Israel. While, strangely, both countries have recent chief executives facing significant legal jeopardy, Netanyahu has been duly attending his trial and not issuing threats of violence if

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THE RECENT EXPLOSION OF VIOLENT THREATS HERE DWARFS ANYTHING GOING ON IN ISRAEL.

the verdict goes against him. While some of the "deep state" rhetoric is similar, real fear of civil war seems confined to the U.S.

Why the difference—given somewhat similar political polarization in both countries? I suspect the solution relates to Israel having been in genuinely greater jeopardy within living memory—an experience the United States simply hasn't had. Few Israelis now remember 1948, but it is much closer than our Civil War. Israelis will never forget the existential fears of 1967 and 1973, compared with 9/11, which was a single day—a day when, despite the shock and horror, the existence of the United States was never threatened. Even World War II, which many of our parents fought in, never came close to our own shores after the attack on Pearl Harbor. We don't have those memories of deep distress.

Not that violence is necessarily a prophylactic—but experiencing it can sometimes give people pause. Wouldn't it be ironic if our lack of recent exposure to internal political violence, combined with the enormous amount of firepower at large in this country, were to make us more prone than Israel to actual bloodshed? Prediction is beyond me, but the degree to which these countries' respective national and self-images have seemingly reversed is striking. Like all of us, I wonder: Where do we go from here? And can we change our trajectory?

Paul Scham is director of the Gildenhorn Institute for Israel Studies at the University of Maryland.

THE GOP'S CHRISTIAN SUPREMACY PROBLEM

Several candidates in the primaries have marched into incendiary territory.

The Republican Party has a Christian supremacy problem—which is also an antisemitism problem. The party's failure to address it in any meaningful way is a dire threat to the religious freedom GOP partisans claim to so ardently safeguard. Indeed, it imperils democracy itself.

Take Doug Mastriano, the Republican nominee for governor of Pennsylvania. In April, his campaign paid a \$5,000 “consulting” fee to Gab, the social media site run by Andrew Torba, an avowed Christian supremacist who has said that “we don’t want people who are Jewish” in America because “this is an explicitly Christian country.” His site is a sewer of hate and incitement to violence. It has platformed white supremacists, racists and neo-Nazis, including the rabidly antisemitic shooter in the 2018 Tree of Life Synagogue massacre in Pittsburgh. Not only did this horrific hate crime take place in the state Mastriano aspires to lead, but Torba has been repeatedly forthright in saying Jews are not welcome in his vision for a Christian state. “We are building a parallel Christian society because we are fed up and done with the Judeo-Bolshevik one,” Torba wrote on Gab’s Twitter account in 2021.

After Mastriano’s Democratic opponent, Pennsylvania attorney general Josh Shapiro, who is Jewish, criticized Mastriano’s ties to Gab on national television this summer, Torba became more combative. “We are going to build a coalition of Christian nationalists, of Christians, of Christian candidates at the state, local and federal levels, and we’re gonna take this country back for the glory of God,” he said in a video posted online. Mastriano, Torba proclaimed, is “our guy.” When asked by a *Huffington Post* reporter to comment on the \$5,000 consulting agreement, Torba, who has said that neither he nor Mastriano will agree to interviews with journalists who are not Christian, didn’t respond but

later sent the reporter an email including a command to “repent now...and accept Jesus Christ into your heart. Every knee will bow, yours included.”

Pennsylvania rabbis and Jewish lawmakers called on the state’s Republicans to publicly oppose Mastriano. To its credit, the Republican Jewish Coalition called on Mastriano to cut ties with Gab—but stopped short of distancing itself from the nominee. Matt Brooks, the group’s president, “strongly urge[d] Doug Mastriano to end his association with Gab, a social network rightly seen by Jewish Americans as a cesspool of bigotry and antisemitism.”

While Mastriano did then apparently deactivate his Gab account, he was less than contrite about having embraced it in the first place. He purported to “reject antisemitism in any form,” but immediately segued to attacking Shapiro as an “extremist”—quite rich coming from a candidate who attended the January 6 insurrection. At a subsequent campaign stop, Mastriano waved away Jewish complaints about his campaign launch, at which a shofar was blown and Christian participants wore tallit.

In the radicalized Republican landscape, none of this has made Mastriano a pariah. Florida governor Ron DeSantis, considered a top contender to be Donald Trump’s political heir, headlined a campaign event for Mastriano in August. Dan Cox, the GOP nominee in the Maryland gubernatorial race, attended a rally with Mastriano that peddled stolen election lies and QAnon conspiracy theories, melding both with Christian nationalism. Cox also proudly touts Mastriano’s endorsement on his campaign website.

It would be bad enough if Mastriano were the only Republican running for top office this fall with an uncomfortable proximity to Gab and its ilk. In Arizona, Torba endorsed Republican Senate nominee Blake Masters, who rejected the endorsement, claiming he had “never heard

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THE RJC HAS CALLED
GAB ‘A CESSPOOL
OF BIGOTRY AND
ANTISEMITISM.’

of” the Gab CEO. But audio surfaced of Masters participating in a Twitter Spaces event (a live audio chat streamed through the Twitter app) with Torba just this year.

Masters is not alone in Arizona. The Republican nominee for governor, Kari Lake—a Trump-endorsed promoter of the stolen election lie—endorsed the Oklahoma state senate candidate Jarrin Jackson, who has an extensive record of posting viciously antisemitic diatribes online, including statements that “the Jews” are proof that “evil exists” and that “Jews will go to hell.” Only after an outcry did Lake, who has courted Trump’s Christian nationalist base, withdraw the endorsement. The Jewish Community Relations Council of Greater Phoenix condemned her “tepid renunciation” as “wholly insufficient.”

Trump, who infamously declared there to be “very fine people on both sides” of the neo-Nazi march in Charlottesville in 2017, may have perfected the art of the deflection from his embrace of racists and antisemites. But his acolytes are following his lead into even more incendiary territory, with federal, state and local candidates across the country openly embracing blatant and grotesque antisemitism. The phrase “never again” has never had more urgency in American politics than it does now.

Sarah Posner is the author of Unholy: How White Christian Nationalists Powered the Trump Presidency, and the Devastating Legacy They Left Behind.

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The Road to Gender Equity, with Ting Ting Cheng,
Ruth Rosen and Nadine Epstein—a series in
memory of Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 28 AT 12PM, ET
From Undocumented Child to Successful American Jewish
Lawyer and Writer, with Qian Julie Wang and
Sarah Breger—Antisemitism Series

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 7 AT 1:00PM, ET
Viktor Orbán and Hungary's Recent Descent Into Antisemi-
tism, with Ira Forman, Kati Marton and
Amy E. Schwartz—Antisemitism Series

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 12 AT 4:30PM, ET
Jewish Refugee Professors at Historically Black Colleges &
Universities, with Lillie J. Edward, Eric K. Ward and Nadine
Epstein—The Wide River Project

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 19 AT 1PM, ET
Rediscovering My Iraqi-Jewish Roots Through Music, with
Yoni Avi Battat and Joe Alterman

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 25 AT 4:30PM, ET
Shanda! Shameful Family Secrets, with
Letty Cottin Pogrebin and Abigail Pogrebin

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 1 AT 4:30PM, ET
Is There Such a Thing as a Bad Jew? The Confluence of
American Jewish Politics and Identity, with
Emily Tamkin and Dan Raviv

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moment debate

NO

Are there dangers in the increase of Israel-related money in American electoral politics? No. In recent years we've seen a dramatic increase in the amounts being raised by all candidates across the political spectrum. It's long past due for the American pro-Israel community to begin to engage in the political process in a way that matches that environment. I'm pleased that AIPAC has stepped forward to do this. You can't communicate with voters the same way you did five, eight, ten years ago. It's far more cost-intensive, and the debates have become far more polarized, full of misinformation and slander and smears—from the far left and the far right—against normal positions held by a majority of Americans. It's essential for those of us who hold reasonable, moderate views to speak out for those who believe that Israel is one of our closest allies in the world. Support for Israel is also an important prism through which one understands whether a candidate shares one's worldview generally.

Not every race is about Israel, but some are, and those messages have to get out. For instance, the difference between Andy Levin and his opponent Haley Stevens, who beat him, was important to understand. Not just because he's *not* a supporter of Israel, whatever he says, but because he's dramatically outside the mainstream of what most voters in his district and in the United States believe. And that messaging has to be accomplished these days through paid media, because the distortion in social media is so rife. So it's very valuable that the pro-Israel community put together this way of addressing the problem.

What changes do you think drove AIPAC's shift in approach? We've seen the rise of a progressive machine that

animates campaigns like Bernie Sanders's and also exaggerates the support for people like Representative Rashida Tlaib of Michigan. When candidates like Bernie are able to raise small-dollar contributions not from a broad public but from bands of supporters on the extremes, like when he raised more than \$140 million before the California Democratic primaries in 2016, it's important for mainstream candidates to be able to raise the money they need to get their message out.

Do you have concerns about the direction of campaign funding generally? Supporting your candidate of choice is as American as apple pie. We want Americans to be as involved in the political process as possible, from voting to canvassing to writing checks if needed. That being said, the high cost of campaigning makes running for office more expensive and time-consuming and can distract from the job of actually legislating. As one who would like to see legislators work together more across the aisle, I think supporting candidates closer to the center is a good idea. Would campaign finance reform make that easier? I don't know.

Will the involvement of Israel-related PACs end up magnifying small policy differences on Israel? More likely, you'll see the pro-Israel community getting involved when there are real differences between candidates within the same party, and broadening support for those who speak out for a strong U.S.-Israel relationship, including a two-state solution when that's appropriate. The difference between Andy Levin, who holds hands with Rashida Tlaib, and a candidate who rejects people like Tlaib is not a minor but a substantial difference. Candidates' approach to

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Supporting your candidate of choice is as American as apple pie.

JOSH BLOCK

antisemitism is also an increasing concern that needs to be more forcefully called out.

On the Republican side, should pro-Israel groups support 2020 election deniers? I'm sensitive to that argument, but Republican politics have become very complicated in the era of Trump, and I don't think any issue should be an actual litmus test. There are important distinctions to be made among Republicans as well as Democrats. As bad as it may be to suggest the 2020 election was illegitimate or fraudulent—it was not—that sentiment was so widely expressed among Republicans that we can't just decline to engage in these important political battles. Also, mainstream candidates often make such statements from a defensive posture to prevent being primaried or assaulted by even more fringe or radical elements. AIPAC did support Liz Cheney; it's unfortunate she lost, and it shows the trauma of the Republican Party in the Trump era. But those of us outside don't have the luxury of setting the agenda for the Republican Party. We have to meet reality where it is.

How do you see these new funding patterns playing out in the general election? We're likely to see a broadening of support across all parties for candidates who express mainstream pro-Israel views and support America's leading role in the world. When money is invested in candidates with mainstream views who then win primaries, then over time, there's a chance to elevate sensible perspectives on both sides.

Josh Block is a former spokesman for AIPAC, an adjunct fellow at the Hudson Institute and a former Clinton administration appointee.

Are there dangers in the increase of Israel-related money in American electoral politics?

YES

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Shutting down discussion of Israel betrays our shared democratic values.

ANDY LEVIN

Are there dangers in the increase of Israel-related money in American electoral politics? Yes. The races that AIPAC's PAC flooded with millions of dollars—including my race—weren't only about Israel. Many of the candidates defeated in these races supported policies that will affect climate justice, racial justice and other crises. In several of these races AIPAC outspent every other lobby combined, all to stop candidates who are fighting for a livable future.

There are really two levels of deception. First, the right-wing-on-Israel PACs aren't honest about what their issue is. In my race, none of the advertising was about Israel-Palestine. There might have been some micro-targeting to certain voters, but the vast majority of the money AIPAC spent against me and others didn't even talk about Israel. Second, millions of these dollars raised and spent by AIPAC have come from Republican billionaires, and that's deeply concerning. These are Democratic primaries, for God's sake. No party wants adherents of the other party to choose its nominees.

What changes do you think drove AIPAC's shift in approach? AIPAC knows the tide is shifting against it on the policy end, especially with Jewish Americans. Trying to convince the public of its views is an uphill battle, especially when a younger generation wants to see Palestinian rights respected. So they're using the kind of tactics any group uses when it wants to advance unpopular views. They're flooding the airwaves with money to force candidates to say what they want them to say.

Do you have concerns about the direction of campaign funding generally? Absolutely. There's a larger problem of

so-called dark money in politics that we have to confront. We're also seeing it play out within the Democratic Party—the Democratic National Committee leadership was unwilling even to vote on a proposal to ban dark money in our own primaries. That's not just a *shanda*, it's a crisis for our politics. We should have public financing for our campaigns.

I've been a leader in fighting against dark money in politics. I contributed a bill to HR1, the For the People Act, that would allow the government to require corporations to disclose to their shareholders whom they're spending this money on. Believe it or not, that doesn't happen.

Will the involvement of Israel-related PACs end up magnifying small policy differences on Israel? I think it's more of a chilling effect. They're trying to shut down rational discussion about Israel and Palestine, the Iran nuclear deal and other issues. They don't do it directly: Most Americans, including most Jews, don't list those issues among the top five reasons they vote. But the PACs use spending to move the goalposts, to punish anyone who speaks up for Palestinian rights. Mostly that has meant targeting women of color, but they also couldn't stand it that I, as a Jew and a former synagogue president who shares the values of most Americans, speak up as I do. And most Americans would support the same kind of baseline accountability issues for money we send to Israel as we do for any other country.

They're trying to tighten the range of what's acceptable. I won't cede the definition of who is a Zionist and who loves Israel to these people. It's just not truthful. I'm just as pro-Israel as they are, and of course,

if you go to Israel, you'll find robust debate with all these views expressed. The most important thing we share with Israel is the commitment to a secure homeland for the Jewish people. But we also share a commitment to democracy. And the idea that AIPAC wants to shut down democratic discussion of policy toward Israel is a betrayal of those shared values.

On the Republican side, should pro-Israel groups support 2020 election deniers? AIPAC has been supporting insurrectionist-aligned Republicans, helping dozens of them survive primary challenges. Regardless of how much money these PACs spend in individual races, their endorsement of 109 insurrectionists means they're putting their stamp of approval on people like Jim Jordan of Ohio and Barry Loudermilk of Georgia—the tour guide of January 5. It's outrageous. And it's deeply alienating for many American Jews.

How do you see these new funding patterns playing out in the general election? Their impact is in shaping our options. AIPAC is helping ensure that the next Congress has a huge bloc of MAGA lawmakers loyal to Donald Trump and not to our democracy. Being a single-issue group is no excuse; it doesn't mean you have no obligation to preserve democracy. When there's no more democracy you can't lobby on your issue, whatever it is. The question for Democrats is whether we're going to let that continue—whether by AIPAC or any other Super PAC.

Andy Levin, a Democrat, represents the 11th District of Michigan. He lost the Democratic primary for reelection to fellow representative Haley Stevens in August.

ask the rabbis

Can Jews married to non-Jews be considered spiritual leaders in the Jewish community?



"Ruth in Boaz's Field" by Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld

INDEPENDENT

Why not? Moses was not such a bad spiritual leader of our people, and he was married to Tziporah the Midianite. His nephew, Eliezer the High Priest, was married to a Midianite woman as well. Joshua, who succeeded Moses as the spiritual leader of our people, married Rahav the Canaanite (*Talmud Bav'li*, *Megilah* 14b). Boaz, spiritual leader of the tribe of Judah a century or so later, married Ruth the Moabite. The first-century Rabbi Akiva was married to the Roman Claudia Rufina, ex-wife of Quintus Tineius Rufus, the Pontius Pilate of his time (Rashi on *Talmud Bav'li*, *Nedarim* 50b). But it was okay back then, because this was centuries before

the tragic establishment of the Israeli Chief Rabbinate. Many will of course argue that these wives all "converted." True, many joined the Jewish people, but throughout the entire Tanach, you will find no sign of the modern notion of "conversion." You can convert your electric dryer to gas-operated, but you cannot convert non-Jewish to Jewish. You can only "graft," a far simpler and more authentic deal: "The Holy-Blessed-One said to Abraham: 'I have two wonderful stems destined to be grafted within you: Ruth the Moabite and Na'mah the Amonite'" (*Talmud Bav'li*, *Yevamot* 63a).

Rabbi Gershon Winkler
Walking Stick Foundation
Monument, CO

HUMANIST

Not only *can* intermarried rabbis and other clergy exist, we *do* exist, and we have for quite awhile. Intermarried spiritual leaders are not only able to help model what committed and flourishing Judaism can look like for people living in diverse households, we can often help couples and families determine how to bring Judaism into their own lives in more meaningful ways, without fear of guilt or shame around whom and how they love.

The Jewish community's fears about intermarriage are not bearing out. We no longer need to ask what might happen if we have significant numbers of Jews intermarrying, for this is already

happening and we are seeing the result: These Jews—couples and families—are engaging with Judaism in beautiful, creative, meaningful ways.

Participants in my community, most of whom are intermarried, children of people who are intermarried, or partnered with people who are not Jewish, all live vibrantly Jewish lives. In fact, we find that explaining celebrations and rituals to our loved ones can increase our own feelings of Jewish connection, for we articulate what the various aspects of Judaism are, what they mean to us and why they matter.

Rabbi Denise Handlarski
Secular Synagogue
Toronto, ON

RENEWAL

Clearly, some intermarried Jews already are spiritual leaders—in Renewal, Reconstructionist and unaffiliated groups that accept and value them. Which makes sense—these are the parts of the Jewish spectrum less concerned with ethnicity, blood lineage and halacha; more intermarried themselves, and more comfortable with spiritual wisdom from multiple traditions.

Many who oppose ordaining intermarried rabbis feel that rabbis are supposed to model Jewish commitment for the congregation. But with non-Orthodox Jews in America intermarrying at a 70 to 80 percent rate, an intermarried spiritual leader might actually be a helpful model to congregants living the new reality. The notion of a “model of Jewish commitment” may also be shifting. For centuries, the rabbi was male, and his wife, the rebbetzin, played an integral communal role: She greeted congregants, made food for kiddush, served as her husband’s gatekeeper, comforted women mourners, led the women in prayer and counseled young brides. This is still a beloved model at Chabad houses and Orthodox shuls today. But elsewhere, rabbis’ spouses or partners (of whatever gender) are no longer necessarily expected to be unpaid assistants. As

the role of a rabbi’s spouse/partner recedes, their religious status also becomes less important to the community. If the rabbi is blessed to have a loving partner of any background who encourages and supports the rabbi’s deep immersion in Jewish life, surely that should be enough for the rest of us.

Rabbi Gilah Langner
Congregation Kol Ami
Arlington, VA

RECONSTRUCTIONIST

Yes, I believe Jews of any marital status can serve, and are serving, as wonderful spiritual leaders in the Jewish community. We should embrace and have gratitude for the leadership gifts people bring, which are independent of the interests and commitments of the people they love. The Reconstructionist movement has had a policy for the last six years that welcomes rabbinical students regardless of whether their partners, if any, are Jewish, and the policy has enriched the movement with wonderful colleagues.

For me, this has been a process of learning. I still believe that in-marriage can be helpful for living a Jewish life, for it is difficult for any minority in the United States to maintain and pass on a cultural heritage different from that of the mainstream. Pressures to assimilate come from many corners—work, school, social circles and more. In such a context, a Jewish spouse and extended family with its shared culture can be one important way of creating support for one’s identity as a minority. Yet it is only one of many ways. Intentional choices to create a rich Jewish life are equally powerful. And increasing the accessibility of great Jewish education underlies all paths and would have the most impact. We do no service to the Jewish world by denying the leadership gifts of dedicated Jews who teach, inspire and deepen our Jewish lives.

Rabbi Caryn Broitman
Martha’s Vineyard Hebrew Center
Vineyard Haven, MA

REFORM

Yes. Jews married to non-Jews are already spiritual leaders in the Jewish community. There are successful rabbis, educators and other professionals who have non-Jewish partners, and often, their experience as part of an interfaith family benefits their work.

In today’s world, the religious status of someone’s partner cannot serve as a reliable sign of their Jewish commitment. Many serious, learned and inspiring Jews build a home with someone who is not Jewish. Conversely, there are plenty of Jews married to Jews whom you probably wouldn’t want as your spiritual leader! You can’t judge just by someone’s marriage partner.

I challenge folks who care about “how Jewish” a spiritual leader is to specify precisely what is important to them. Is it ritual observance? Adherence to Jewish law? Depth of knowledge? Lay out the factors you care most about and then assess a spiritual leader for those qualities. I bet, when you get down to it, the religious status of a person’s spouse isn’t going to make the list.

Especially in organizations and communities where interfaith families are common and accepted, intermarried Jewish spiritual leaders can certainly be celebrated and successful.

Rabbi Daniel Kirzane
Oak Park Temple
Oak Park, IL

CONSERVATIVE

The spiritual leader of a Jewish community has an important role in ensuring that the overarching goals of the Jewish people are realized: commitment to serving God, support for the Jewish people, a life of Torah and support for the State of Israel. A spiritual leader—a rabbi or a cantor in most synagogues—does not have just any job. My colleagues and I have chosen a lifestyle, one that demands a Jewish partner in order to create the fullest Jewish life and most effective leadership.

A Jewish spiritual leader is a *dugma*

eesbeet—a person who sets a good example in actions, thoughts and presence. This person is a role model to the Jewish and non-Jewish communities and as such must maintain a serious, engaged, observant and committed Jewish home, which is reflected in choices as weighty as life partner or as mundane as kashrut observance.

Our work, rightly so, is hard, and at times it can be lonely. While I offer no halachic basis here, based on the sociological reality of a Jewish life, I would say that to do this work effectively and authentically—if one is lucky enough to have a partner—that partner must be Jewish.

Rabbi Amy S. Wallk
Temple Beth El
Springfield, MA

MODERN ORTHODOX

In my immediate community, Modern Orthodoxy, the answer is no. Since a rabbi married to a non-Jew would be violating halacha, he would be unfit to serve as a spiritual leader. Moreover, since intermarried Jews have lower rates of ritual observance, of affiliation and of support for Israel, most Modern Orthodox Jews would consider them bad role models.

That said, I recognize that there are communities where many members are intermarried. Some of these might seek a spiritual leader with a similar pattern of marriage, with the thought that if the spiritual leader is Jewishly learned or activist, similarly situated members might be more likely to identify and become better Jews.

My advice to people in such a community: Check out *why* the potential rabbi is intermarried. Often, intermarriage means the person does not care that much about being Jewish, is not bothered that children of a non-Jewish parent are likely to be less affiliated and is not motivated to convince a spouse to convert. In such a case, you would probably want to find a different spiritual leader/role model. But in other cases, a deeply caring Jew may meet and fall in love

with a non-Jew. The non-Jewish partner may not be willing to convert because he/she is a devout member of another faith, has devout parents or has an aged parent who would be deeply hurt by a child's conversion to Judaism. In other words, this rabbi is a committed Jew who cares deeply about the Jewish future—and perhaps has children who are being raised Jewish—but is constrained by legitimate human concerns from having a spouse become Jewish. This kind of intermarried rabbi might nevertheless be able to inspire a higher level of Jewish identity or commitment in you and your children. If your community is ready to choose an intermarried rabbi, this is the kind of person you should seek out.

Rabbi Yitz Greenberg
J.J. Greenberg Institute for the
Advancement of Jewish Life/Hadar
Riverdale, NY

ORTHODOX

There's a classic story of a professor who lectures on the evils of smoking while puffing away at a cigarette. Someone asks afterward, "How can you be so passionate and yet smoke?" He responds, "If I were teaching trigonometry, would I have to become a triangle?" If you subscribe to this theory—that is, if you believe a leader does not have to model whatever his mission statement is—then this is a legitimate question. Otherwise, it's clear that such a person should not be entrusted with guiding the future of the Jewish people.

It's disappointing that in 2022 this argument still needs to be made. In 2001, the National Jewish Population Survey found a rate of intermarriage that, though lower than today, shocked many. Doomsayers said, "This is the end of the Jewish people!" But others were quick to respond that it was not so gloomy, but rather a source of hope, because so many intermarried people and their children identify as Jews.

That was a baseless balm on the wound to the Jewish people. A 2020 survey found that only 16 percent of adult children of intermarriage identi-

fied as Jews by religion. Almost half of those surveyed said they were Christian. Even those identifying as Jewish don't offer much hope for a vibrant Jewish future. The (non-Orthodox) Jack Wertheimer has described the identity of intermarried couples and their children as "thin"—thin on learning from traditional Jewish sources, thin on Jewish practice, thin on commitment to Israel. By now, we should realize that the only real future for the Jewish people is one based on strong Jewish families—that is, a Jewish nuclear family of two parents both committed to the Jewish past, present and future, which means commitment to the Jewish people, Jewish practice and traditional Jewish values.

Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein
Cross-Currents
Los Angeles, CA

NEO-SEPHARDIC

To be a spiritual leader one needs to embody the values one preaches. A misogynist cannot preach equality, you don't discuss the importance of vegetarianism over a rib steak, and it would be hard to be inspired to protect the planet when the speaker arrives at the event in a gas guzzler. That does not mean that the answer to the question above is negative. It means that we first have to define the value system of said community. If the community is in favor of such marriages, then that person could become a spiritual leader. If not, one could still ask why those two people are married to each other, why the non-Jewish spouse is not converting to Judaism and whether the candidate is being hired to convey a spiritual message not reflected in his or her lifestyle. If so, the result of the appointment will be the opposite of what is intended. Each case should be examined individually to see whether the candidate meets the requirements of the position, not only in terms of professional credentials but also in terms of being a role model.

Rabbi Haim Ovadia
Torah VeAhava
Potomac, MD

moment(s)



JEWISH MONTANANS BUY BACK HISTORIC SYNAGOGUE AMID GROWING ANTISEMITISM

BY **DAN FREEDMAN**

The northeast corner of Temple Emanu-El in Helena, Montana bears the Jewish calendar date 5651, which corresponds to the year 1890, when the state's first governor, Joseph K. Toole, declared, "We lay this cornerstone to the truth."

The ceremony attracted many of Helena's leading citizens, Jews and non-Jews, to celebrate what clothing merchant and congregation leader Herman Gans described as "a gift to ornament the city we love."

The temple opened the following year. Twin onion domes framed a superstructure of granite, porphyry and sandstone. The sanctuary ceiling was blue and dotted

with stars. The space was large enough to seat 500. It was the only synagogue between St. Paul, Minnesota and Portland, Oregon, a distance of about 1,750 miles. "It was an architectural anomaly, adding greatly to the cosmopolitan image that Helena really wanted to project at the time," says Ellen Bauml, a historian with the Montana Historical Society.

For 44 years after its opening, Temple Emanu-El stood as a monument to a thriving community in one of the diaspora's loneliest outposts. But the Jewish population declined due to intermarriage and out-migration, and the synagogue closed its doors in 1935 during the Great Depression, when the state of Montana bought the building for \$1 and a pledge

to use it for a "good and social purpose."

Today, the onion domes are long gone, the copper portions supposedly salvaged for use in building the State Capitol dome. The local Catholic diocese, which bought the building from the state in 1981 for use as administrative offices, placed a cross on top. But on August 25, the Jewish community of Helena officially reacquired Temple Emanu-El, 87 years after the original congregation closed its doors.

"We are thrilled to have succeeded in this monumental effort," Rebecca Stanfel of the Montana Jewish Project said at the ceremony outside the synagogue, where she and Bishop Austin Vetter signed documents formalizing the purchase as a crowd of about 100 looked on.

COURTESY OF REBECCA STANFEL

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Vatican Archives Opened; Desperate
WWII Letters From Jews Revealed

"It's vital for all of us people of faith to focus on the good we can do together instead of our differences," said Bishop Vetter. "My prayers are with Montana's Jewish community for God's blessing in this new endeavor."

Jewish life in Montana dates back to at least the 1860s, when Samuel Schwab, born in Bavaria, rode the first stagecoach from Salt Lake City to sell materials to gold miners in the boomtown of Banack (now a ghost town).

He was not alone. Lewis Hershfield opened a bank in Virginia City (also now a ghost town), and was the first banker to trade gold dust for currency. Of 78 Jews listed in an 1888 survey of Helena, 14 were sales clerks, 17 were clothing mer-

chants, 4 were tobacconists, and 1 was a saloonkeeper. Jews served as state representatives and city council members. Henry Lublin Frank, a successful liquor wholesaler, was mayor of Butte from 1885 to 1887. The Fligelman sisters, Frieda and Belle, were born in Helena in the 1890s to the successful proprietor of the "New York Store" and his wife. The sisters were suffragists and devoted their lives to equal rights for women and minorities.

Montana's Jewish population also had its share of shady characters. "Jew Jake" Harris, born in Prussia, gambled his way through the state, shooting an opponent who brandished two razors after accusing him of cheating. "Jew Jess" was another such figure, a sex worker and drug addict skilled in picking pockets. She was said to know the law well enough to serve as her own counsel in court cases. Nonetheless, the historical picture of Jews in Montana is a positive one.

"Jewish residents...were not only respected but really embraced by the Gentile community," says Baumler. "Jews were lawyers, doctors, judges, bankers, merchants, service providers and business partners with non-Jews."

After its Depression-era decline, the Jewish population is on the rise again, drawn by Montana's "Big Sky" open

spaces and unhurried lifestyle. Today, the state's Jewish population is about 1,500. However, this rebirth comes at a time of growing antisemitism both nationwide and in Montana: The Mountain West region has long been a breeding ground for white supremacists and the (antise-mitic) Christian identity movement.

Stanfel recalls her teenage son having pennies tossed at him and being subjected to vicious Holocaust jokes at school. Earlier this summer, the neo-Nazi group National Socialist Movement announced a demonstration in Missoula that set local law enforcement and the community on edge. (The net result was three adherents with signs in front of a mall during a fierce rain-and-hail storm. They live-streamed the event and disbanded.)

"We know our work is only starting," said Julie Bir, a member of the Montana Jewish Project's board of directors, in a statement. "We can't wait to fulfill our mission, to create a statewide center for Jewish life, enhance interfaith opportunities, combat antisemitism in Montana schools, and bring to reality the Jewish value of 'repairing the world.'"

**Read the full story at
momentmag.com/montana-jewish-project**

ON POETRY **JOSHUA WEINER**

Nelly Sachs and the Poetry of Flight

In my childhood memories, my grandparents are sitting around the dining room table in Boston (we were "Newton Jews") with extended family of their generation, and I'm hiding under the table, listening to them banter in a mix of English and Yiddish that I couldn't understand and didn't wish to learn. They were foreigners to me; even those born in the United States seemed different, other, not fully knowable. I was from here, and of here—an American kid of 1960s suburbia who identified mostly with Max, the boy protagonist of Maurice Sendak's

Where the Wild Things Are, who sails days and nights in his imagination to an island populated by creatures both strange and intimately familiar. These beings were modeled on the writer's own elders, who affectionately threatened him as a child with the ultimate love, "I'll eat you up!"—thus providing Sendak with the uneasy and deadly serious repartee of his "Wild Things." But what young person wants to be consumed by the past, even the living past, with its fearful teeth and big eyes and funny sounds?

My grandfather, Samuel Weiner, fled Kyiv sometime between 1919 and 1921, between the ages of 10 and 12, after the orphanage where he lived was bombed during the Ukrainian War of Independence. With the help of HIAS (the He-

brew Immigrant Aid Society), which helped Jews in Eastern Europe and Russia flee pogroms, Sam made his way to Canada by way of Liverpool, where he joined his father, Charles, who'd left earlier to establish himself.

Or did Sam flee when he was 7 years old, in 1916? How did that become a different version? Why would the Red Army have bombed an orphanage in 1916? Sam's aunt traveled with him through Europe, *my* aunt says (and she's a rabbi, so that carries some weight), but then was stopped at the border with Hungary because she was cross-eyed. My aunt remembers Sam telling her he was only 7 years old at the time. But rumor has it that he heard Lenin's famous "Peace, Land, and Bread" speech on the radio in 1917.

My father says that Sam made it to Winnipeg when he was 11 and traveled with his two sisters, both in their teens. My aunt says that the sisters refused to leave Ukraine because they were married. My brother, who interviewed my grandmother more than 40 years ago about family history, thinks that's unlikely. My aunt (Rabbi Cheryl Weiner) writes in an email, "Home was wherever they lived. The stories are what remain."

Facts are the first casualties of war. That's why documents are so important—but they're often lost or destroyed. My aunt says that on his journey, Sam carried with him the collected stories of Sholem Aleichem (physical books, totem

Facts are the first casualties of war.

and talisman). Now we add our stories to the great Yiddish writer's when we think of our roots in the Pale of Settlement; the archive of memory is virtual.

More than five decades went by before I began exploring the psychic space of that archive in earnest, though at an unusual remove. I had dropped into Berlin in 2015 in order to write about the refugee situation in Germany, as millions of displaced families from Syria made epic journeys to the West. As I traversed the city, interviewing refugees, I was slowly getting closer, not to my own ethnic roots, but to the condition of rootlessness that was also mine. At one point, the poet and translator Alexander Booth met me for coffee and put a book into my hands—a volume of poems by Jewish poet Nelly Sachs, translated decades earlier. I opened it randomly and fell into the poem that had become her signature work, from which she read at the Nobel Prize ceremony in 1966 (the year she shared the prize with S.Y. Agnon, who helped invent modern literature in Hebrew)—a poem from the book-length poetic sequence *Flight and Metamorphosis*. The poem begins, "In flight / what great welcome / along the way..."

I turned to the jacket flap; it featured an iconic photograph of the poet, who looked uncannily like one of the relatives who had sat at my grandparents' table. Perhaps it was time to come out from under and find out who they were. Perhaps I could, in some way, return to that dining room by translating this book, a book clearly of our own moment, too—a time of mass displacement the scale of which we hadn't seen for 75 years. The experience, the insight, the understanding was all there, legible on the page, but the poetry of it had gone stale in an outdated English. Poetry lives in the freshness of language, and poetry in translation is more vulnerable to the vicissitudes of change than other writing. It was time now for a new Nelly Sachs.

Born in 1891 and raised in Berlin, Sachs fled the Nazis with her elderly mother in 1940, and by the skin of her teeth found refuge in Stockholm, barely escaping arrest in Berlin. The city was still intact, but their lives had been destroyed. In their escape, they fled with nothing but a couple of suitcases and each other, and some goodwill from Sweden. In a tiny flat on Bergsunds Strand, Sachs wrote her poems through the night as her mother slept. Throughout her life in exile, she felt gratitude, fear, grief, loneliness.

Flight changed Nelly Sachs utterly and turned her into a great poet. Here, in an untitled poem from *Flight and Metamorphosis*, she moves in a different direction from that of most German-language poets after the war. (The Nuremberg Race Laws of 1935 had stripped her of her citizenship.) Where other poets, such as Paul Celan, risked a more radical "rubble-izing" of the German language, Sachs risks something more mystical and equally metaphorical at its core. She had finally dropped the masks that had let her speak through the murdered Jews of Europe and was writing from her own position in the world. "My metaphors are my wounds," she wrote in a letter. She speaks in her poem with the authority of experience. Even in capturing the exhaustion and despondency of the refugee, *her* despondency as a refugee, this poetry of flight has lift:

If someone comes
from afar
with a language
that maybe seals off
its sounds
with a mare's whinny
or
the chirping
of young blackbirds
or
like a gnashing saw that severs
everything in reach—

If someone comes
from afar
moving like a dog
or
maybe a rat
and it's winter
dress him warmly
for who knows
his feet may be on fire
(perhaps he rode in
on a meteor)
so don't scold him
if your rug, riddled with holes,
screams—

A stranger always has
his homeland in his arms
like an orphan
for whom he may be seeking nothing
but a grave.

When Nelly Sachs gave her Nobel acceptance speech, she read this poem and showed us how the most powerful talisman had always been there in the heavy luggage of her own life, a shared life. "This stone," she called it, "with the fly's inscription / has dropped into my hand— // In place of home / I hold the metamorphoses of the world—"

Joshua Weiner is the translator (with Linda B. Parshall) of Nelly Sachs's Flight and Metamorphosis, published in 2022. He is the author of Berlin Notebook: Where Are the Refugees? and three books of poems. He lives in Washington, DC and teaches at the University of Maryland.

The Subversive Art of Philip Guston

BY FRANCES BRENT

The painting, executed in acrylics and ink, shows a mound of cherries outlined in black contours and linear hatching. Look at it once and you might see a hastily drawn homage to Jean-Baptiste-Siméon Chardin, the great French chronicler of 18th-century domestic life, and his *Basket of Wild Strawberries*. But look again, and the heroic pyramid of cherries with woody stems turns out to be a pile of painted cherry bombs with ignition fuses. The artist, Philip Guston, who was born in Montreal in 1913 to Russian Jewish immigrants and died in Woodstock, New York in 1980, was like that, often aspiring to blow things up.

Although his artistic “pantheon” was comprised of famous Italian artists—Masaccio, Piero, Giotto, Tiepolo and de Chirico—Guston was also an avid fan of early-20th-century cartoons such as George Herriman’s *Krazy Kat*, which spotlighted American perpetual motion and the ambiguities of modern identity. “Why is Language?” asks the credulous but thoughtful cat, wondering whether his friend Ignatz, the anarchist mouse, could understand the words spoken by Finns, Laplanders or Oshkoshers. Answering his own question, he observes, “I would say language is, that we may misunderstand each udda.” Guston’s heart was sincere and rapturous, filled with enthusiasms like *Krazy’s*, but his conscience resembled that of Ignatz, who was always on the attack and throwing bricks.

“How do you get from there to here?” That was the question asked in 1967 when Guston shifted from the abstract work that had made him famous and returned to figuration. Artists and intellectuals, many of them his closest friends, accused him of betraying the aesthetic values of their generation. Critic Hilton Kramer excoriated him in a 1970 *New York Times*

article. Why had he abandoned the flickering, layered and indeterminate style of his New York School paintings, which had brought him success in the 1950s and early 1960s? And why had he turned to a parodic, comic-book technique—Kramer called it “appealing to a taste for something funky, clumsy and demotic”—repeatedly making an inventory of legs and shoes, flatirons, books, clocks and trash-can lids?

And that was the question again, in 2020, when four museum directors decided to postpone a blockbuster Guston retrospective scheduled to open at the National

Gallery of Art in Washington, DC before traveling to the Museum of Fine Arts in Houston, the Tate Modern in London and the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. This time the concern was not about style but about content—specifically, the content of a group of large figurative paintings from the late 1960s and 1970s that cartoonishly and outlandishly depicted priapic-looking, candy-colored Ku Klux Klansmen wearing pointy hoods while smoking cigars, painting, driving and nonchalantly living Philip Guston’s life.

The joint statement by the four museums explained their decision: “The racial



Dial, 1956 (Whitney Museum of American Art, New York) is one of the New York School paintings that marked Guston’s transition from figuration to Abstract Expressionism.



Above, clockwise from the left: *Painting, Smoking, Eating*, 1973 (Collection of the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam); *Untitled*, 1980 (Private Collection); *Open Window*, 1969 (Private Collection).

justice movement that started in the U.S. and radiated to countries around the world, in addition to challenges of a global health crisis, have led us to pause.” But the museums’ delay caused a flurry of controversy, with many people incensed that Guston’s highly charged work was being misconstrued since he had intended the preposterous but energetic KKK figures to lacerate liberal insouciance, even his own. In fact, in 1969, commenting on how he had turned away from abstraction, Guston talked about the privilege and money that was connected to that art world: “Every time I see an abstract painting now I smell mink coats.”

After a pause of two years, the exhibition opened in Boston in the spring of 2022 and will be in Houston from October 23, 2022, through January 16, 2023, before traveling to DC and then to London. Big, bulky and supercharged, the show links recurrent themes and preoccupations spanning Guston’s five-decade career, framing his development from the social realism of his early work to his ribald satire of Nixon in his “Poor Richard” series of the 1970s to his anguished Odessa paintings, with their references to the violence of the pogroms in Russia.

But the transitions in style also reflect the restlessness, discontent and self-doubt of an artist who was often “feeling split” between the deep satisfaction of being a painter and his scathing social conscience. “What kind of man am I?” he famously asked when America was in the middle of the Vietnam War and race riots. “What kind of man am I, sitting at home, reading magazines, going into frustrated fury about everything—and then going into my studio to adjust a red to a blue?”

The exhibition includes Guston’s early figurative paintings, which grew out of the work he did during the Depression for the Works Progress Administration. The most outstanding of these, *If This Be Not I*, is a poetic and mysterious mise-en-scène. Part dream, part memory, it shows a group of street children with paper hats and crowns, masks, musical instruments, rags, rope and splintered lumber. Surrounded by the debris, the children exude the fragmented loneliness of Picasso’s *Family of Saltimbanques*. But in the late 1940s, during one of his depressions, when painting seemed “like an act of impossibility,” he began to slowly condense his compositions, stripping them down to the most elemental components,

dismantling recognizable images and shapes. As he put it, “I wanted to come to the canvas and see what would happen if I just put on paint.” You can feel the tensions as he approached the point where the image could vanish. When, finally, he scraped away any remnants of figuration and was left with just the layers of paint, he arrived at amorphous and beautiful compositions hovering as if they were pinned in space. *Beggar’s Joys* and *Dial*, both paintings from 1956, are consummate examples of this. Then, feeling “a kind of war between the moment and the pull of memory,” he made the transition back to objects and figures, but this time using cartoonish, caustic, crudely abbreviated and painfully disquieting imagery.

Like many of his contemporaries, Guston strode into the mid-20th century as a self-invented man. He had made a sharp break with his past, leaving home when he was barely 20. As far back as 1935, he began using the name Guston rather than the family name Goldstein. This was a decision he came to regret, because he didn’t want people to think he was embarrassed about being Jewish. As his friend the critic and novelist Ross Feld put it, “With Yiddish habitually and liberally thrown into



Above: Philip Guston drawing with a reed pen in his Woodstock, New York studio, 1970. **Right:** *If This Be Not I*, 1945 (Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum, Washington University in St. Louis), from Guston's early figurative period.



his speech, he had no problem seeing as well as presenting himself as a doubt-ridden cerebral Jew painter.” He was also an autodidact, having dropped out of both high school and the Otis Art Institute. Brilliant and forceful, he was a dynamic personality and frenzied conversationalist. Another close friend, Philip Roth, described Guston’s vitality when he hosted dinners at his house in Woodstock: “...wearing those baggy-bottomed, low-slung khaki trousers of his, with a white cotton shirt open over his burly chest and the sleeves still turned up from working in the studio, he looked like the Old Guard Israeli politicians in whom imperiousness and informality spring from an unassailable core of confidence.” But, as is often the case, such buoyancy came at a price, since the other side of his forcefulness was the plague of debilitating depression.

Guston was the youngest of seven children in a family that left Russia just after the turn of the century, settling first in Montreal, where the three youngest siblings were born, and in 1920 moving to Los Angeles. Whether they originated in Odessa, as Guston recalled (but which art historians question), is not as important as the fact that his family accepted the stories of the 1905 Odessa pogrom as

part of its narrative. Like so many Jewish-Russian immigrants, they experienced the tug-of-war between the ways of the past and modern life. Guston’s mother sent the children to heder and kept a kosher home, but his father turned away from the old customs. Guston’s first professional drawing, a cartoon, appeared in

**“I wanted to
come to the
canvas and see
what would
happen if I just
put on paint.”**

the “Junior Times Club,” the children’s section of *The Los Angeles Times*, on his 13th birthday. As a present, his mother gave him money for a correspondence course in cartooning. Although he only took three lessons, Guston published additional cartoons during the following two years, inventing a minstrel character named Snowball who quoted lyrics by Jewish Tin Pan Alley writers.

The family had more than their share

of misery. In Canada, Guston’s father, originally a blacksmith, worked as a boilermaker for the Canadian railroad, but in Los Angeles he was a junkman. When Philip was ten years old, his father committed suicide, hanging himself with what Guston described as “a rope as thick as a hawser.” The shock of that grisly event was followed by another set of traumas. Sometime in 1932 his brother Nat was in a freak accident, and his crushed and mangled legs had to be amputated. He died in the hospital of gangrene. At about the same time as his brother’s death, Guston and a group of friends who were connected to one of the Communist John Reed Clubs painted murals commemorating the trial and conviction of the teenage African-American Scottsboro Boys. Just a few months later, a gang of vigilantes, armed with guns and lead pipes, destroyed the murals in an early morning raid. Guston has described the desecration of his artwork, the eyes and genitals of the painted images being shot out, and, although scholars have again questioned the veracity of these details, he carried the shock of that encounter with white racists for the rest of his life.

Images of rope, hoods and severed legs circulate in his Neo-romantic paintings

of the 1940s. It's possible that the long period when he later experimented with abstraction helped to tamp down some of the pain and anxiety of those memories, but in 1966, after a large solo show at New York's Jewish Museum, Guston experienced a major depression and for a short period left his devoted wife, Musa, a painter and poet who had been by his side since the early 1930s. When he returned to her and to his work, his painting completely changed. Using the jaunty linear technique of the cartoonists he had loved since childhood, he left abstraction behind and achieved a new artistic freedom, combining and repurposing the images that obsessed him, using them to tell his personal story. In these new paintings, the hanging rope appears as a cord that pulls down the shade for a studio window or supports a

dangling light bulb, and severed legs and shoes are heaped in the junk pile of a cellar. When the wacky Klansmen migrate into his paintings, they are abbreviations or metaphors for Guston himself, "a hooded thug" who "slips into his studio for a quiet afternoon of painting," as he once put it. Through their clownishness, they expose his bad habits, self-hatred and guilty feelings toward his wife and daughter, from whom he had withdrawn to devote himself to his work. When these figures disappear, they're replaced by the smoking and gluttonous Cyclops you see in *Painting, Smoking, Eating* or the unshaven grotesque Cyclops in *Web*.

When you think about Guston's agonies, it seems surprising that museum administrators were concerned about this art, given that it sprang out of painful up-

heaval and was intended to offend complacency. On the other hand, looking back to the near-collapse we were facing two years ago, the exhausting first months of the pandemic and the raw feelings stirred up after the murder of George Floyd, it's not impossible to see their point of view. Guston, after all, was not just a master of high jinks, he was subversive. And reading his pictures is not easy. They call for imagination and hard work. It's not difficult, as Krazy says, to "mis-unda-stand."

"Philip Guston Now"—Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Texas (October 23, 2022 - January 16, 2023); National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC (February 26, 2023 - August 27, 2023); Tate Modern, London, England (October 5, 2023 - February 25, 2024).



Cellar, 1970 (Collection of Ann and Graham Gund). When Guston returned to figuration in the late 1960s and 1970s, he employed cartoonish, abbreviated and disquieting images, such as this junk heap of severed legs.



72* people
who
inspire
us

WHO ARE YOUR ROLE MODELS AND WHY SHOULD FUTURE GENERATIONS KNOW THEIR NAMES?

PART ONE

If,

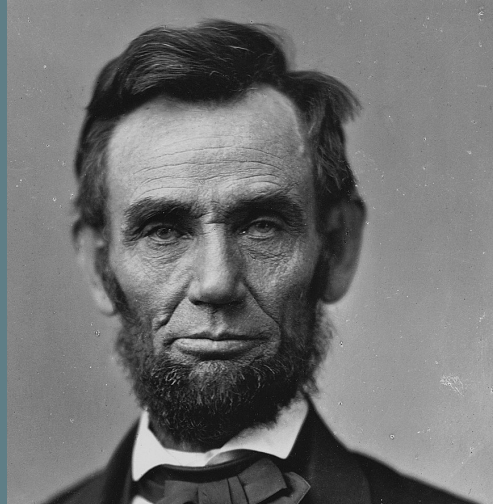
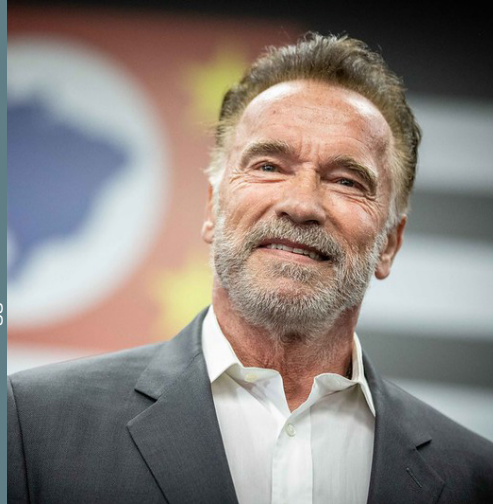
as rabbinic sages say, an angel touches us before we are born and causes us to forget all the Torah we have learned in the womb, then we arrive in the world ravenous to learn. And although we are a people of the book, we acquire understanding not just from the written word but from people, present and past. “Who is the wise one? One who learns from everyone,” says Rabbi Ben Zoma in *Pirkei Avot* 4:1 (he uses the word “men,” but I include all genders). “Everyone” includes rabbis and scholars and also biblical and historical figures or elders—in fact, just about anyone can show us how to live and better serve the world, or God, if we believe in her.

These teachers, whether we are conscious of it or not, are role models from whom we absorb traits and attitudes, for better or worse. What is a role model? The dictionary defines it as a person looked to by others as an example. It is someone we admire and in whom we sense something that we want to incorporate into ourselves. It may not be someone well known, but rather a family member, a mentor or a person who inspires us through their life’s work.

Identifying role models is a necessary step to emotional intelligence and self-awareness. This process begins unconsciously in childhood and continues throughout our lives. As we evolve, our role models evolve also, filling gaps in ourselves. The canvases of our souls remain absorbent until death. In this way, we strengthen our own humanity. And the more aware we are of the individuals who have shaped us, the more complete we are—and the more likely the Jewish people can become, as the prophet Isaiah says, a “light unto the nations.”

We have asked people to share with us their role models and the core qualities they exemplify. As we discovered, this is not often done on first thought; we went back to many, more than once. It’s easy to veer into unadulterated adulation when discussing role models rather than to elucidate traits that we would like future generations to model. We hope that these responses will inspire you to identify your own role models, and we’d love to hear who they are. Please send them to us at editor@momentmag.com or on your preferred social media platforms.—*Nadine Epstein*

Interviews by: Jennifer Bardi, Sarah Breger, Nadine Epstein, Noah Phillips,
Amy E. Schwartz, Francie Weinman Schwartz, Ellen Wexler & Laurence Wolff



MARGE PIERCY

Early on I was strongly influenced by **Simone de Beauvoir** (1908-1996). She wrote in her novels about the lives of women, including their romantic and sexual lives, but also about wider political, social and economic forces. That really appealed to me, growing up poor and Jewish in a predominantly Black part of Detroit, when Jews were not considered white and when antisemitism was something I experienced constantly. I was far more interested in societal forces than most women writers of my era. In fact, when I had only published one novel and was looking for a new agent, one of the most prominent agents of that time told me I could write well but that I should stick to writing about love. ("Why not set a romance against that background?") I wasn't interested.

An influence on my later life was **Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi** (1924-2014), who introduced me to Kabbalah and Jewish meditation, all with historical context. I have meditated ever since, and it keeps me from imploding when I deal with a lot of stress in my daily life—especially important in the Trump and COVID years. I've continued to study on and off, including with other teachers, but Zalman was the key to my practice. He was very kind to me and gave me a new Hebrew name, although I also kept the one my grandmother Hannah gave me when the doctor said I was dying of rheumatic fever. (I hyphenated.) He was encouraging while I was writing my novel *He, She and It*, which he loved and touted after reading. I also worked with him and others in writing and producing the Shabbat morning siddur *Or Chadash*.

Marge Piercy is the author of 17 novels, 20 volumes of poetry and a memoir. She helped found a Cape Cod havurah called Am Ha-Yam and teaches at the Elat Chayyim Center for Jewish Spirituality.

REBECCA NEWBERGER GOLDSTEIN

I know how pretentious this is likely to sound, but **Baruch Spinoza** (1632-1677) has probably been the biggest influence on me. I first heard his name when I was in the 10th grade and attending an ultra-Orthodox girls high school—the type that discouraged us from going to college. Spinoza was mentioned to us as a cautionary tale: His views had led him to be permanently banished from the 17th-century Jewish community of Amsterdam in his mid-twenties. But my teacher mentioned that Spinoza had kept his heretical views secret until his parents both had died, in order not to shame them. Right then, before I knew anything else about the philosopher, I vowed to follow his example, at least in regard to my own parents.

It was when I became a professor of philosophy that I began to study him in earnest. At first, I was skeptical, since this was the kind of metaphysics my training as an analytic philosopher made me doubt was possible. His magnum opus, the *Ethics*, makes every claim for human reason that has ever been made. But though its formalism can make it seem dry and emotionless to the uninitiated, it's anything but. It's a work of transcendent power, which can have a transformative influence on the reader. The type of transcendence to which Spinoza can lead you is almost akin to a mystical experience—a sense of grateful oneness with all that there is. But it's an experience that rejects all supernatural premises.

Among Spinoza's inspiring traits were courage, integrity, love of truth and a realistic optimism that allowed him, despite all, to keep his faith in humanity. He knew what he was up against: the egotistical distortions that limit our view of the world and of each other, causing us to increase suffering. These

forces are sometimes subdued and sometimes take on a terrible intensity, but they're always with us, and there is never a time, most certainly not now, when we don't need to muster Spinoza's traits in ourselves.

*Rebecca Newberger Goldstein is a philosopher and the author of ten books, both fiction and nonfiction, including **Betraying Spinoza: The Renegade Jew Who Gave Us Modernity.***

ALEXANDER VINDMAN

Setting aside family members who are my most important role models and inspirations—such as my father, my older brother, my wife and daughter—I think back to my youthful admiration for **Arnold Schwarzenegger** (b. 1947), who is an immigrant like myself and somebody I had a chance to meet. He appealed to me then as a movie star and a hard-working, successful immigrant American and later as a mature adult who served in government and tried to make this nation a better place.

I've also been influenced by historical figures and, as you can imagine, any number of folks in the military sphere. **Abraham Lincoln** (1809-1865) showed incredible fortitude when the country was basically on the precipice of disaster. And so, he's been an influential figure in my life, especially in the context of my own recent experiences. Other role models whose moral courage changed the orientation or direction of a country or of humanity include **Rosa Parks** (1913-2005), **Mahatma Gandhi** (1869-1948) and **Martin Luther King Jr.** (1929-1968).

Although I had limited interaction with him over the course of my military career, **General Jim Mattis** (b. 1950) is someone from whom I took the example of a soldier-scholar and a soldier-statesman—he exemplifies both. Secretary of State

Colin Powell (1937-2021) was another prominent figure who fit the same roles. These men gave me an enormous amount of latitude to contribute to U.S. national security by deploying my expertise and knowledge of Russia and the region.

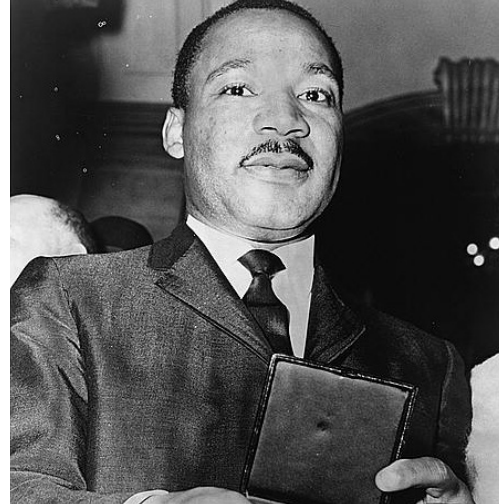
Alexander Vindman is a retired U.S. Army lieutenant colonel who testified in the 2019 impeachment trial of Donald Trump. He is a senior fellow at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies.

EVGENY KISSIN

When I was growing up in Moscow, **Andrei Sakharov** (1921-1989), the Soviet nuclear physicist, dissident, Nobel laureate and activist for disarmament, peace and human rights, was the greatest hero for all the people in my circle. He professed and fought for what we all believed in (freedom and democracy), and he was a morally impeccable person. Unfortunately, I never got to meet him.

A few years after moving to the West, I learned about **Elie Wiesel** (1928-2016) and read his book, *The Jews of Silence*, which brought the world's attention to the plight of Jews inside the Soviet Union. He became my other hero. He clearly also had firm democratic and humanistic convictions and a profoundly Jewish soul. Luckily, I met him several times, and we spoke Yiddish to each other. It's hard to say whether all the things I admire in these two men are things I learned from them or were just always very close to my nature and that's why I became their great admirer.

Evgeny Kissin is a Russian-born concert pianist known for his interpretation of Chopin, Schumann, Liszt, Brahms and Rachmaninoff. He also performs and records Yiddish poetry.



Martin Luther King Jr.



Eleanor Roosevelt



Esther



Colin Powell

ESTHER WOJCICKI

From a biblical perspective, I always admired **Esther**. I was named after both grandmothers, but my name meant a lot to me because of Queen Esther. Esther was a very clever woman, and she risked her life to save the Jewish people. She showed incredible courage, taking care of people who were being persecuted for no reason other than their religion. And she was one person, just one, who managed to change many lives.

Eleanor Roosevelt (1884-1962) is an example of the power that one person can possess and utilize, even as a woman in her day. She stood up for the things she believed in, even when they weren't popular. She didn't just sit back quietly and watch; she took action. She fought for refugees, and she saw the power of education to improve people's lives.

In the present day, I would point to **Michelle Obama** (b. 1964) as someone I admire. I'm older than she is, so she's perhaps less of a role model than an affirmation of what I believe. I've admired her for standing up and speaking her mind, for trying to help people experiencing poverty and for advocating for good food in public schools.

Running through all of this is the power of one. That you can do something, even if you're alone. In 1941 a young Harvard graduate named **Varian Fry** (1907-1967) traveled to France to rescue Jews who were being targeted by the Vichy regime. He went alone and saved approximately 2,000 Jews before he was arrested by the Vichy government and sent back to the U.S. Fry was one person who made a huge difference and was the first American recognized in Israel as "Righteous Among the Nations." We all have the power to improve the world. We just need to do it.

Esther Wojcicki is the author of How to Raise Successful People: Simple Lessons for Radical Results. She is vice chair of the Creative Commons advisory council and co-founder of Tract Learning, Inc.

PAMELA PAUL

In naming role models I assume we're thinking of people we would like to emulate in some way. So, while I have a deep appreciation for cabaret singers and cartoonists, what they do is so far afield from my abilities that I don't think they qualify. And then there are inspiring individuals such as Nelson Mandela whose roles extend so far beyond my own that it also makes no sense to call them my models. There are other people whose work I love, admire and may hope to emulate—their writing, their art, their films—but about whom I know little, which makes me reluctant to hold them up as role models because I'm not really thinking about them as fully realized human beings. Because the truth is, people are complicated and everyone has flaws. I also don't subscribe to the prevailing presentism, whereby we rigorously apply standards or values that have evolved over time to people in the distant past.

All that said, there are certain character traits I really admire: Courage. Independence. Curiosity. Determination. Reason. Clear-headedness. The first person who comes to mind here is **Eleanor Roosevelt** (1884-1962). She's someone for whom there were very low expectations, which over time she learned not only to overlook but to defy. This was someone who was quiet and considered reserved, who really learned how to use her voice prolifically as a writer and as a speaker. From our vantage point of 2022, the strong stands she took—on human rights, civil rights, women's rights—seem basic but at the time were trailblazing. For me, she is one of those figures who stand out, especially when we're thinking about educating and inspiring young people.

Another person I've been thinking about recently (having just read a book in which she played a part) is **Dorothy**

Thompson (1893-1961). As a woman, as a journalist and as a foreign correspondent she was outspoken and fearless in taking stances, most notably raising awareness about the Holocaust when the United States was ignoring it. She also said racist things and may have even been an out-and-out racist—I don't know enough about her biography and everything she's written to say definitively. This is an example of those caveats above.

Someone I know personally and admire enormously is **Robert Gottlieb** (b. 1931). He's been the editor-in-chief at Simon & Schuster, Alfred A. Knopf, and *The New Yorker* and has written a number of books himself. The consummate editor and supporter of writers, Gottlieb reads everything and approaches books with an open mind that I find increasingly rare. At 91, he's still writing, still editing, still reading, still thinking. He's just endlessly curious and is also a delightful human being.

Jane Goodall (b. 1934) is probably as close to a purely good person as possible, and while it's far-fetched to consider her a personal role model because her endeavors are so far removed from mine, I have huge admiration for her as someone who took her powers of observation and her childhood curiosity and turned them into not just an occupation but a mission. She went out into the field. The time came when she could have rested on her laurels; instead she went from doing science in the field to advocating for animals and for the planet. She's never slowed down. I'm a big fan of the octogenarians and nonagenarians of the world who are still out there trying to do good, and that is Jane Goodall.

And finally, as a book person, I have to laud **J.K. Rowling** (b. 1965) for opening up the world of literature to millions of readers. She reinvigorated the world of children's literature and proved to adults that children's books are worthy of being read. And then she defied expectations; instead of doing another middle-grade or young-adult fantasy series, she wrote stand-alone children's novels, crime fiction and adult fiction,

Ruth Bader Ginsburg



Rosa Parks



Jane Jacobs



Dorothy Thompson



all the while doing a huge amount of philanthropic work in medicine and advocacy for at-risk women and children.

Pamela Paul is a New York Times columnist and former editor of The New York Times Book Review. Her books include 100 Things We've Lost to the Internet, How to Raise a Reader and Pornified.

ROBERT ALTER

When I was 17 years old I was a junior counselor at Camp Ramah in the Pocos, where I met a man named **Moshe Greenberg** (1928-2010), who was probably then in his early 20s. He ended up doing a doctorate in biblical studies at the University of Pennsylvania and then teaching his whole career at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. He was very charismatic. I had never seriously studied the Bible before, and he taught a class for the junior counselors that was riveting. It was on a section of the David story in 2 Samuel. That class was what got me excited about the Bible.

Beyond that, Moshe and I used to sit together for many meals in the dining hall. All of our conversations were in Hebrew because Camp Ramah was pervasively Hebrew-speaking in that distant era. This was my first encounter with not just a Bible scholar, but maybe my first serious intellectual. His mind was constantly operating on all kinds of ideas. He was open to the world in this lively, intellectual way, and that was a serious model for me.

A second role model is someone I met when I was a graduate student at Harvard. I took two courses with a man named **Reuben Brower** (1908-1975). He's not generally known today. He was maybe one of the last, and one of the best, of the New Critics. He had a great gift for reading poetry with minute attention to subtle details. I took a course with him on 18th-century English poetry. We studied Alexander Pope, John Dryden and a lit-

tle bit of Jonathan Swift as well. It's all in rhyming couplets—so-called heroic couplets, iambic couplets. It seemed to my superficial early reading of them that it was kind of jingle-jangle. Reuben Brower taught me that this poetry had great complexity, great subtlety. He showed me that a good teacher can open up new worlds for students. He also was always very respectful to students and treated them as people. That's something that I tried to do in my teaching career.

My final example of a role model is an Israeli intellectual historian named **Amos Funkenstein** (1937-1995), who spent most of his teaching career in the United States. He was a genius. Among other things, he had a photographic memory. I learned from Amos that it's possible to look at any question freshly, turn it around and see a whole new possibility. He was still alive when I translated Genesis, and I would send draft sections to him. Then we would get together and discuss them.

I had one very memorable experience at the end of that project. I had sent him the last batch of drafts and we spoke on the phone and he said, "Listen, I have to be at the cancer center tomorrow afternoon for a treatment and it's actually pretty boring. Why don't you come over and we'll talk about your translation?"

I still have this vivid visual memory—I came in, and there's a big clock in his treatment room. The clock said five after one. Amos and I began to talk about the translation. We went on from verse to verse. When I looked up at that big clock again, it was about ten after four. During those three hours, everything ominous around us—the IV tubes going into his arm, the treatment room, the fact that he was dying of cancer—had disappeared. We just entered together into this world of learning and intellectual investigation. That moment, you might say, was a model I will always remember.

Robert Alter is a biblical scholar and the author of 23 books, including his translation of the Hebrew Bible. He is a professor of Hebrew and comparative literature at the University of California, Berkeley.

DAVID BIALE

Amos Funkenstein (1937-1995) was the person who had the most important influence on me in terms of my career but also as a role model. What made him so special in the field of Jewish studies was that he was also an expert on the history of Christianity and the history of science. Instead of teaching Jewish studies as a kind of ghettoized field, he made it part of this very large, capacious intellectual world in which the Jews played a major role—but in conversation with all of the great thinkers, starting with Aristotle and going through Thomas Aquinas.

Funkenstein grew up in Jerusalem in an Orthodox family. He was the first Israeli to get a PhD (in medieval history) in Germany. Two years later, in 1967, he was appointed as a professor at UCLA to teach Jewish history, which he had never formally studied at the university level. He gave his students the feeling that you can research, write about and teach anything you put your mind to. I was a graduate student of Funkenstein's in the mid-1970s, and the idea that you didn't have to go to a Jewish theological seminary to pursue Jewish studies was incredibly liberating.

I've always approached that field as a place to explore questions that were important to me personally, without necessarily imposing my values on the past. So I've looked at questions like sexuality and Jewish history, power, blood and so on, where I was asking modern questions of ancient sources without necessarily expecting the sources to give me answers that conform to my values. That dialogue with the past is something else I got from Funkenstein.

He was a phenomenon—one of those people who seemed hatched from the

forehead of Zeus knowing everything. At the same time, he was completely egalitarian. It didn't matter if you were a freshman, if you were a beginning graduate student, if you were a famous scholar—he treated everyone equally. And he established a friendship with his students, which was a great lesson for me in terms of how I've related to my students over the years. They are my partners. And I convey to them that they can do whatever interests them, and I will support that. I've found, even with undergraduates who know absolutely nothing about Jewish studies, you can throw them into the deep end, and, if the ideas are exciting enough, they'll want to get the tools they need to understand the texts.

Funkenstein was also eccentric, unorthodox and iconoclastic. He famously convened his classmates at a religious high school in Jerusalem and announced there was no God. That was the kind of guy he was. He liked to attack things that everybody believed in to show that maybe that was the wrong way of thinking about it. It was his Socratic method. In seminars, we would be reading a text, he would pose a question and then we would go around in circles for an hour trying to figure out the answer, never quite getting it. And then his answer was something none of us had thought of. That was the experience of studying with him. I described it once as watching a mind thinking. Total originality.

Actually, most of his undergraduate students couldn't understand Funkenstein, but they came back over and over again because they realized they were listening to something they would never hear anywhere else. If you were to ask people in the field of Jewish studies today, "Do you know who Amos Funkenstein was?" they might say they've heard the name. People need to know about him. He was truly unusual.

David Biale recently retired as professor of Jewish history at the University of California, Davis. His books include Not in the Heavens: The Tradition of Jewish Secular Thought.



Michelle Obama



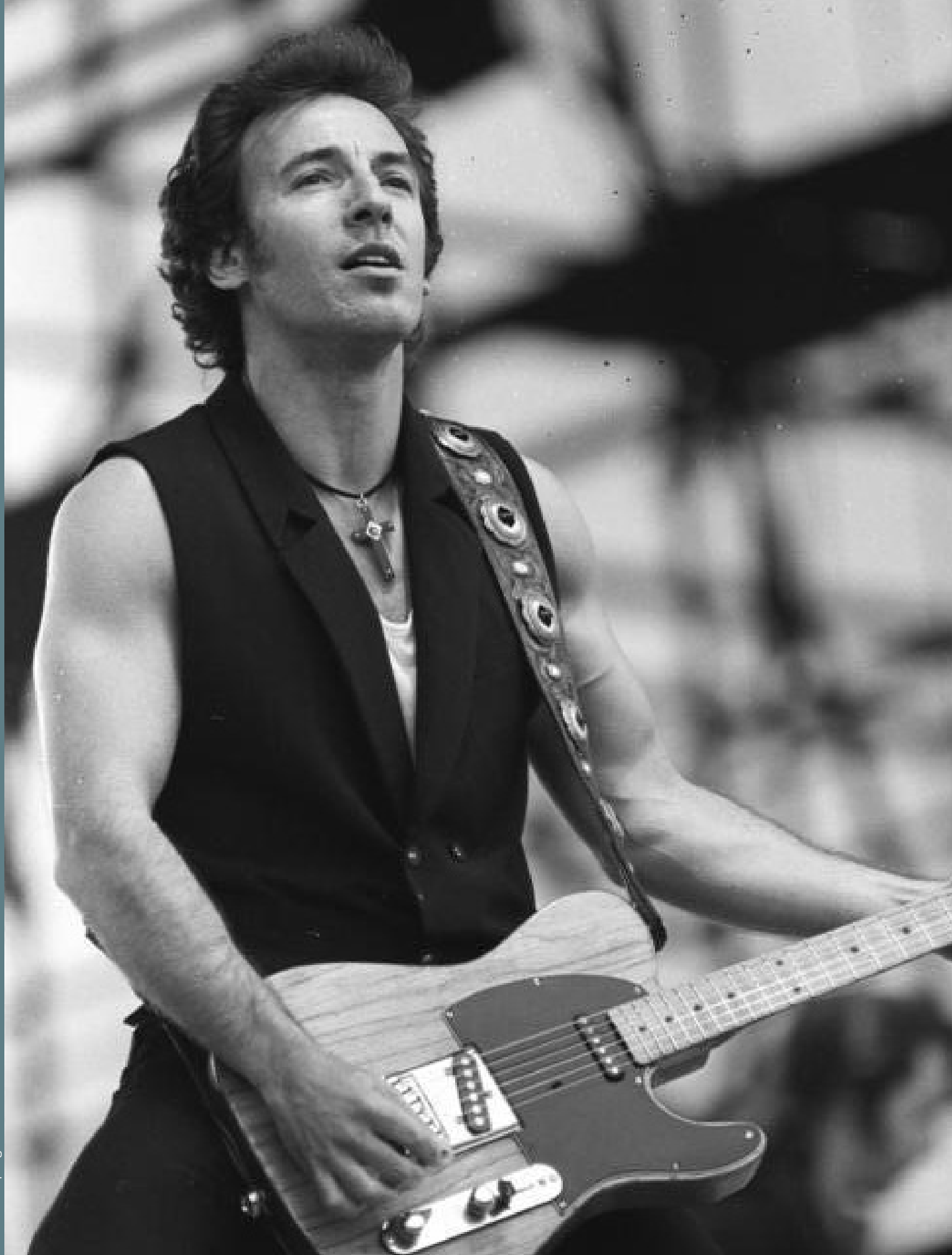
Varian Fry



J.K. Rowling



Rachel Carson



ROBERTA KAPLAN

As far as I know, **Ruth Bader Ginsburg** (1933–2020) and I have only two things in common. I learned the first at the White House in 2013. It's a story I've told dozens of times by now because I think it says something fundamental about who Justice Ginsburg was as a person.

My wife and I were invited to one of the annual Hanukkah parties at the White House that year. And because we didn't know when or if we would ever be invited back again, we debated whether or not to bring our then 7-year-old son along with us. Now, our son is a brilliant, creative, amazing person, but he also has severe ADHD, which was much more of a challenge for him then than it is now. We decided to make a deal with him—we promised to leave the party if things got too hard for him to handle.

Turns out that our son did great getting through security and for the first hour and a half or so at the party. But eventually, as it did get very crowded, he invoked our promise, and we agreed to leave.

As we were walking out, Justice Ginsburg was walking in. I suggested to our son, "Let's go over and say hello." As with most breaches of contract, this was a huge mistake. As we approached, he threw a temper tantrum. Literally sitting on top of Justice Ginsburg's shoes. Right on the buckle of her Ferragamos.

I immediately started to apologize, and Justice Ginsburg, almost as immediately, cut me off. This is what she said: "I have a son. He is almost exactly your age. When he was that age," she said motioning down to my son, "he acted like this as well. His childhood was a 'trial.' But now he is very successful, lives in Chicago, and has a wonderful wife and children. So don't worry, it will be fine."

In my line of work, I come across a lot of very smart people all the time. None smarter than Justice Ginsburg. The point here is that she was equally kind. For the rest of my life, I will always be

grateful for what she said to me that day.

The second thing Justice Ginsburg and I have in common is that we both worked at the law firm Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton & Garrison. I worked there for 25 years, starting as a summer associate in 1990, Ginsburg in the summer of 1958. Despite her obvious talent, she was not offered a full-time position as a litigation associate at the firm at the end of the summer—the norm for summer associates then and now. The rumor I heard was that Judge Simon Rifkind offered her a job in the tax or trusts & estates departments instead and that she justifiably turned both down. While only Justice Ginsburg knew the truth of what happened, there was likely a simple reason behind it—the partners didn't believe a woman could, or should, be required to adjust to the demands of being a litigator, particularly a woman like Ginsburg who was already a wife and a mother.

Ginsburg repeatedly experienced, in her formative years, what it was like to be marginalized. She has been quoted as saying that while she did not personally experience antisemitism the way that Justice Louis Brandeis did, she surely experienced gender discrimination. And this is what I most admire about her: She employed her formidable intellect, creativity and command of the law to do something about it.

As founder and director of the ACLU's Women's Rights Project, Ginsburg argued six cases before the Supreme Court in the early 1970s, winning five out of six. In case after case, she challenged state and federal laws that enshrined discrimination, and won. While I don't cite the late Justice Antonin Scalia often, he was 100 percent correct in describing her as "the leading (and very successful) litigator on behalf of women's rights—the Thurgood Marshall of that cause, so to speak." It is quite literally the case that I would not be where I am today without her.

Roberta Kaplan is the litigator who successfully argued against the Defense of Marriage Act before the Supreme Court and who recently won a settlement against the leaders of the 2017 Unite the Right rally.

DAVID BROOKS

Perhaps every Jewish New Yorker wants to become a comedian on some level. I started out as a humor columnist before I became earnest and deadly. When my career turned toward journalism, I found a kind of intellectual milieu in a group of writers active between 1955 and 1965—people like **Jane Jacobs** (1916–2006), **Rachel Carson** (1907–1964), **Daniel Bell** (1919–2011), **Reinhold Niebuhr** (1892–1971) and **Walter Lippmann** (1889–1974). I read the magazines they wrote for and it was a world I wanted to enter. (If you had asked me back then who ran the universe, I would have said, well, obviously it's the people who work at *The New Republic*!)

These were nonfiction writers, a little more highbrow than journalists but a little more lowbrow than academics. And they were ambitious; they wrote these big books on big subjects. I mean, Niebuhr wrote a book called *The Nature and Destiny of Man*—that covers a lot of ground. Bell wrote *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism*, about how a society that relies on self-discipline was creating a consumer culture that rewarded spending and borrowing. These were big themes, not from a specific academic discipline but taking the whole sweep of American life into their grasp. And these writers were moralistic in a good way, asking: "What is a just life? What is a just society? How are we falling short?" So they became role models for me, at least professionally.

When I was 25 I was the book review editor for *The Wall Street Journal*. One week I noticed that every book reviewer was over 85 years old, and they had all been contributors to *Partisan Review*—a tremendously influential "little" magazine—in the 1950s, which was a time of great cultural and intellectual ferment. I found the debates in these pages entrancing. These writers had the idea that a book review could change the world.



Once everything became more academic, a lot of those people were swallowed up writing boring papers for academic journals. I think we're recovering the popular intellectual tradition a bit—there are more places, like *Moment*, where you can do that sort of grand analysis.

Switching gears, **Bruce Springsteen** (b. 1949) is someone I discovered when I was 13 and never stopped listening to. And I've often wondered how, if you spend so much time listening to a certain musician, that person influences you. Psychologists have a saying: Some people need tightening, and some people need loosening. Growing up in a New York Jewish intellectual household, I was definitely in the latter category. But Springsteen brought an operatic, uninhibited and raw passion to my life and also a deeply moral sense about the marginalized and the dispossessed—and our obligation to them. For most of my life, my politics were quite different from Springsteen's, but that level of moral concern is something I got partly from him and partly from my grandmother.

The heady mentality I grew up around was all about argument. Springsteen—and music in general—is, by contrast, about story. There are some truths about people you can't capture in argument—you have to tell stories about them, including their motives and their goals. How bad luck or things outside our control can ruin or bless a life. And so, with Springsteen you really get the human person in full form; songs like "Rosalita" are explosions of joy, and then you've got others like "Darkness on the Edge of Town," "The River" or "Racing in the Street" that are about lives that have gone horribly wrong. Like I said, I needed to get out of my head and into my body, and Springsteen is a guy who enables you to do that.

David Brooks is a New York Times columnist and a regular commentator on the PBS NewsHour. His books include The Road to Character and The Second Mountain: The Quest for a Moral Life.

SALLY J. PRIESAND

After careful consideration, I have realized that I do not really have any role models. There were people I admired, but no one about whom I said, "I want to be just like her" or "What would she do?" My number-one rule in life has always been "Know yourself and be yourself," and no matter how many people thought they knew what the first woman rabbi in America should be like or look like, I always tried my best just to be me. As a result, I have become a role model for others, something many people have conveyed to me during this past year celebrating the 50th anniversary of my ordination.

A man I greatly admired and who was most responsible for my ordination and the subsequent ordination of women as rabbis was **Nelson Glueck** (1900–1971), president of Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion. He was passionate about things of importance to him, and he had a certain charm that inspired others to dream bigger and do more. The higher horizon to which he aspired enabled him to envision a day when women would serve the Jewish people as rabbis. From the moment I arrived in Cincinnati for rabbinical school, I knew he believed in me, and I was conscious of the fact that ordaining a woman as a rabbi was a decision being made not by the Reform movement but by the College-Institute under his leadership.

Unfortunately, he died the year before I was ordained. I was devastated, but his wife Helen, a distinguished physician and researcher, told me that before he died, he said there were three things he wanted to live to do, and one of them was to ordain me. I cherish a letter she sent to me, which ends: "I have already told you how meaningful your ordination would have been for him and how he would have loved to have seen that day. I am sure when I see you ordained,

in my mind's eye I will see his hands on your shoulders, for no matter whose hands are there the meaning will be clear, the continuity of Jewish life and his immortality of spirit."

I continue to be motivated by my female colleagues, who inspire me with their enormous creativity and faithful devotion to the Jewish community and all humanity. Shortly after my ordination, a Jewish scholar said that female rabbis would be little more than a footnote in history. "*Gam zeh ya-avor*," he said. "This too shall pass." Fortunately for all of us, it didn't, and today there are well over 1,000 female rabbis of all denominations throughout the world.

Sally J. Priesand was the first female rabbi in the United States, ordained in 1972 by Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in Cincinnati, Ohio.

SHMULEY BOTEACH

While Christianity and Islam are very good at macrocosmic issues like building nations and empires, the Jewish faith has focused much more on the microcosmic: How do you build a strong family? How do you have a passionate marriage? How do you raise and inspire children? And above all else, how do you live justly and righteously? **Martin Luther King Jr.** (1929-1968), more than anyone else that I know of, leveraged the Hebrew Bible to make American men, women and children feel that God called on them for justice and righteousness. That if a Black child was being bitten by a police dog in Birmingham, Alabama, it mattered to you sitting in Los Angeles, California.

We Jews so often treat our Bible as a page of history. We struggle to get people to go to shul to hear the Bible read on Shabbat. And here was Dr. King bringing the words of Zechariah, Jeremiah, and Micah, making them into a living, breathing document of freedom.

Committed, scholarly and morally courageous, he created an army based on words. Based on morality. The question was whether King could use biblical ideals of justice to shame white Americans into doing the right thing sooner. Could he reach their conscience somehow? It was a very risky proposition, and he did pay for it with his life. But as I'm someone who seeks the relevance of my faith to modern times every single day, he's a hero to me. Always has been.

Next, I'd like to talk about two people at the same time: the **Lubavitcher Rebbe** (1902-1994) and **Theodor Herzl** (1860-1904). Herzl decided, based on his experience of European antisemitism, that the only solution to antisemitism was a Jewish state—that as long as Jews lived on European land, they would always be hated. If Israel doesn't come into existence within the next 50 years, he said, a cataclysm beyond the imagination is going to happen. And the tragedy, of course, is that the creation of the State of Israel was five or six years too late; most of our people were murdered in the Holocaust because they had nowhere to go.

The Rebbe came along and said, "Wait a second. I get Israel. I'm passionate about Israel, but are you really saying that we Jews should not be a global religion? Are you saying that when Israelis leave the State of Israel, they shouldn't even have a shul to go to when they go to visit Paris? When Israeli soldiers finish their three years in the IDF and they travel to Nepal, to Argentina, that they should have no Jewish experience, that they should be lost to their people? Judaism must be a global religion." And I think for the longest time, these two visions were seen as being in conflict; Zionism was a replacement for Jewish globalism and Jewish universalism, while Jewish universalism and globalism were a dismissal of Israel as a nation-state.

The Rebbe said, "We have to have both." Even when Israel became a great success—the soaring buildings, the technology sector, the yeshivas, the army, the young people, the tourism—and some were writing off the diaspora, he sent his emissaries to live in Bangkok, Thailand;



Lubavitcher Rebbe



Theodor Herzl



Ruth Messinger



Salome Alexandra

Tulsa, Oklahoma; Sydney, Australia; Oxford, England, and so on.

Herzl and the Rebbe are the two great Jewish visionaries of the past half millennium. And if you were to ask which vision has been more successful, you would be hard pressed to choose. Israel is the greatest miracle and yet people are in awe of what Chabad has achieved. It's a melding of Jewish globalism and Jewish particularism: the nation-state and the global space. And that's why the Rebbe and Herzl are such important role models.

Shmuley Boteach is an Orthodox rabbi, author and TV host whose 31 books include Kosher Sex: A Recipe for Passion and Intimacy and Kosher Jesus.

ROBERT SIEGEL

Murray Feshbach (1929-2019) was a demographer who studied Soviet census data throughout the Cold War and discovered truths that conflicted with the Soviet Union's official success propaganda and with the arguments of Cold War players who saw in the USSR a potent enemy state. The military might of the USSR may have been formidable, but life expectancy there was declining; maternal death rates were on a par with undeveloped countries; the hospitals were terrible; the environmental pollution was shortening life spans; birth rates were down; the primary form of birth control was abortion and women had so many that uterine injury was common; and birth defects were on the rise, suggesting poor prenatal health. Murray described the Soviet Union as it was: a nation in collapse, a system broken.

Public health indices had improved after the Russian Revolution and

brought Russia closer to European standards, but by 1960 they were veering back to Third World levels. Murray was brimming with data and illustrative stories: the heart clinic that was a walk-up. The number of rural hospitals that had no running water. The region near the Finnish border where life expectancy was at a low for the Soviet Union. Murray spoke with digressions in his digressions within his larger digressions, and when I would suggest interviewing him, my producer colleagues, who would have to cut the interview, would run and hide under their desks (figuratively). But he was uniquely well informed and, to the modest extent that I knew him, a delightful guy.

I would say that he helped the world understand why the Soviet bloc was collapsing, without focusing on GDP or the number of missiles under Russian control. His was, ultimately, a holistic view of what leads to a society's undoing: failures of health, welfare and environment.

I would also cite **Edward R. Murrow** (1908-1965) as a role model for setting the standards of the trade that I plied: courage, integrity and an insistence on training first his microphone and then his camera on the most important issues of the day. He was a war correspondent during World War II who reported on the resolve of Britain when appeasers thought the UK was a lost cause, and later on he described the liberation of Buchenwald with a powerful if dispassionate precision. He took on Joseph McCarthy and, equally, the plight of impoverished migrant farm laborers. And he brought passion, intellect and clarity to a business in which cynical windbagery can prove very successful. Murrow's protégés included my late colleague and friend Dan Schorr, Marvin Kalb, Fred W. Friendly—his producer and later head of CBS News who was also my professor in graduate school—and the thousands of younger broadcasters who took him as a model, myself included.

Robert Siegel is special literary contributor at Moment and former senior host of NPR's All Things Considered.

SYDNEY MINTZ

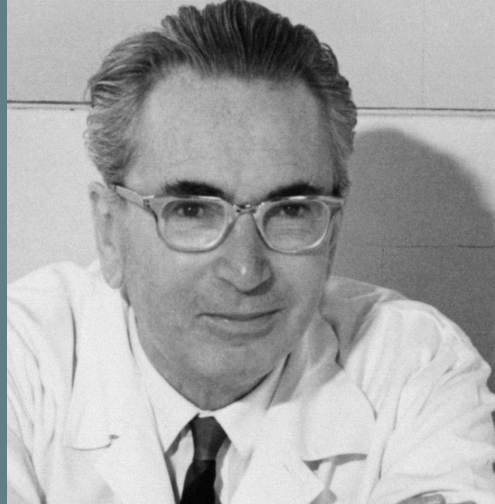
I was introduced to **Ruth Messinger** (b. 1940) after she had just taken over as the executive director of the American Jewish World Service. It was 1998, I was just out of rabbinical school and Ruth blew my mind with her vision to take this small organization and expand it into a global one. What was so influential for me was her understanding of tikkun olam, of changing the world, meaning not just Jews helping Jews, but Jews helping *all* people. I've always found it to be very important for us to have an embodied sense of our spirituality and an understanding of our tzedakah (to do what is right and just). To not be so insular; to be expansive.

Ruth is a boundary-pusher in every arena where she stands, whether it is political, global, justice or Jewish. Growing up as women in America, we're encumbered by questions: What do they think of me? Do I belong here? and so on. Ruth encouraged me to care less about what people thought of me and more about what I was doing in the world. It has been a lesson I share with women on my journey all the time. We do belong, and we are here to change the world.

Gilda Radner (1946-1989) is another major role model of mine. And it's partly because when I was a kid, I couldn't decide whether I wanted to be a rabbi or a standup comic. (People ask, how did you decide? And I say, well, I'm both. I mean, how great is it that every Friday night I have a built-in audience?) My mom and I watched Gilda Radner every week on *Saturday Night Live*. Roseanne Roseannadanna and her other characters were incredible to me, as was the fact that Gilda didn't hide anything about her Judaism (and in fact, she married a nice Jewish boy, Gene Wilder). Moreover, most Jewish comics were men, so she was inspirational in that sense. As a comedian she was unique and brilliant



Gilda Radner as Roseanne Roseannadanna



and so smart. Her combination of eccentricity and authenticity made me understand the power of laughter and how you can take on difficult things by laughing at them. There was a series of sketches she did with Bill Murray called “The Nerds” (she was “Lisa”; he was “Todd”) that stands out in my memory. I was a queer kid living in Highland Park, Illinois—in the suburbs where there were a lot of Jews but not a lot of queer people. I was a weirdo and a little bit of a nerd. And so, to have people love Gilda so much and see her being the nerd was also something that gave me comfort for my future. Maybe I wasn’t going to be a nerd the rest of my life. Maybe people weren’t just going to laugh at me, they would laugh with me.

As the very first woman in history to be ordained as a rabbi, **Regina Jonas** (1902–1944) is a role model to me in terms of her tenacity, conviction and humanity. For a woman to want to be a rabbi in the 1920s and 1930s wasn’t just unheard of; it was verboten. And here’s this young woman in Berlin who writes a thesis daring to make the case that no law prohibited a woman from being ordained.

And while I knew of Jonas, it wasn’t until I went to Berlin and visited the places where she lived that I read a direct quote from her, in which she said that her desire to become a rabbi was based on her love of humanity and her devotion to God. I wanted to be a rabbi for very similar reasons—I loved people and could see the cruelty and the immense goodness in them; caring and love and compassion are what drew me to the rabbinate. The fact that she served as a rabbi in the 1930s gives me a lot of strength, because to this day, there are people in the Jewish world who don’t think that I, or any woman, should be a rabbi.

Jonas was ordained in 1935 and worked as a pastoral counselor in the Jewish hospital in Berlin. As rabbis were being deported, she stepped in at liberal synagogues. Then she was deported to Theresienstadt, where she served as a rabbi preaching and comforting. And from firsthand accounts, she was an incredible inspiration to fellow inmates at Auschwitz,

where she herself was murdered.

I appreciate being asked to think about and talk about my role models. I base a lot of my own spiritual strength on these three and many other women.

Sydney Mintz is a rabbi at Congregation Emanu-El in San Francisco and a member of the U.S. State Department’s Working Group on Religion and Social Justice.

NADINE EPSTEIN

I first began to seriously consider role models after a 2019 conversation with **Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg** (1933–2020) in her chambers during which she talked about some of hers. This conversation led to our collaboration on a book about women role models, which immersed me in the topic and became the inspiration for this Big Question project.

During the years I knew her, Justice Ginsburg became one of my role models. I imbibed some of her no-nonsense clarity of purpose, her perseverance and her willingness to say outright that the presence of women much improved the tone of private deliberations at the Supreme Court. I came away a more resolved feminist with higher expectations. She also modeled how a naturally reticent person could learn to speak out publicly. When I once told her that I preferred being behind the scenes, she said resolutely, “Get over it. If you do not speak your mind, no one will speak it for you.”

Another role model of mine is the Judean queen **Salome Alexandra** (139 BCE–67 BCE), who successfully led a nation in her own name. Her rule so impressed Flavius Josephus that he not only included a woman in his historical chronicle (a rare occurrence throughout history) but praised her for her wise leadership. Despite this, she is barely remembered, even though decisions she made led to the focus on learning in rabbinic Judaism, making it possible for Judaism

to survive the fall of the Second Temple.

Compared to her, another of my heroes, global shipping magnate **Gracia Mendes Nasi** (1510-1569), is enjoying something of a public renaissance. In addition to transcending the laws and customs that prevented women of her time from owning and running a business, Nasi saved large numbers of Jews from the Inquisition. Less known is that she also envisioned and created a homeland for Jewish refugees in Ottoman Palestine. Fiery crusader **Ernestine Rose** (1810-1892) is another one of my role models. The daughter of a strict rabbi in Poland, she had the chutzpah at 16 to take her father to civil court to fight for the right to control her own money and avoid an arranged marriage. She argued the case herself and won. Decades later Rose became one of the trio of women leading the American suffragist movement along with Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton. Astonishingly, she is practically forgotten, but I hope I have absorbed some of her indomitable determination and power. **Lillian Wald** (1867-1940) was visionary in her understanding that poverty was a social issue and not a personal failing. She believed that sick people, rich or poor, deserved access to quality health care and could be taught how to protect themselves from dangerous diseases. Wald was strong enough not to care about what women were supposed to do or not do, or with what people thought of her. Instead, she founded the fields of community nursing and public health, creating programs that we take for granted today. She also helped found the NAACP.

There are many leaders, past and present, from whom I try to learn. Two come to mind today: **Yitzhak Rabin** (1922-1995), the Israeli prime minister whose assassination led to the crumbling of hopes for peace between Israel and the Palestinians. Why is he a role model to me? For his evolution from warrior to peacemaker, for his ability to see what might be and for his courage to seize a moment and move forward. Conversely, I have learned from Ukrainian President **Volodymyr Zelensky** (b. 1978), who has

evolved from comedian and actor to warrior in defense of his country's freedom.

In contemplating my role models, I must mention two Holocaust survivors. **Elie Wiesel** (1928-2016), the Romanian-born cofounder of this magazine, was both a mentor and a friend. His attention to words, exemplified in *Night* and his many other books, and his clarity of thought are traits I work on having, as well as his curiosity and joy in the tumult of Jewish thought. On a personal level, he encouraged me to be myself and find my own voice. Much earlier, the Austrian psychologist **Victor Frankl** (1905-1997) spoke to me through the pages of his 1946 book, *Man's Search for Meaning*, which I was so struck by that I carried it around in my backpack for months in my 20s. His argument that the ultimate test is to find meaning in our lives and that it is in our power to do so, regardless of our health, wealth or circumstances, resonated with me. No matter how miserable or dire things are, no matter how much we are suffering, we retain the ability to choose our attitude. It's how we react to suffering that counts, and purpose is our superpower. I hold this message close.

Now that I've started thinking about role models, I understand that I am made up of the qualities of many people I admire, a construction of their strengths and values mingled with my own. We all are such inventions, whether we recognize it or not.

Nadine Epstein is the editor-in-chief of Moment Magazine. 🍷

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Yitzhak Rabin



Ernestine Rose



Elie Wiesel



Gracia Mendes Nasi

ISRAEL'S COMPLICATED DANCE WITH

PUTIN

SINCE RUSSIA INVADED UKRAINE,
ISRAELIS HAVE SCRAMBLED TO LEARN NEW STEPS.

VLADIMIR PUTIN has earned his reputation as a dictator, but he has often behaved warmly toward Jews. He has also maintained positive relations with Israel and made several trips there. The temperature dropped abruptly, though, with reports that the Kremlin was seeking to shut down the Russian branch of the Jewish Agency of Israel, the quasi-governmental organization that supports Jewish cultural programming and emigration to Israel.

Russian policy on Jewish emigration is often a proxy for other tensions, and right now there are plenty, some stemming from the war in Ukraine, others from Israel's military activities

in Syria, where Russia has a significant presence. Both Russia and Ukraine have substantial Jewish populations, and a group of rabbis in Moscow recently issued an unusual, carefully worded statement calling for peace in Ukraine and noting "a sense of fear and isolation not felt in decades."

What's going on, and how bad is it? To interpret these enigmatic signs, *Moment* turned to Aaron David Miller, a longtime Middle East analyst and negotiator who has served in both Democratic and Republican administrations and is now a senior fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.



Former Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett and Russian President Vladimir Putin in Sochi, Russia on October 22, 2021.

How serious is the downturn in relations between Russia and Israel?

The Ukraine invasion is one of the most consequential policy crises since the end of World War II, and it's forcing the Israelis to confront some difficult realities. Since February, when Russia invaded Ukraine, the Israelis have been walking a tightrope. They understand that their interests on different issues regarding Russia are in conflict with one another. There are 1.2 million Russian-born Jews in Israel who vote as a bloc in Israeli elections. Israel also has Russians literally on its border, in Syria, where the relationship with Russia is crucial to maintaining Israel's ability to enter Russian-controlled Syrian territory and strike Iranian targets.

The longer the Russia-Ukraine war continues, the greater the chance of deterioration in the relationship and the less flexibility the Israelis will have in balancing their interests in relation to Putin. I believe Putin will not completely undermine his relationship with Israel—it's still very valuable to him—but the salad days are over.

Wasn't Putin supposed to be pro-Jews and pro-Israel? What happened?

Context is important with Putin. He's not pro-Israel or pro-Jews. He's pro-Putin and pro-Russia. Russian-Israeli relations, even at their best, were never driven by philosemitism. They're part of Russia's broader conception of its own interests, often vis-à-vis the United States—whether in the 1970s, when Brezhnev relaxed immigration policies on Soviet Jews to help obtain a deal to buy subsidized grain; or in the 1980s, when relations soured and the spigot of immigration dried up; or in the glasnost period when Mikhail Gorbachev was determined to solve the “Jewish question” by being supportive of Jewish emigration; or now, in the Putin era.

Until the invasion of Ukraine, the relationship under Putin had been quite productive. In 2005, Putin became the first Russian leader to visit Israel. He visited Yad Vashem, and he's made multiple trips since then. In 2012, he supported the building of the Jewish Museum of Tolerance in Moscow. He was viewed

as a philosemite. But we're seeing now that when those positive relations aren't viewed by Putin as being in Russia's interest, they can take a turn for the worse.

Objectively speaking, the Israelis were extremely risk-averse for a long time in how far they would go toward supporting Ukraine. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky repeatedly asked Israel for military aid and did not get it. When Naftali Bennett was prime minister, he never used the words “Ukraine,” “Russia” and “condemn” in the same sentence. The Israelis have not participated in economic sanctions against Russia. You could say they've gone out of their way to appease Putin.

Bennett believed—wrongly, I would argue—that he could play a mediating role. He was treated as a sort of pawn. He thought he had pretty good contacts with both Zelensky and Putin; other than Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, he may have been the only leader to maintain working ties with both. He catered to Putin, some would say to a fault—it may be that he didn't tend to



Russian President Vladimir Putin visits Yad Vashem in Jerusalem in 2005.

his own coalition and it fell. When Yair Lapid took over as prime minister, all the risk-aversion evaporated and Lapid toughened up his rhetoric. Lapid, unlike Bennett, has not gone to great lengths to cater to Putin—not reaching out to him or meeting with him. It was Lapid who in April, as foreign minister, accused the Russians of committing war crimes in Kyiv, in Babyn Yar and in Bucha.

Was that when Putin moved against the Jewish Agency? Was there a connection? Nobody knows for sure. It's very fuzzy. Is what's happening to the Jewish Agency the result only, or primarily, of events in Ukraine? The Russian Ministry of Justice accuses the office of violating Russian law, specifically by gathering information on Russian citizens, that is, Russian Jews. Apparently the ministry was upset because Israelis have maintained a data bank of such information in Israel.

Can the problems be sorted out? The Jewish Agency has been operating in

Moscow since 1989. Since Putin came to power in 1999, there have certainly been issues from time to time, but in the past the Kremlin would intervene and any problems would be resolved quickly and out of the public eye. Now, the Russians seem determined to constrain, if not shut down, the work of the Jewish Agency; the Ministry of Justice actually has asked to liquidate the organization. So what changed? Maybe Lapid's criticism did it; maybe Putin was unhappy about Israeli attacks in Syria.

But there are other factors you can't rule out. One is brain drain. Hundreds of thousands of Russians leave the country every year; you can still leave the country freely if you're a Russian citizen, so there's no problem getting out. It's possible that the Russians regard Jewish emigration as part of that broader problem. Since February, about 16,000 Russian citizens have registered as new immigrants in Israel—three times as many as in 2021. Another 30,000 have entered the country as tourists, possibly to stay. Among them are some very prominent citizens, such as

Elena Bunina, the Jewish CEO of Yandex, Russia's answer to Google. So this is a real issue and has created a lot of concern.

It's also possible that the Russians are cracking down generally on foreign entities that are identified with Western, liberal, democratic causes. That's worrisome. The Jewish Agency case fits the pattern of using Russian Jews as pawns. There are still anywhere from 160,000 to 200,000 Jews in Russia proper. So far, Israeli government efforts to fix the problem have not been successful. But Israel is a serious country in an important part of the world; Russia envisions itself as a great power, and great powers have relationships with all important players. So we'll see.

Is Putin's relationship with Jewish oligarchs deteriorating? Yes, but their being Jewish isn't the main reason. It's nonsectarian. There have been a series of mysterious deaths of Russian businessmen, Jewish and not Jewish. If you criticize Putin or undermine the war effort publicly, and if Putin or his intelli-


gence services think you have influence within Russian civil society, you're going to face consequences.

Has Israel responded to U.S. pressure to toughen up on Ukraine? Maybe. I'm sure Bennett was making more than a few senior American officials unhappy. They may have expected more support from the Israelis, given that Israel is the region's only democracy, America's closest ally and also a country whose population has dealt with the aftereffects of genocide. Putin turned that genocide on its head in describing Zelensky, a Jew, as a Nazi. I think the Biden administration was unhappy about Israel's lukewarm response, but there was a larger objective for the Biden administration in dealing with Israel during this period, and that was, "Thou shalt do nothing to bring about the collapse of this Israeli government" such that Netanyahu would return to power. The Biden adminis-

tration gave Bennett an incredibly wide margin to maneuver on many different issues, including his relationship with Putin, because of this understandable concern. And it still shapes U.S. policy toward the Lapid government—witness the slow-walking of opening the Jerusalem consulate and the relatively mild criticism of settlement activities.

Are the Iran nuclear deal negotiations a factor? Russia now needs Iran more than ever, and Iran's supreme leader sent a message that Putin's criticism of Israel was welcome in Tehran. This does not mean Putin is prepared to break relations and deny Israelis freedom of movement in the air over Syria, at least not yet. If there is no agreement to restrain Iran's nuclear weapons aspirations, then I think we'll see Israeli efforts to strike Iranian assets in Syria, and maybe in Lebanon. Given that Russian-Iranian relations are growing closer—in drone sales, for ex-

ample—that set of circumstances could have consequences.

I don't think Putin wants to go there, particularly when he has his hands full coping with sanctions and one war already. He is smart enough not to push the envelope. But is it conceivable that we could see something similar to what happened in 2018, when Syrian anti-aircraft guns that were trying to strike Israeli aircraft shot down a Russian plane instead, and the Russians blamed the Israelis? That crisis got sorted out, but could there be direct Israeli-Russian confrontations, with Russians shooting down Israeli aircraft? I think it's still very unlikely. The Israelis and Russians are in touch daily through hotlines, and they practice "de-confliction"—if the Israelis are going to strike somewhere, they send messages to the Russians to ensure no personnel are in the strike areas. But in the event of a serious Israeli-Iranian confrontation, anything could happen. 



Russian President Vladimir Putin at the Great Mosque of Damascus with President of the Syrian Arab Republic Bashar al-Assad in 2020.



MIDTERMS '22:

What Our Jewish Voters Are Thinking

With the clock ticking down to midterm elections on November 8, *Moment* checked in with the participants in our Jewish Political Voices Project (JPVP). In 2020, JPVP followed 30 Jewish voters from ten states through the primaries up to Election Day. This broad cross section of Jewish voters—old, young, middle-aged, Democrat, Republican—provided a mosaic of shifting attitudes about then-President Trump and the Democrats who were running to challenge him.

2022 MOMENT INSTITUTE
**JEWISH POLITICAL
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The 2022 midterm is shaping up to be no less consequential. Usually, midterm elections are a referendum on the party in power in the White House and, of course, on its occupant. (And typically, the party of the president loses seats on Capitol Hill.) But this year's elections promise to be as much about the previous party in power and its leader, the former president. We picked ten veterans of our 2020 JPVP exploration to interview: five Republicans and five Democrats, all from swing states. Among them are a lawyer, a corporate executive, a few retirees, a member of Gen Z and a former member of Congress.



LAVEA BRACHMAN

Age: 59

Location: Columbus, OH

Party: Democrat

Occupation: Visiting fellow, Metropolitan Policy Program at the Brookings Institution

Jewish denomination: Unaffiliated

2020 choice: Joe Biden

Which Senate candidate will you vote for in Ohio, Democratic Representative Tim Ryan or Trump-backed Republican J.D. Vance, author of best-selling *Hillbilly Elegy*? Tim Ryan, absolutely. J.D. Vance is reprehensible. He's as bad as anybody in the Republican Party right now. Ryan is a moderate Democrat. He's trying to run in the way that Democratic Senator Sherrod Brown runs here in Ohio, and I hope he can do it. He tries to appeal to the working

class—the older, old-fashioned blue-collar white population. That's where he comes from. So it's authentic. I'm also a big supporter of the Democratic gubernatorial candidate, Nan Whaley. She is mayor of Dayton, and a friend of mine for a very long time. It's probably a long shot for her to beat GOP incumbent Mike DeWine. But she's a great person, a great candidate. Again, kind of a moderate Democrat, very principled.

Is Joe Biden too old to run for a second term? Should he consider stepping aside? I don't think I've formed an opinion on that. It would be best if there were another viable candidate. But such a candidate would have to be really, really careful to run a very centrist campaign. And I don't know who has the backbone to do that. So it really depends on what the options are, honestly. Age is not disqualifying per se.

Are elections honest? I think the questioning of elections comes from those who are not dedicated to real democracy and to letting voters' voices be heard. J.D. Vance is embracing anything that Trump says and does. He's an opportunist, and I think he's despicable in every

way. I'm concerned about gerrymandering. I'm concerned about the polarization occurring in our primaries. I'm a fan of ranked-choice voting, where voters rank all candidates by preference.

What issues will most impact your vote in this cycle? I'm concerned about our democracy. I trust those who trust the process. And I want to vote for those who believe in our democratic process. After that, I guess abortion is pretty high up there. There's a set of mainstream Democratic values: pro-choice, addressing climate change, supporting bills that increase taxes on the rich. I am really concerned about the increasing divide in our country, economically.

Have you been influenced by any of the investigations involving former President Trump? I'm shocked by some of the revelations. It's far worse than anyone ever thought. But also I'm not surprised. I hope the hearings and everything else are having an impact beyond the base of people who already believe Trump to have been responsible for what was going on. I'm already a pretty motivated voter. So nothing I see or read changes that.



ARIANA MENTZEL

Age: 36

Location: Beverly Hills, MI

Party: Democrat

Occupation: Assistant to the director of the Serling Institute for Jewish Studies and Modern Israel at Michigan State University

Jewish Affiliation: Conservative

2020 choice: Joe Biden

Which gubernatorial candidate in Michigan will you vote for, Democratic incumbent Gretchen Whitmer or Trump-backed Republican

Tudor Dixon? I will vote for Governor Whitmer. I liked her from the beginning, even before she became the governor, and I think she's done a really good job. To the best of her ability, she tried to keep us safe during COVID, and she almost lost her life due to a botched kidnapping attempt. Thankfully, the FBI intervened. Under Tudor Dixon, Michiganders would lose a lot of rights. Our public school systems would deteriorate. I would worry about our environment. I really just see her as a Trump candidate. So I would be very worried if she were elected governor. On the congressional front, because of redistricting, my congressperson will be Representative Rashida Tlaib. That's a problem for me. The "Squad," of which she's a member, reminds me of Trump and his cronies who divide people with their extremes. I will likely leave my House vote blank.

I will take a stand for my values on protecting U.S.-Israel relations, security for all Israelis (Jews and non-Jews alike), and a heartfelt preference for the two-state solution to the conflict.

Is Joe Biden too old to run for a second term? Should he consider stepping aside? It's not a yes or no for me. It's a punt. I think he is old but he's doing a decent job. If Joe Biden were to step aside for someone younger, I would be in favor of that. It would make us seem stronger. The Republican conservatives really like to use Biden's age against him. His age isn't detrimental. It might just politically be a good move to have a younger candidate.

Are elections honest? I think voting generally is fair. The most unfair part is just how expensive it is to run a campaign. I donate drops in the bucket. But I just wish that money could instead be

given to something else. When you hear of candidates raising millions and spending millions on a campaign, it just upsets me. I don't know of any alternatives. Voter fraud is a non-issue. The real voter fraud is that it's so hard for some people to get to their polling station. The lines to vote are so long. When I think of voter fraud, that's what I think of.

What are your feelings about your party at this point? The tension within our party is a reaction to the Trump era, with some of us feeling that "moderate" is enough, and others saying there's a

need to go much farther to the left.

What issues will most impact your vote in this cycle? I think abortion is probably at the forefront of my mind. Almost 800,000 signatures were collected to amend Michigan's constitution to guarantee reproductive freedom. Currently, there is a law, going back to 1931, that outlaws abortion. But thankfully, our governor and other organizations have helped keep it legal. Michiganders will literally be voting on abortion this November. And polls show that a good number of Republicans will be voting in

favor of reproductive freedom, which is a good thing.

Have you been influenced by any of the investigations involving former President Trump? The news is just reinforcing what I already believe. For my own well-being, I have intentionally removed myself from the endless news cycle and pundits talking about anything political. I couldn't sleep at night because of what so-and-so said and how so-and-so reacted. But now I'm like, as long as I know the facts, that is enough. And I'm sleeping much better!



RUTH KANTROWITZ

Age: 45

Location: Las Vegas, NV

Party: Republican

Occupation: Property manager

Jewish denomination: Declines to define

2020 choice: Donald Trump

Which Senate candidate in Nevada will you vote for, Democratic incumbent Catherine Cortez Masto or Trump-backed former Nevada Attorney General Adam Laxalt? I plan to vote for Cortez Masto. I don't vote along party lines but rather based on the people themselves. I will confess that I did not vote in the Republican primaries as I didn't like any of the candidates.

Is Donald Trump an asset or a liability for the GOP? I think Trump is an asset and that's why the Democrats are working so hard to hurt him. The current administration is attempting to make him a liability. Trump still has a huge influence among Republicans, but yes, I think many are looking for other strong Republicans to run, namely Florida Governor Ron DeSantis.

Are elections honest? I find the entire

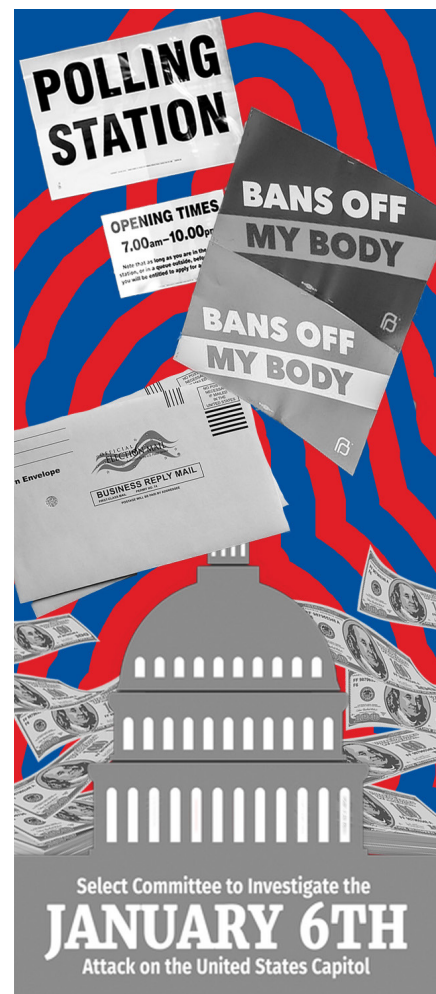
political system far from honest, including elections. Politics should be a service to people, not a means to become extremely wealthy. Our politicians care more about their own pockets than any of their constituents. The entire system is so fraught with back-scratching and wasteful, careless spending. Mailing ballots to people and not requiring ID to vote simply begs for fraud to be committed.

What are your feelings about your party at this point? I vote Republican because I can't tolerate Democrat policies on handouts and Israel, but I would not call it "my party." I voted Democrat through Obama's second run. My biggest issue with the Republican Party is their pretend pro-life stance. It's a blatant lie. Too many Republicans are actually pro-birth, which truly makes no sense; no Republican wants to fund feeding, clothing, housing and educating the kids they insist must be born. This is a hot-button topic for me.

What issues will most impact your vote in this cycle? Abortion access is really a high priority for me, but as I'm too old to worry about such a thing, my vote will heavily be based on government spending and financial policies including inflation and gas prices. At the end of the day, it will be the position on Israel that determines my vote. I find many Democrats have abhorrent views on Israel, but I'm always hoping to be pleasantly surprised.

Have you been influenced by any of

the investigations of former President Trump? The January 6 hearings will assure I don't vote Democrat, as I cannot support this waste of time and tax dollars.





MARK GOLDHABER

Age: 70

Location: Raleigh, NC

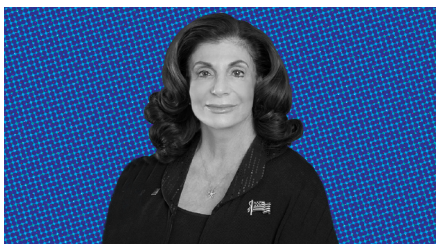
Party: Republican

Occupation: Consultant on housing and mortgage finance

Jewish denomination: Conservative

2020 choice: Jo Jorgensen (Libertarian)

Which Senate candidate in North Carolina will you vote for, Trump-backed Republican Representative Ted Budd or Democratic former state supreme court Chief Justice Cheri Beasley, for an open seat? I'll be supporting Congressman Budd. I think he'll be better on economic issues, because there is an enormous amount of spending, which has helped lead to very high inflation. He has also been a strong supporter of Israel. So from my point of view, that's a good combination.



SHELLEY BERKLEY

Age: 71

Location: Las Vegas, NV

Party: Democrat

Occupation: Senior vice president, Touro University System; U.S. Representative for Nevada's 1st congressional district, 1999-2013

Jewish denomination: Reform/Conservative

2020 choice: Joe Biden

Which Senate candidate in Nevada will you vote for, Democratic incumbent Catherine Cortez Masto or Trump-backed former state Attorney

Is Donald Trump an asset or a liability for the GOP? I think you already see the party moving beyond Trump. That's not to say that the former president doesn't have any influence. He certainly does. I myself did not vote for Trump, and I don't believe in the "Big Lie" that the race was stolen. If they choose to re-litigate the last election, the Republican Party is not going to be successful.

Are elections honest? I have a lot of faith in elections. I understand that when you have a very divided country, elections are very close. The election system is never going to be perfect because there are human beings involved. But I have confidence in the outcome of the last election. I think that all elections ought to be done with paper backup. And election laws should be in place well before the election and should not be changed in the last 30 to 60 days.

What are your feelings about your party at this point? I still consider myself a strong Reagan Republican. I want the party to focus on economic policy and smaller, less intrusive government—and be willing to defend democracy. I think the party will be more successful if they can show the difference between

us and what I believe is an overly expansive Democratic Party. Having economic policies that aim at helping the average American is the right strategy. But a piece of the Republican Party is straying away from that.

What issues will most impact your vote in this cycle? Certainly inflation is a major issue for me. It hurts the low-wealth community tremendously. If you don't have stable prices, you can't have a stable economy. And poor people get hurt a lot more than anybody else by inflation. Even in a period of rising wages, the wages don't keep up anywhere near to the cost of food, gas and other everyday items.

Have you been influenced by any of the investigations involving former President Trump? I think the hearings of the January 6 Committee show how many people did the right thing—people who were close to the president and were telling him the truth that Biden won the 2020 election, but also local secretaries of state around the country. I think that's often missed in the discussion because it's not sensational. The system actually worked the way it's supposed to.

General Adam Laxalt? I am enthusiastically supporting Senator Cortez Masto. She is doing a remarkable job, and I think it is very important to retain her in office. Incidentally, I was very close friends with her father, Manny Cortez, who was a county commissioner and the head of the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority. I've known Catherine since she was born. I supported her when she ran for attorney general, and I supported her in her first race for Senate. I've also known Adam and his family for many decades, but I am not supporting any election deniers.

Is Joe Biden too old to run for a second term? Should he consider stepping aside? I think President Biden has done a very solid job under very difficult circumstances. He has had extraordinary success in the legislative arena

and has made every attempt to restore this country to normalcy. He may walk a little slower, talk a little slower, but I think his mind is sharp. (I am in my 70s, and I'm very sharp!) If he runs, I will support him again.

Are elections honest? I think that the future of our democracy depends on well-run elections and that we should rejoice, as a nation, that in the middle of a pandemic people showed up and voted. The ludicrous, disproven claim of substantial voter fraud in the 2020 election is undermining our democracy, harming us as a nation and doing a serious disservice to the citizens of the United States of America.

What are your feelings about your party at this point? I am concerned that the Democratic Party has a progressive element that is blatantly antis-

mitic. And that is why it is so important for people like me to remain in the party and continue to speak with intelligence and moderation. Antisemitism is wrong, whether it's expressed by the right, where it's rampant, or by the left, where it's no less destructive.

What issues will most impact your vote in this cycle? I'm not a single-issue voter. And while I'm looking for rational, intelligent, hard-working, dedicated public servants to represent me, I don't have to agree with them on every single issue. However, I won't support extreme candidates on either side of the

aisle; I would no sooner support Senator Bernie Sanders than I would Donald Trump. I am only supporting candidates who believe in our democracy and work to make it better. And that's particularly important to me because history has demonstrated that if you are in a governmental system that leans too far to the left or to the right, it's the Jews who are ultimately hurt. We do well when there's a vibrant democracy.

Have you been influenced by any of the investigations involving former President Trump? I do follow the news. I have watched the January 6 Committee

hearings. I am also interested in what's happening in Georgia and New York. And what I am seeing, and what the country is witnessing right now, only makes me more committed to continue participating in the political process, supporting candidates, voting and encouraging others to vote as well. I am so tired of this nonsense of voter fraud and casting Trump as the ultimate victim. It is incomprehensible to me that a man who lives like a potentate at Mar-a-Lago is soliciting money from people who are struggling, and they are sending him money. It's inexplicable.



ANDREW SMITH

Age: 60

Location: Columbus, OH

Party: Republican

Occupation: CEO of a family-owned resin producer

Jewish denomination: Reform

2020 choice: Joe Biden (reluctantly)

Which Senate candidate in Ohio will you vote for, Ohio Democratic Representative Tim Ryan or Trump-backed Republican J.D. Vance, author of best-selling *Hillbilly Elegy*? I have not made up my mind. I used to think J.D. Vance was an admirable character. But ever since he started kissing Donald Trump's ring, I've had to reassess. I've always thought highly of Tim Ryan. He is a very good person, and for a Democrat, I think he's relatively harmless. But everything out of his mouth sounds like he is a Republican. I know it's not true, based on his voting record and party identification. So it's not easy.

Is Donald Trump an asset or a liability for the GOP? He's a negative any way you want to look at it. I find it quite

distressing that his endorsement has appeared to help many Republican candidates. Vance, for example, was running third before the endorsement, and now he's the Republican nominee. So can we as Republicans get past him? I think the answer is "Not yet." There are many Republicans like me who do not support Trump and would like him to go away, even if it costs some support from the rabid right. Sadly, he's going to stay in the limelight just as long as the limelight lets him.

Are elections honest? I don't think there is meaningful voter fraud. I do think that districting in this country is probably suboptimal, from many points of view. And I guess if you counted up how much Republicans benefit from gerrymandering versus how much Democrats benefit from it, maybe Republicans do better. I know they do in Ohio. I think it's bad, even if one sort of unfairness is partially offset by another sort of unfairness.

What are your feelings about your party at this point? Because so many Trump Republicans turn out in primaries, non-Trump Republicans, independents and even conservative Democrats don't have a say in who the nominee is. I was hoping for a resurgence of the Whig Party that could bring them all in. And perhaps that would be where I would give my loyalties. In the short and medium terms, I'm not bullish on the Republican Party; I think it's going to be a long time before it's cleansed from the very

pernicious influence of Donald Trump.

What issues will most impact your vote in this cycle? Typically, economic issues influence me the most at the federal level. My view is that the less the federal government does, the better. And usually what it does ends up not being good for business or taxpayers. I'm very troubled by Ohio's policy on abortion, but I think that the Ohio state Senate and House races have a lot more to do with that than the U.S. Senate. So that's where I will be choosing my candidates and thinking about social issues with respect to their positions. I do look at candidates' views on foreign policy. And primary among those foreign policy issues will be their stances toward the State of Israel. In the U.S. Senate race in Ohio, issues and character will be equally important.

Have you been influenced by any of the investigations involving former President Trump? January 6 was a terrible event, and I hope the people who committed criminal acts are punished. But with respect to Trump, I don't think I've learned much about him that I didn't know already. On the FBI raid on Mar-a-Lago, I think it's horrible that this has led to threats and violence. And it just goes to show that Trump's influence is not benign. There are nutty and potentially violent people who support this guy. Whenever he's perceived as being a victim, they go nuts. That's a very unhappy state of affairs in this country.



GLENN HAMER

Age: 53

Location: Austin, TX

Party: Republican

Occupation: CEO and president, Texas Association of Business

Jewish denomination: Conservative

2020 choice: Donald Trump

Which gubernatorial candidate in Texas will you vote for, Republican incumbent Greg Abbott or former U.S. Representative Beto O'Rourke?

I will enthusiastically vote for Governor Greg Abbott. He's the governor of the strongest economy in the U.S. We have more Fortune 500 companies than any other state. We've been voted the best state for business by *Chief Executive Magazine* 18 times in a row. We're the only state in the country that has gained two congressional seats. We export energy, and not just oil and gas. Beto would be bad for business. He made it pretty clear he supports high regulatory policy, and he's close to labor unions. There's no question within the business community that the state would be under better leadership with Governor Abbott.

Is Donald Trump an asset or a liability for the GOP? Trump is not on the ballot, obviously. But I believe that the key Senate and gubernatorial races are going to be more of a referendum on the current party in power in Washington. The performance of the party in power is a

drag on Democrats. There are a number of races across the country where the Trump endorsement probably has not led to the strongest candidates. I think the general consensus is that Trump's involvement has increased the chances of Democrats keeping the Senate and Republicans losing some governorships. Trump doesn't seem to care about it. He wants candidates who are loyal to him. You look across the country, and my suspicion is some of the candidates Trump helped are not strong candidates and will have a tough time in November.

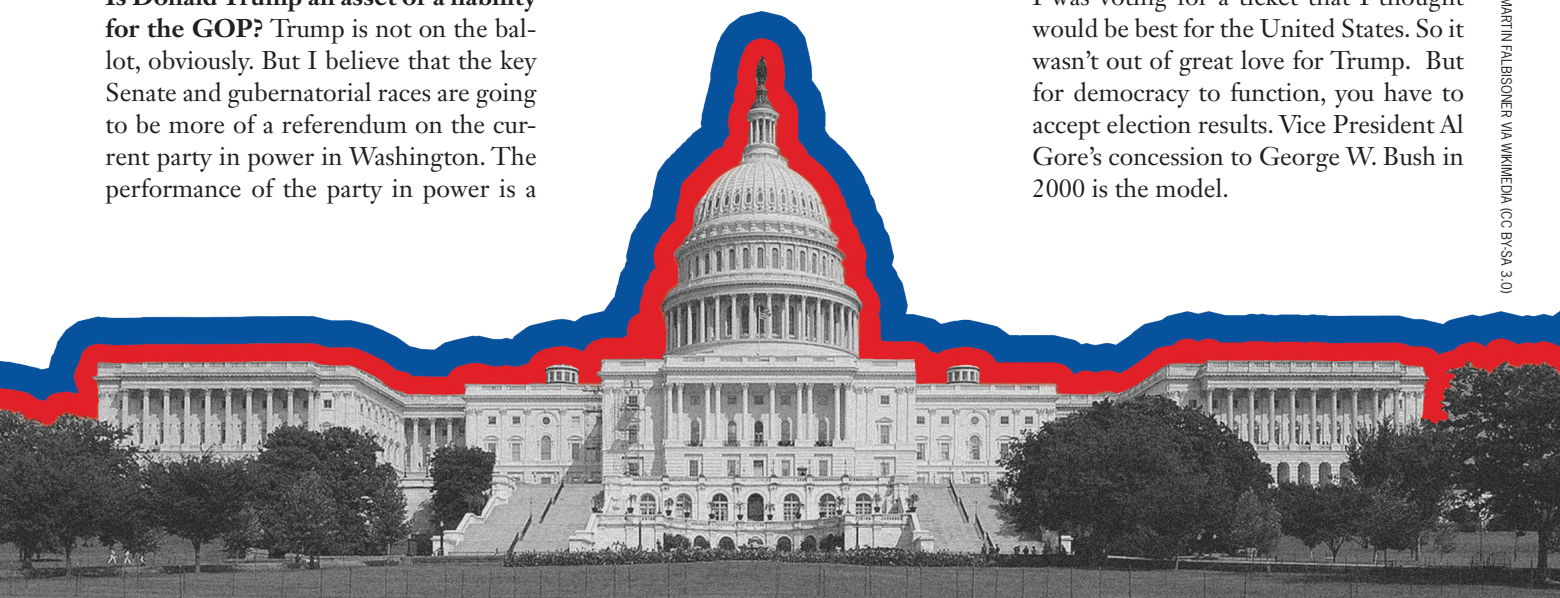
Are elections honest? There certainly is gerrymandering on both sides. Both parties do it and there is zero difference. Sometimes independent commissions can take the edge off it, but mostly it's just a matter of who has the power. Trump lost the election in 2020. But I do think it's important to have secure elections. I think voter ID has strong support and also that same-night results would ease people's suspicion of funny business.

What are your feelings about your party at this point? From the perspective of a Reagan Republican or a free-market person, both parties have changed pretty dramatically in the last 25 years, and not in a good way. You have candidates getting through primaries who would not have even been imaginable back then. And very strong incumbents are losing in both parties. I don't believe that Trump is a positive force in the Republican Party. He carries enor-

mous sway, but I believe Republicans will pay a price, because parties should always be looking forward. Looking back at the 2020 election is not a great formula for winning other elections. I read Andrew Yang's book (on forming a third party). It's interesting. It is more appealing today than it has been at any point in my lifetime.

What issues will most impact your vote in this cycle? The economy is the number-one issue. Inflation has probably peaked, but it's still an issue most Americans feel on a daily basis and has put a lot of people, understandably, in a grumpy mood. Here in Texas, we want to make sure we can keep the economy moving forward. The other big issue in states like Texas and Arizona is border security. There's bipartisan agreement that the current enforcement efforts are not working particularly well. So immigration and border security will almost certainly cut against Democrats. And I'll say, Israel's always somewhere on my mind when I'm voting. Governor Abbott is a very pro-Israel governor. He's traveled there and is a strong supporter of the Jewish state. So he checks more than one box on the important issues.

Have you been influenced by any of the investigations involving former President Trump? January 6 is a stain on our country and our history. It's unconscionable, revolting, disgusting. I voted for Trump in 2020 because I thought his record was very strong across the board. I was voting for a ticket that I thought would be best for the United States. So it wasn't out of great love for Trump. But for democracy to function, you have to accept election results. Vice President Al Gore's concession to George W. Bush in 2000 is the model.





HANNAH ROSENTHAL

Age: 71

Location: Madison, WI

Party: Democrat

Occupation: Former president and CEO, Jewish Federation of Greater Milwaukee; former U.S. State Department's Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Antisemitism

Jewish denomination: Reform

2020 choice: Joe Biden

Which Senate candidate in Wisconsin will you vote for, Democratic Lt. Governor Mandela Barnes or Republican incumbent Ron Johnson? Barnes is currently the lieutenant governor, and he also served in the legislature. He is a brilliant thinker and strategist. And I will proudly be voting for him. My biggest fear is that because Barnes is such a nice guy, he may not be able to withstand the onslaught of Republicans and Johnson—in particular the name-calling and bigotry.



SANDER EIZEN

Age: 24

Location: Southfield, MI

Party: Republican

Occupation: Public opinion researcher

Jewish denomination: Modern Orthodox

2020 choice: Joseph Biden (with regrets)

Which gubernatorial candidate in Michigan will you vote for, Democratic incumbent Gretchen Whitmer or Trump-backed Republican Tudor Dixon? I actually don't know that yet.

But I trust Wisconsin voters. They voted statewide for him to be lieutenant governor. He'll be a wonderful senator.

Is Joe Biden too old to run for a second term? Should he consider stepping aside? I think what's good for the nation is for Biden to run again. He's got the experience, the know-how, and strength of conviction on values, which I call Jewish values. Age is a fair question. I think, however, stability and understanding of what the president can or cannot do trumps everything else, excuse the expression. That's Joe Biden through and through.

Are elections honest? When you have legislatures that are one political party, they're going to gerrymander to keep their jobs and their majority. I think reapportionment should be made by an independent commission in every state. It's the fairest way to go, but that isn't happening. **What are your feelings about your party at this point?** I'm a proud Democrat. Our platform is solidly pro-choice, and it is strong on women's issues writ large. It cares about civil rights, human rights and civil liberties. That's the party I proudly belong to. Do I get angry at some members? Oh, yeah! Don't ask me about Arizona Democratic Senator Kyrsten Sinema. And don't ask me about

some of the hate-filled, bigoted language from Minnesota Democratic Representative Ilhan Omar. We still have Democrats who reach across the aisle and try to build consensus. But you do not see that with Republicans. If they do reach across the aisle, they get primaried. The Democrats remain a big-tent party.

What issues will most impact your vote in this cycle? Women's issues, voting rights and climate issues. Those are my top three. I have three grandchildren, and I want them to eat healthy foods. I want them to live in an environment that's healthy. If we stay on course, we may be dooming the planet. And I don't like that phrase, because it sounds like I'm exaggerating. But I'm not. And I don't see any Republicans stepping forward and saying we have to make sure that people have the right to vote. As a matter of fact, they say the opposite: "I want only people who are likely to vote for me to vote."

Have you been influenced by any of the investigations involving former President Trump? I don't happen to believe that Donald Trump will run again. But I think there will be a lot of Trumpers who might. It's clear that the Republican Party has sold its soul to the "Big Lie," and that's too frightening for me.

I'm not really a fan of either of them, but I think Whitmer is going to win. The Michigan Republican Party has put forward pretty distasteful candidates for governor and also for secretary of state and attorney general. It'll be hard for me to support any of them. I actually need to learn more about Dixon. She's such an unknown figure to me.

Is Donald Trump an asset or a liability for the GOP? I don't see him as an asset for Republicans. It makes it easier for Democrats when all they have to do is campaign on being anti-Trump and not for reducing inflation or lowering the cost of living or bringing jobs back to the communities that need them. Trump being the topic of conversation makes things easier for Democrats.

Are elections honest? If there is voter fraud, we should stop it. And we should

always be proactive in figuring out how to prevent voter fraud in the future. I'm not saying voter fraud doesn't happen. I don't ever want to dismiss voter fraud as a possibility. But do I think it's a threat to the integrity of elections? No, I do not. I think there are legitimate complaints about gerrymandering, and I would like to do away with congressional districts altogether. I think that we should do proportional representation at the state level. In Michigan, for example, if the Democratic list of candidates gets 48 percent of the vote, and the Republican list gets 45 percent, and the Libertarians get 7 percent, it would allow, maybe, for one Libertarian member of Congress from Michigan.

What are your feelings about your party at this point? The Republican Party is in a bad place at the moment.

I'm slightly optimistic for the future—I just don't know when that future will be. But at the moment, I'm not feeling too great about the state of the Republican Party. We've put forward a lot of very questionable candidates in what should be very winnable races (for instance, in Pennsylvania, Ohio and Arizona). I think eventually people are going to wake up after seeing the effects government spending is having on inflation. I think people are going to come back around to "Oh, maybe we shouldn't pass trillion-dollar bills and start printing money." There are some younger Republicans who are willing to work across the aisle while staying true to their beliefs.



NINA STANLEY

Age: 71
Location: Sarasota, FL
Party: Democrat
Occupation: Retired nurse
Jewish denomination: Unaffiliated
2020 choice: Joe Biden

Which Senate candidate in Florida will you vote for, Democratic Representative Val Demings or Republican incumbent Marco Rubio? And for Florida governor, former Republican Governor Charlie Crist (now a Democrat) or Republican incumbent Ron DeSantis? I'm voting for Charlie Crist for governor and Val Demings for senator. DeSantis is a dictator: "You can't say gay." We have a lot of problems here in Florida that he's not addressing, such as unaffordable

housing. Instead he's worried about gay people and drag queens. Plus, he's most likely running for president. Also, DeSantis did not condemn the Nazis' march in Orlando in January. So there you go. Rubio is just an opportunist. He's on the Trump train, even though he once hated Trump.

What issues will most impact your vote in this cycle? Inflation is the top issue. There just needs to be a coherent plan to actually lower costs for Americans across the country. Everybody's feeling it. Inflation doesn't care if you're Republican or Democrat. And so, I'd like to see a plan, whether it's from Republicans or Democrats. Israel is important for my congressional district, because Rep. Rashida Tlaib, the Democratic member of the far-left "Squad" who is hostile to Israel, is my new representative after re-

housing. Instead he's worried about gay people and drag queens. Plus, he's most likely running for president. Also, DeSantis did not condemn the Nazis' march in Orlando in January. So there you go. Rubio is just an opportunist. He's on the Trump train, even though he once hated Trump.

Is Joe Biden too old to run for a second term? Should he consider stepping aside? I'm 71 years old, and I'm not the same as I used to be. I'm not even the same as I was six years ago. Don't get me wrong—I think Biden's done a good job. He inherited a mess, and people aren't giving him enough credit. But I think 80 is just too old to be the president of the United States.

Are elections honest? Voter fraud is made up. When Trump lost to Ted Cruz in the 2016 Iowa primary he said there was voter fraud. When he won the 2016 election but lost the popular vote to Hillary, he said there was voter fraud. Every election he is in, win or lose, he claims voter fraud. That's what he does.

What are your feelings about your party at this point? I think what Democrats did to Republican Representative

districting. It's unfortunate, to say the least, that the Democratic Party was way too splintered this time around to really make a difference in unseating her. So I'm hoping that when 2024 rolls around, we can all work together to unseat her.

Have you been influenced by any of the investigations involving former President Trump? I don't skip elections, so they have no impact on whether I will vote. Inflation is what matters most right now. The media likes to think that Republican voters think about Trump all the time. That's just not the case. I know from working in the polling industry that the media thinks about Trump way more than Republican voters do.

Peter Meijer of Michigan was terrible. Meijer had voted for impeachment, voted for gay marriage, voted for gun control. As Illinois Republican Representative Adam Kinzinger has said, the Democrats complain, "Where are all the good Republicans?" Well, there was one, and they put in all that money to help the Trump guy win the primary so Democrats could pick up that seat in November. Meijer really was a good Republican.

What issues will most impact your vote in this cycle? Abortion and gun control are important. Inflation is terrible, but Republicans aren't going to do any better with it. They haven't put out a plan to get it under control. Look at the plan they had for Social Security, where they want to reauthorize it every five years. That's scary. I like Social Security. I'm on Social Security.

Have you been influenced by any of the investigations involving former President Trump? The hearings have been extremely revealing and informative. But I would vote whether they had a January 6 Committee or not. I would not vote for a Republican today. I mean, I wouldn't vote for *these* Republicans. 🇺🇸

We are seeking a new cohort for the upcoming 2024 presidential campaign and election. Please email editor@momentmag.com if you would like to participate.

talk of the table



The Feast Before the Fast

BY VERED GUTTMAN

It once happened in Rome on Erev Yom Kippur that a Jewish tailor went to the market to buy fish. There was only one fish available, but there were two buyers: the tailor and the servant of the Roman governor. Each offered a progressively larger sum until the price reached twelve dinar, which the tailor paid. During the governor's meal, he asked his servant: "Why did you not bring fish?" The servant replied: "...I went to buy fish, but there was only one available. A Jew and I haggled over it...until the price reached twelve dinar. Would you have wanted me to spend twelve dinar on a fish?" The governor asked: "Who is this Jew?" He sent for him and he was brought before him. He asked him: "Why did you, a Jewish tailor, see fit to eat a fish that cost twelve dinar?" The tailor replied: "Sir! We have but one day during which all the sins that we commit throughout the year are atoned for. Shall we not honor that day when it comes?"—Bereishit Rabbah

It may seem odd to write a food story about Yom Kippur, one of the rare days on which Jews refrain from eating. But growing up in an Ashkenazi-Iraqi home in Israel, I got a chance to see firsthand all the effort and attention put into the food and drinks before and after the fast. As the sages have said, the mitzvah of eating well on the ninth of Tishrei (the day before Yom Kippur) is almost as important as fasting on the tenth. The *Shulchan Aruch*, the code of Jewish law written in 1563, was very clear about the

importance of a good meal before fasting: "One who eats and drinks on the ninth [of Tishrei] receives a great reward as if he fasted [on the ninth and the tenth]."

Some, like 16th-century Kabbalist Rabbi Isaac Luria of Safed, even argued for eating "the equivalent of two days' food" before fasting on Yom Kippur. Indeed, in many communities around the Jewish diaspora it is customary to eat a large lunch and then a large *seuda mafseket*, the separation meal, just before the fast begins.

Preparatory eating starts in the morning on the day before Yom Kippur. In

some Hasidic synagogues the *gabbai* (rabbi's assistant) will hand out slices of honey cake (*lekach*, in Yiddish) to congregants. According to some traditions, one must ask for a slice: In case God decreed that one would need to beg for a hand-out during the coming year, asking for food should satisfy the decree.

Moroccan and Libyan Jews also used to bring sweets to the synagogue on the day before the fast. In Morocco, members of the Jewish community would fry *sfenj*, flat doughnuts, outside the synagogue and hand them out to the wor-



Feigel challah, or bird-shaped challah, originated in 18th-century Ukraine.

shippers. In some provincial towns in Libya, Jews would bring their bowls of food to the synagogue and eat together after the morning prayer, wishing each other a happy new year, according to North Africa folklorist Raphael Ben Simchon.

In other Jewish communities, preparation for Yom Kippur meals starts with the ritual of *kapparat* (atonement, in Hebrew), when a live chicken is twirled over the head of each family member (a rooster for the males, a hen for the females), symbolically passing his or her sins to the poor animal. The prayer accompanying this ceremony asks for the chicken's death and for the person to be inscribed in the Book of Life. The chicken is then slaughtered according to Jewish law, and while some communities donate it to the poor, in many others, the chicken is used for the pre-holiday meal. Persian Jews traditionally stuffed the chicken with rice and spices (*morgh tu-deli*), Moroccan Jews served the chicken with couscous, and Ashkenazi Jews made chicken soup.

My Ashkenazi mother, Erela Arnon,

remembers her family's own *kapparat* ritual from Tel Aviv in the late 1940s and 1950s, a time of austerity in the young State of Israel. "We used to go with my mother to the market on Basel Street, where she chose the best rooster and hen

Whether it's apples and honey on Rosh Hashanah, fried food on Hanukkah, Haman's ears on Purim or matzah for Passover, the food we eat on Jewish holidays is filled with symbolism and adds to the understanding of the occasion. Yom Kippur is no different.

for our family. We brought them home to do the ceremony with my dad, then walked back to the market to have the chickens slaughtered by the butcher and their feathers plucked by a specialist," she recalled. When they had no money for

chicken, they'd use a carp instead, swinging it in place of the chicken. At home, my grandmother would make chicken soup, which she'd serve with kreplach, another pre-Yom Kippur Ashkenazi staple. Kreplach are triangular dumplings, similar to pierogi, stuffed with meat and served in chicken soup. My grandmother used to make the stuffing out of chicken liver mixed with a little ground beef. Kreplach are served, traditionally, whenever the Jewish calendar requires "beating," since the filling of the kreplach is "beaten" (or ground, which is the same word in Yiddish). In fact, the *kapparat* ceremony is called *sbluggen kappores* in Yiddish, *sbluggen* meaning beating or hitting.

This happens three times a year: on Yom Kippur, when Jews beat their chests to atone for their sins; during Sukkot, when the leaves of the willow are beaten; and on Purim, when Jews recollect how Haman was beaten. (My grandmother added a fourth occasion for making kreplach—when the meat you cooked turned out badly.)

Many Yemeni Jews have a dairy meal for lunch on Erev Yom Kippur. “My mother used to treat me with delicious *ftout* served with *samneh* and *bilbeh*,” says Galit Bineth, who lives in Tel Aviv. *Ftout* is the Yemeni dish made from the traditional *salouf* flat bread, which is ripped into small pieces, cooked in clarified butter (*samneh* in Arabic) and seasoned with fenugreek seeds (*bilbeh*). “My mother would go to her relative to make the *samneh* with her,” she added, noting that the relative’s outdoor kitchen turned out to be beneficial for cooking with fenugreek, a delicious yet strongly aromatic spice. “They started by toasting the fenugreek on a skillet, then they’d add the butter and clarify it. The thick and flat *salouf* was bought at a Yemeni bakery. Then she’d cook a little milk with sugar and the seasoned *samneh*, and add the *salouf* pieces in until they were soaked with the liquid.” Many Yemeni cooks also add eggs into the pot and cook it a little longer. Bineth still considers this one of her favorite dishes.

A few hours after the dairy meal, it

was time for the meal of separation. It included a starchy side dish, such as potatoes or noodles, then a meat-based soup, such as *kar’an*, leg-of-lamb and bone soup, served with *salouf*. David Moshe, an Israeli-Yemeni jeweler and author of the cookbook *Disappearing Flavors of the South*, told me that the meal ended with dates and white coffee, a lightly roasted blend that keeps its light yellowish shade. “My family comes from Bayhan (a city in western Yemen),” Moshe said. “It was located on the Spice Route, and so their coffee was rich with spices, similar to Indian chai.” The coffee is seasoned with plenty of ginger, cardamon, clove and cinnamon, and sometimes even toasted sesame or toasted partially cooked wheat berries.

For Ashkenazi Jews, it was all about the kugel. A year-round Ashkenazi favorite, kugel is filling enough for starting or ending the fast. The 18th-century rabbi Jacob Isaac Horowitz taught that “just as one’s respective mitzvot and transgressions are weighed in our final judgment in heavenly

courts, so too are weighed all the kugel one ate in honor of the Shabbat.” That should apply to Yom Kippur too.

Another symbolic pre-fast food is found in Carol Ungar’s book *Jewish Soul Food: Traditional Fare and What It Means*. Eighteenth-century Ukrainian Jews started the tradition of baking a bird-shaped challah (*feigel challah*, in Yiddish) for the separation meal. Behind it stood the promise in the Book of Isaiah that just as a bird can fly loose from its captors, so will God rescue the Jews from their foes.

Whether it’s apples and honey on Rosh Hashanah, fried food on Hanukkah, Haman’s ears on Purim or matzah for Passover, the food we eat on Jewish holidays is filled with symbolism and adds to the understanding of the occasion. Yom Kippur is no different. One thing is for sure: from a twelve-dinar fish to kreplach, *ftout* and *feigel challah*, Jews around the world have always made sure that they enter the Day of Atonement with food that is not only delicious, but also meaningful.

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MOROCCAN SFENJ DOUGHNUTS

Recipe by Vered Guttman

Sfenj (or *sfinje*) are free-form doughnuts that originated in Muslim Spain and are popular in the Maghreb. Moroccan Jews make these before Yom Kippur, and they are as simple as they are good.

INGREDIENTS

3 cups all-purpose flour
1 tablespoon instant dry yeast
2 tablespoon sugar, plus more for dipping
1 tablespoon whiskey
1¾ cups warm water
1 teaspoon salt
Corn oil or olive oil or peanut oil for frying

Yields about 16 *sfenj*

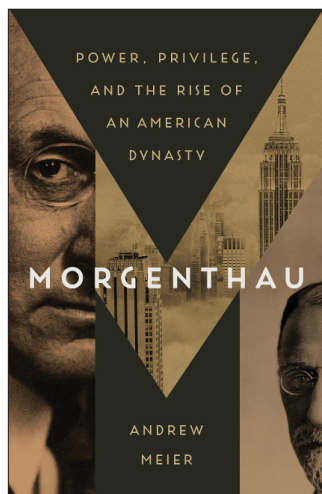
DIRECTIONS

1. In a bowl of a stand mixer fitted with a dough hook, put flour, yeast and sugar and mix with a spatula. Make a well in the center and pour whiskey, water and salt in, then knead for 4-5 minutes. The dough will be very sticky, but don't be tempted to add more flour to it.
2. Transfer dough to a lightly greased large bowl, cover with plastic wrap and let stand for an hour or until dough doubles in volume. Pinch dough to deflate it, then let rise again for another hour. Some may even repeat this process for a third time.
3. Fill a deep frying pan with ¾ inch of oil, cover, and bring to 325 degrees over medium heat (this may take about 10 minutes.) Test oil temperature by dropping a piece of dough into it. The oil should simmer gently around it.
4. Line a large tray with double layers of paper towels.
5. Grease your hands with a little oil. Take a piece of dough the size of a Ping-Pong ball, roll it into a ball, then use your fingers to shape it into a ring-shaped doughnut and gently drop it into the oil. Repeat with three more *sfenj*. Use a tablespoon to drop hot oil on the upper side of each *sfenj*, and when the bottom is golden, flip it over and cook the other side until golden. Traditionally, a wooden skewer is used to flip the *sfenj*. When the *sfenj* are ready, transfer them to a tray and continue with the rest of the dough.
6. Put ½ cup sugar in a medium bowl and dip each *sfenj* in sugar to coat both sides. Arrange on a platter and serve immediately.

literary moment

BOOK REVIEW **ROBERT SIEGEL**

A FAMILY OF AMBITIOUS ARISTOCRATS



Morgenthau: Power, Privilege and the Rise of an American Dynasty

By Andrew Meier

Penguin Random House,
1,072 pp. \$45.00

The Morgenthaus, the late New York mayor Ed Koch once said, were “the closest thing we’ve got to royalty in New York City.” Jewish-American quasi-royalty? While Koch was no stranger to hyperbole, his judgment, cited by Andrew Meier in his masterful new study of the Morgenthau family, recalls an earlier observation that Jews like the Morgenthaus amounted to a unique American aristocracy. In his 1967 history of the German Jews who came to the United States in the mid-19th century, *Our Crowd: The Great Jewish Families of New York*, Stephen Birmingham called the Schiffs, Guggenheims, Lehmans and the rest America’s true aristocracy: wealthy and insular, a people apart. While those families were typically ac-

tive in commerce and finance, the Morgenthaus were the exceptional ones (like the Lehmans) whose achievements went beyond making money to achieving great success in politics and public service. Their stories deserve every page of Meier’s thousand-page serial biography.

His subjects span four generations of Morgenthau men. There is Lazarus, the patriarch, who managed to make and lose a fortune in Germany (the cigars he exported to the United States were done in by Lincoln’s tariffs of 1862). He moved the family to America just as the Civil War was ending and lived out his days, part entrepreneur, part confidence man, in the zone between eccentric and just plain crazy.

Lazarus’s improvidence forced his bright, ambitious son Henry to drop out of the young City College of New York and get a job. The German-born Henry, ten years old when the family arrived in America, worked hard enough to pay his own way through Columbia Law School. From there it was on to a successful law career, from which he became far more successful investing in New York real estate. Having acquired a considerable fortune, he turned to politics and invested early and generously in the presidential campaign of Woodrow Wilson, who made him ambassador to the Ottoman Empire.

Henry’s son, Henry Jr., grew up rich in upstate Dutchess County, New York, where, having dropped out of Cornell twice (Meier suggests he may have suffered from a learning disability), he took to farming and made the friendship of his life. Henry Jr. and his wife Elinor (a Lehman on her mother’s side) became best friends with fellow aristocratic Dutchess County Democrats Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt. Henry Morgenthau Jr. served in FDR’s gubernatorial administration in Albany and in his presidential administration in Washington.

Henry Jr.’s son Robert Morgenthau was the New York County (Manhattan) District Attorney from 1975 through 2009. Before his election to that office, he was the U.S. Attorney for the South-

ern District of New York, picked by his childhood friend, John F. Kennedy.

Setting aside Lazarus—whose final business scheme, ultimately busted by the police, was a Manhattan townhouse dressed up as “The Temple of Humanity,” a wedding hall for orphan brides of all faiths for whom Morgenthau solicited ostensible dowries from charitable donors—the Morgenthau men took jobs in government that they interpreted expansively, usually for the better. Each of them, in their turn, confronted choices between acting on a clear sense of right and wrong and accepting the less clear exigencies of political life.

Woodrow Wilson pressed Henry Sr. to accept the post in Turkey in a White House meeting in June 1913. The offer struck Henry as unsatisfactory and even offensive. Washington had sent Jewish ambassadors to Constantinople before (a non-Christian envoy was less problematic in a non-Christian capital) and Morgenthau had wanted something bigger, not a Jewish sinecure. If not Treasury secretary, he hoped to become governor of the new board Wilson promised to create, which was to become the forerunner of the Federal Reserve.

When Wilson told a reluctant Morgenthau that the position was an opportunity to do much for American Jews, Morgenthau replied, “I wouldn’t be going as a Jew. I would be going as an American.” “That the president could see him only as a Jew infuriated him,” Meier writes.

When Wilson pressed the strictly anti-Zionist Morgenthau further by citing the welfare of the Jews of Palestine, then ruled by the Ottomans, and called it “almost indispensable that I have a Jew at that post,” Morgenthau persisted in his refusal. He went off on

To relate the Morgenthaus’ stories is to relate a century and a half of New York City and American history.

a European vacation and sent the president a letter. “Why,” the letter asked, “should Jews be treated any differently than anyone else? ...Would Methodists or Baptists be told, here is a ‘Position,’ find one of your faith to fill it?”

Morgenthau ultimately relented at the insistence of his friend Rabbi Stephen Wise, an influential figure in Reform Judaism and, unlike Henry, an ardent Zionist. Wise complained in a letter to Morgenthau that “no Jew has been appointed to a single place of importance”—the flip side of the same argument that had failed to move him when made by Wilson, that Morgenthau should take the job because he was Jewish. Whether he liked it or not, that fact was not irrelevant.

In the end, Morgenthau went to Turkey, where his service proved historic. During World War I, he famously studied and believed accounts of the mass murder of Armenians, accounts that Ottoman leaders denied and much of the world ignored, and he urged U.S. action. “From harrowing reports of eye witnesses,” he wrote to Secretary of State Robert Lansing in 1915, “it appears that a campaign of race extermination is in progress under a pretext of reprisal against a rebellion.”

As the victims of the Armenian genocide were not American citizens and the United States was still neutral in the war, the State Department concluded it could, or at least should, do nothing. Morgenthau ultimately resigned his post and campaigned for the relief and rescue of the Armenians as a private citizen. His persistence earned him the admiration and gratitude of the Armenian people and foreshadowed the issue that would dog his son Henry Jr. in the Roosevelt Administration.

That son achieved a goal that had eluded his father: For the last 11 years of Roosevelt’s presidency, Henry Jr. was Treasury Secretary, despite having no background in banking, finance or economics. With FDR’s blessing, he took the Treasury into policy realms where no Treasury Secretary had taken it be-



From left: Henry Morgenthau Jr., Eleanor Roosevelt, Franklin D. Roosevelt and unknown man in 1935.

fore. With both the State Department and the War Department governed by isolationists in career and political jobs, Treasury organized Lend-Lease, a sleight of hand by which arms sales to France and Britain were treated as loans and, therefore, technically consistent with American neutrality. More significantly, Morgenthau and a group of his staffers pushed FDR to act on behalf of European Jews at a time when refugee quotas for them went unfilled, owing to the State Department’s dubious excuse that they would be used to infiltrate German agents into the United States. They never succeeded in pushing FDR toward a public, robust commitment to saving European Jewry, but Morgenthau’s team did bring the issue some attention and prove that the State Department had actively suppressed reports that the camps were exterminating Jews on an industrial scale.

Secretary Morgenthau also made it his business to plan for the U.S. occupation of a future defeated Germany—not self-evidently the job of the Treasury. “The Morgenthau Plan” called for the effective elimination of German heavy

industry and the rebirth of Germany as an agrarian state. Secretary of War Henry Stimson and other senior administration officials opposed another punitive peace to end another war with Germany, and in his arguments against Morgenthau’s ideas Stimson appealed more than once for “Christian” values. Morgenthau’s political clout had always depended on his close personal friendship with FDR, whose death spelled the end of Henry Jr.’s life in politics. His idea of Germany’s future was abandoned in favor of a reindustrialized German bulwark against the Soviet Union.

After leaving government, Morgenthau became head of the United Jewish Appeal (a reminder that, as the late rabbi and historian Arthur Hertzberg once told me, “You can run the American Jewish community without having read a single page of Maimonides.”) As Meier writes, Secretary Morgenthau attended his first Passover seder, a communal event for local Jewish servicemen, in Daytona, Florida, in 1945—after rejecting an appeal from members of the community that he leave the resort where he was vacationing because



Henry Morgenthau Sr.



Henry Morgenthau Jr.



Robert Morgenthau

of its restrictive ban on Jews less powerful and famous than himself. His father's anti-Zionism notwithstanding, the younger Morgenthau became an enthusiastic supporter of Israel.

Treasury Secretary Morgenthau's son Robert, like his father and grandfather before him, stretched the definition of his public office. As Manhattan district attorney, he championed the prosecution of organized crime (which for decades FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover had insisted did not exist) and white-collar crime, which had largely gone uninvestigated. At the end of his career, Morgenthau's investigations of Iranian money laundering, done with the help of a former Israeli intelligence officer on his staff, reflected his interest in blocking Iran's nuclear program—a broad interpretation, to put it mildly, of the powers of the Manhattan DA. Morgenthau cared less about murder cases or violent crime, a possible reason that the wrongful convictions in the Central Park Jogger case, convictions later disproved by DNA and the confession of a convicted rapist, were carried out and defended by his subordinates. As for civil liberties, Morgenthau was a stop-and-frisk supporter.

To relate the stories of the Morgenthau family is to relate a century and a half of New York City and American histo-

ry. This accounts for the book's length, essential to the breadth that makes it a success. Innumerable episodes cast light on the larger saga of which the family was a part. There is an account of how Henry Sr., the shrewd 19th-century real estate speculator, prepared a syndicate of investors to pounce when the route of a new subway line was announced: He and his fellow investors promptly bought and flipped the rural outlands of Washington Heights. There is Henry Jr.'s struggle to convert his friendship and weekly lunch with FDR into policies that would help Europe's Jews and punish its Nazis; Meier includes the transcript of his unpublicized call to Coast Guard headquarters (the Coast Guard reported to Treasury) trying to track and protect the *St. Louis*, the ship carrying Jewish refugees from Europe that was tragically turned away.

There is a painfully vivid portrayal of Robert's naval service in World War II: his near-death experience when the destroyer of which he was executive officer, the USS *Lansdale*, was sunk in the Mediterranean, and his equally harrowing service off Okinawa in the USS *Harry F. Bauer*. There is the story of how, during Robert's stint as U.S. Attorney, his investigation of the corporate raider Louis Wolfson led to the forced resignation of Supreme Court Justice

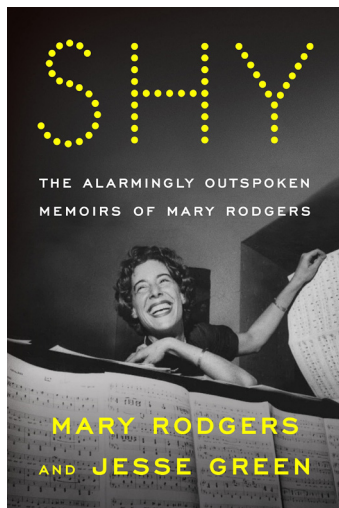
Abe Fortas, a Lyndon Johnson intimate, when Johnson was president.

Writing about Robert Morgenthau's time at Amherst College, Meier observes about Robert and his brother, "The Morgenthau boys had scarcely been made to feel their Judaism." The class of 1941, he tells us, numbered 240 students, only five Jews among them. Robert Morgenthau and his father were assured that Alpha Delta Phi was the only fraternity worth joining, which he did, after the fraternity's powerful alumni had to debate admitting its first Jew—a change to which there was significant opposition.

This seems to be the essence of the Morgenthau family's Jewishness: It was not to be the cause of any discrimination; it was not a source of cultural identity or spiritual strength; yet it was a community affiliation not to be abandoned. Case in point: Until his death, Robert Morgenthau was a member of the board of Temple Emanu-El, New York's first and grandest Reform congregation. It is a 19th-century take on Jewishness and assimilation, and a very German one—a recurring theme in the stories of the Morgenthau men, but not the driving rhythm.

Robert Siegel is Moment's special literary contributor.

SECRETS OF A MUSICAL FAMILY



SHY: The Alarming Outspoken Memoirs of Mary Rodgers
By Mary Rodgers and Jesse Green
Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 480 pp., \$35.00

Mary Rodgers's posthumous autobiography is a brash, outrageous and entertaining excursion into the life of its author. Mary (1931-2014) was the daughter of Richard Rodgers—memorable as the creator of *Oklahoma!* and *South Pacific*, two of the most iconic musicals in American theater history—and of his wife, Dorothy, about whom the less said, the better.

Drawn from interviews and conversations with Mary, the memoir is brought to life by her interlocutor, *New York Times* chief theater critic Jesse Green, a friend of the author's for 20 years. Green fills the first chapters with enlightening if occasionally distracting footnotes that clarify theater history, identify people mentioned in the text or temper some of Mary's audacity. The result is both a fascinating life story and a sharp and often disconcerting look at the talented, complex

and often problematic men and women who dominated the American musical stage for most of the 20th century.

It is not surprising that Broadway was marked by a Jewish cultural and religious sensibility. Yiddish theater, which emerged in late-19th-century Europe, had melded farcical Purim plays, cantorial songs and Jewish minstrel shows with European literary and theatrical traditions. The giants of the American musical theater did the same, using minor chords to express emotion and adapting comic tropes to themes such as poverty, tradition and social anxiety.

They were rich and successful, but in their daily lives, these famous artists mirrored ordinary Jewish concerns about belonging. For years, Mary Rodgers writes, many of them refused to live on Manhattan's Upper West Side because it was "too Jewish," choosing the wealthier, WASPier East Side for its opportunities to ascend the social ladder. So Jewish was the musical theater world that Ethel Merman, who was often mistaken for Jewish, went to great pains to assert her Episcopalian identity. In a footnote, Green recounts the story of how Merman, invited to a Passover dinner by writer-producer Jule Styne, brought a ham sandwich with her in case she hated the food.

Mary, truly a poor little rich girl, grew up in this world amid a paradoxical mixture of parental constraints and neglect. Her sharp wit and rapier tongue concealed the massive hurts of her childhood and helped her overcome a fraught personal and professional life. Her first husband was physically and emotionally abusive while she was beginning her musical career; later, insecure about her own talent, she became easy prey for jealous competitors who asserted that her work had been written by her father. "Why in the world would my father want to write my music?" she wrote. "He doesn't even want to *listen* to it."

In the end, she became a successful author and lyricist. *Once Upon a Mattress*, her comic rendering of the fairy tale *The Princess and the Pea*, was a Broadway triumph and a resounding financial success. She

married twice and was the mother of six children. Five are alive today, successful in their chosen careers and relationships.

A chapter titled "Hostilities" opens *SHY* with an account of frightening games played by her family—games designed to teach competitive players how to win, or how to protect themselves with sharp language and funny stories when they lost. Family stories weave in and out of the narrative, which bubbles over with the louche and often hilarious foibles of the rich and famous. She begins with Lorenz Hart, her father's first partner, followed by Oscar Hammerstein; Hal Prince, the Broadway producer with whom she had an early affair; Woody Allen, Irving Berlin, Leonard Bernstein, Judy Holliday, Barbra Streisand...you get the idea.

Mary spares none of them, including herself. Sometimes admittedly mean, she tempers initial barbs with deeper insight. She first describes "Daddy" as an alcoholic, a womanizer and a man who "hated having his time wasted with intangible things like emotion." I was stunned by this view of her father, so at odds with the man his audience adored—the man whose musicals championed unlikely unions, spoke out against racism and underscored the romantic view of love that, for better or worse, was common coin of the postwar era.

Over the years Mary came to understand and forgive her father. Her love for him reflected an increasing intimacy in their shared passion for music, her appreciation of his practical and musical advice and his growing pride in her talent. "He gave me music," she writes, and, later, "He taught me love."

She is far less forgiving of her cold and distant mother, whom she calls Miss Perfecta, a sobriquet used by their servants

"Why in the world would my father want to write my music? He doesn't even want to *listen* to it."



Mary Rodgers with her father, Richard Rodgers.

and even by some close friends. Dorothy Rodgers was a sometime entrepreneur, writer and inventor, more concerned with the condition of her house than the happiness of Mary and her sister Linda. “Mummy was amazing and awful,” Mary writes. Dorothy, a victim of her own loveless childhood, envied Mary’s musical ties with Richard and constantly sought to undermine them. Frozen in that childhood relationship, Mary and her mother never reconciled.

The two daughters were highly competitive—at least in part because Dorothy constantly pitted them against each other. In defense, the sisters ultimately allied against her and remained close, though they never ceased competing. At the end of their lives, they bet on who would die first. Mary won that bet, passing away two months before her sister.

Amid all the personal and professional turmoil, one constant star lit the dark sky of her imagination: Stephen Sondheim. She fell in love with him at 11, when they first met. That love never died, through breakups and arguments, and they remained close friends until her death at age 83. She writes that the pair even contemplated “marriage”—in part out of mutual affection, and also, perhaps, to help Sondheim conceal his homosexuality. Being gay in the 1940s and 1950s was a cardinal sin that could cost you your

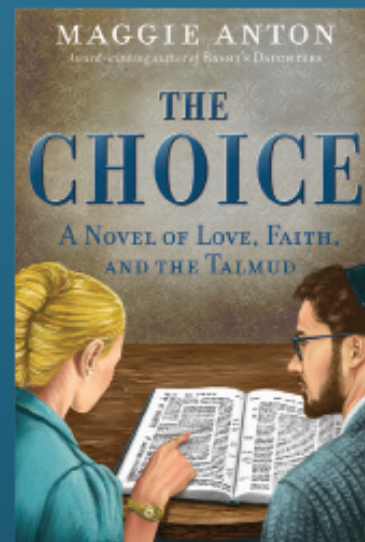
career. Sin or no, many of Mary’s friends (and one of her two husbands) were gay. She is frank and honest about these relationships, which seem to have satisfied her need for the warmth and emotional contact absent in her family.

Her stories of unhappiness amid the wealth and excitement of Broadway offer us the undeniable pleasures of *schadenfreude*. But there is a deeper satisfaction in reading this book. Mary’s life story is so different from what I might have imagined, given her fame and station, and so much more like the lives of many other women who grew up in the last half of the 20th century. We may have had more caring families or fewer possessions, but we, too, invested our emotions in fairy-tale loves, were uneasy about our looks (Mary’s mother always called her “fat” although she wore a size 8 for most of her life) and forged careers in the face of male domination and religious and social prejudice. We, too, juggled motherhood and work and hid deep insecurities behind quips, jokes and sometimes rebellious behavior.

Bolder than most of us, Mary dared to tell the truth, often the awful truth, about herself and those who created the golden age of musical theater. Oh, Mary—how I wish I had known you!

Gloria Levitas is a cultural anthropologist.

A Powerful Love Story With a Purpose



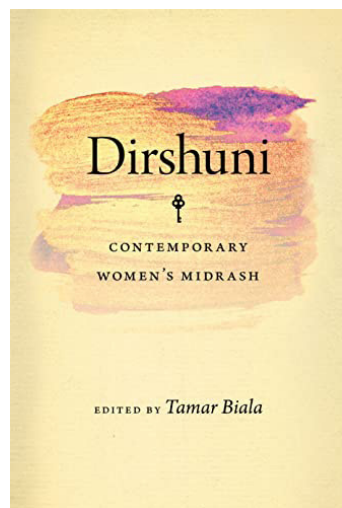
Anton has written a transformative novel that takes characters inspired by Chaim Potok and ages them into young adults in Brooklyn in the 1950s.

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STUDYING TALMUD WITH BERURIAH



Dirshuni: Contemporary Women's Midrash

Edited by Tamar Biala

Brandeis University Press, 304 pp., \$30.00

When the ancient rabbis had a question about the Torah—an important detail that seemed to be missing, an inconsistency between two passages, even a redundant word or verse—they would often solve the problem by writing a midrash, or story, filling in the missing piece or reconciling the seeming contradiction. One well-known example of such a midrash is the story of the young Abraham smashing the idols in his father's workshop, then claiming that the largest idol had done it, so as to trick his father into admitting the idols were merely powerless, human-made statues. People often assume this is part of the Bible story, but in fact it is the rabbis' creative answer to a question not answered in the text: Why did God choose Abraham to convert the heathens to monotheism?

Many of these invented stories reflect sensibilities that bother contemporary

women, and women have responded by composing a rich variety of feminist midrash in response. (I take pride in thinking I have been part of this effort, particularly in my two novels that seek to flesh out the life of the otherwise unnamed "Rav Hisda's daughter," exploring why the Talmud would describe her as having married *two* of her father's best students after being asked, "Which do you want?" and responding boldly, "Both of them.")

For an example of the conversation between ancient and modern values in midrash, consider the story of Lilith. Traditional rabbis wanted to reconcile the two different accounts of the creation of man and woman that appear in Genesis: Chapter 1 describes God's creation of man and woman at the same time, but Chapter 2 recounts how God makes man in the Garden of Eden and then creates woman as man's mate later.

The rabbis wondered what happened to that first woman—why was Adam alone again and in need of a mate? They contrived the legend of Lilith, created as Adam's equal, who left him when he insisted on dominating her. In this tradition, Lilith became a baby-killing demon, while Eve, created from Adam's body in the second story, was more willing to submit to him and thus more acceptable to the ancient rabbis. In 1972, though, feminist theologian Judith Plaskow wrote "The Coming of Lilith," which transforms the fearsome, demonic Lilith into a wise and brave woman. Instead of a rival to be feared, she becomes Eve's friend and empowerer.

Dirshuni: Contemporary Women's Midrash is the long-anticipated English edition of a collection of midrash composed by Israeli women. Three of the *Dirshuni* authors are rabbis; all are educators, many with advanced degrees. Using the classical forms developed by the ancient rabbis, they seek to fill what the book calls "the missing half of the sacred Jewish bookshelf." Like other feminist approaches to the Torah, *Dirshuni* asks: How might women have told their stories if they were central, rather than peripheral, characters in the tradition?

As with traditional midrash collections, this volume begins with Genesis and Ex-

odus and continues through Prophets and Writings. Here the similarity ends, as the following seven chapters are arranged by subject, including "Fertility and Parenthood," "Holidays," "Inequality in Jewish Law" and "The Rabbinic Court." Each is fashioned in the traditional form: first the text, then the midrash explaining or expanding on it, then commentary on its implications, legal or otherwise.

Some of the authors retell stories in a way that highlights women's pain in greater detail, creating sympathy and revising traditional judgments. Retired high school teacher Ruti Timor offers a heart-rending alternative explanation of how Lot's wife was transformed into a pillar of salt after she looked back at Sodom:

She was unaware of God's command not to look behind (Genesis 19:17). Lot said to his wife, quick...we'll run for our lives or be killed. She said, we'll save ourselves, and our [married] daughters will stay here? ...He walked sure-footed and she lagged behind. Her heart was heavy upon her, she looked back and saw her city, her family, and her property going up in flames. Tear after tear dripped from her eyes, and the tears grew fuller and fuller, stronger and stronger; until they became a pillar of salt. She stumbled and fell, and stirred no more. And Lot did not look back. Our Sages said, *She sinned and with salt was punished*. And I say, she sinned not, but was punished all the same.

Other retellings add new takes on long-standing debates, such as whether Sarah was complicit in Abraham's decision to obey the command to sacrifice their son Isaac. Tamar Biala, a feminist scholar and longtime Torah teacher who spearheaded both the Hebrew and English *Dirshuni* projects and edited this volume, imagines the voices of various female biblical figures reacting to the verse describing Abraham's early morning departure (Genesis 22:3):

And where was Sarah at the time?... Jezebel said: Sarah was of one mind with Abraham and she too sought not to withhold her only son, whom she loved. For Abraham and Sarah both worshipped the same God, and would convert

How might women have told their stories if they were central characters in the tradition?

people to Him; he the men, and she the women. Dinah said: Sarah was in the tent and didn't know of their departure, for ever since she had returned from the palace of Avimelekh, her husband had told her *All the princesses' treasure is inward* (Ps. 45:14). She would hide within the tent and no longer took notice of other people. The Great Woman of Shuman said: Sarah hurried after Abraham to stop him from slaughtering her son, but judges and officers at the gates prevented her.

Biala, in her own commentary, concludes by blaming God:

...for the Holy Blessed One had told Abraham *Whatever Sarah tells you, listen to her voice* (Gen. 21:12). But He had not said those words to her...Against a patriarchal reality in which women truly do have the power to intervene and avert catastrophe...yet they fail to act because [they] are unaware of their own strength.

Some midrashim in this collection go further and depict women studying together in the *Beit Midrashab shel Beruriah*—Beruriah's Study House, an imaginary yeshiva headed by Beruriah, the learned wife of Talmudic sage Rabbi Meir. This allows for narratives in which women are shown studying text and contributing legal rulings as in classical Talmudic passages. One of my favorites, by Rivkah Lubitch, a scholar and advocate for women in Israel's religious courts, is about *mamzerut*, the issues surrounding the treatment of *mamzerim*, or bastards—children born to parents in a forbidden union, who are then, under religious law, prohibited from marrying other Jews. In Lubitch's midrash, Moses ascends to heaven to write down the Torah as God dictates it, but becomes distressed:

He came to the verse *Do not uncover the nakedness of your father's sister; she is your father's*

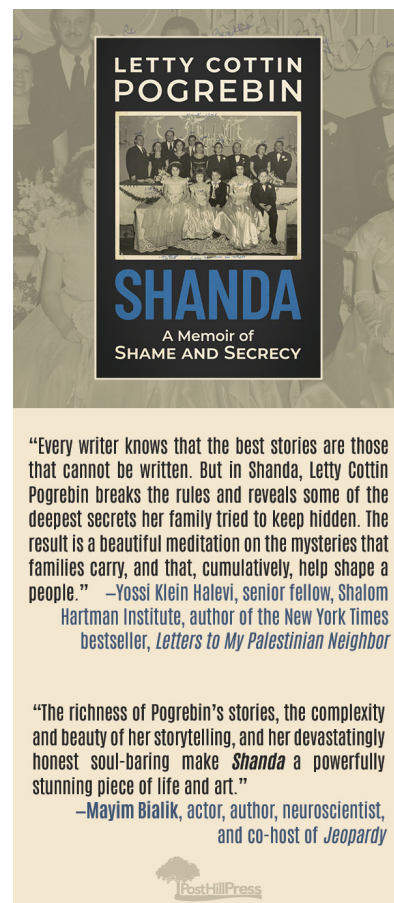
near kinswoman (Leviticus 18:12), and he said, isn't my mother my father's aunt? After all, Amram, my father, is the son of Kehat and grandson of Levi...And Yocheved, my mother, is the daughter of Levi...Moses felt faint. He came to the verse *No mamzer will enter the assembly of God, even to the tenth generation* (Deuteronomy 23:3)...He said: Could I and my siblings, Aaron and Miriam, be *mamzerim*? He grew weak. He wept and wept...

He [traveled forward in time] and sat in the *beit midrash* of Beruriah. He heard a woman ask: Why is the law of *mamzer* not practiced today? And they answered her: Because we do not receive testimony on a *mamzer*; because it has already been decided that the entire community are presumed to be *mamzerim*, and are permitted to one another. Moses's mind was eased.

In a commentary following this story, Lubitch shows how one might use this midrash as a basis for contending with the *mamzerut* problem in religious law today. She imagines the court adopting a legal principle based on the precedent that Jacob violated the prohibition against marrying two sisters, Leah and Rachel, during their lifetimes:

...the halakha maintains that the entire Jewish community is presumed to be bastards and thus all are permitted to marry one another...Throughout the generations, rabbis have made such general statements and legal presumptions...Similarly the entire Jewish community is presumed to have been rendered impure by contact with the dead, such that most of the purity and impurity laws no longer apply.

Not every midrash in *Dirshuni* is so encouraging. Jerusalem prosecutor Oshrat Shoham's trilogy of tales in the "Rape and Incest" chapter ("The Father's Scream: Concealing and Revealing," "The Mother's Scream: Uncovering and Expulsion" and "The Woman's Scream: Cover-Up and Tikkun"), where each victim is ignored, shamed or both, upset me so much I could barely skim them. Upon reflection, however, I think they were written to make readers outraged and empathetic, to force chang-



es in attitude and to demand justice. By contrast, two contributions to the chapter on post-Holocaust theology are more comforting, drawing on texts about Noah's dove and raven and on passages from the Song of Songs to emphasize how important it is for humanity to feel God's presence, especially in a difficult, frightening and painful period. The human tendency is to forget God and ignore His presence when all is well; the closeness between God and humanity depends on both working to ensure that the bond endures.

These are merely a taste of the formidable resources in *Dirshuni*. While scholars will relish the book's nuances, it is the less experienced Torah student who will learn most from this wealth of new insights into the tradition.

Maggie Anton is an author of historical fiction, including the trilogy *Rashi's Daughters* and *The Choice: A Novel of Love, Faith and the Talmud*.

moment cartoon

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"Shaloha!"

—Jonathan Schreiber, Los Angeles, CA

"Hey, the seventh day is over when I say it's over."

—Jim Gorman, Thousand Oaks, CA

"I'll be back for the jet ski."

—Dale Stout, Colorado Springs, CO

(SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2022)



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"They're very nice, but my people want a commitment carved in stone."

—Stephen Nadler, Princeton, NJ

(SUMMER 2022)



CHUCKLE AT THE WINNING CAPTION!

spice box

FEATURED BOX



A 19th century spice box from Austria-Hungary. It is a tower-shaped box with both finial and flag missing. There is a hinged door where a wooden box fits inside.



It's 5 o'clock
somewhere holy

Submitted by
Merritt and Sue Weisinger, Reno, NV

"What am I," asks Hamm,
"Chopped liver?"

Submitted by
Anonymous

**Jewish Federation
honors Bacon**



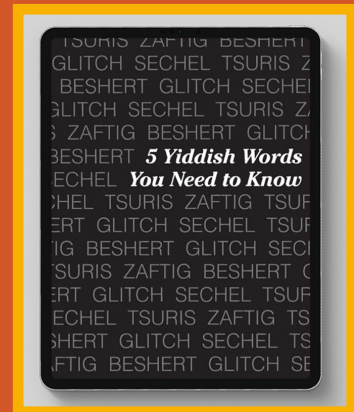
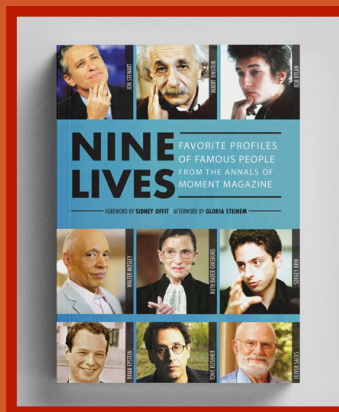
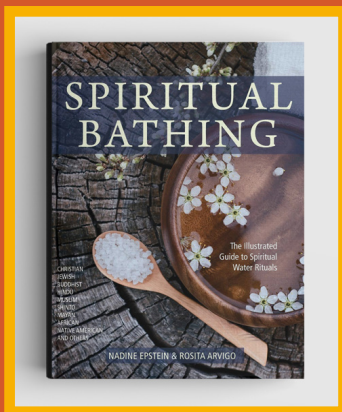
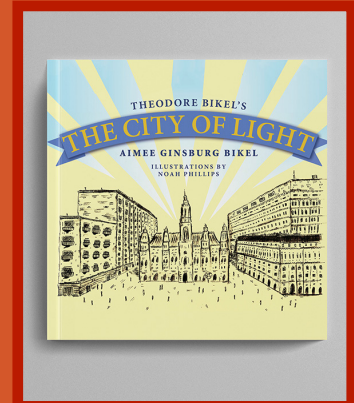
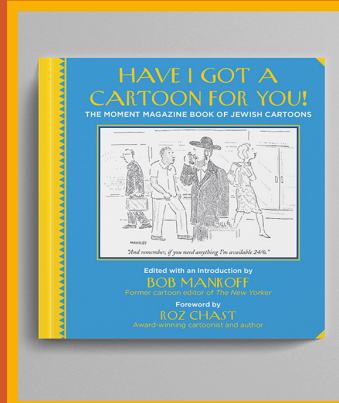
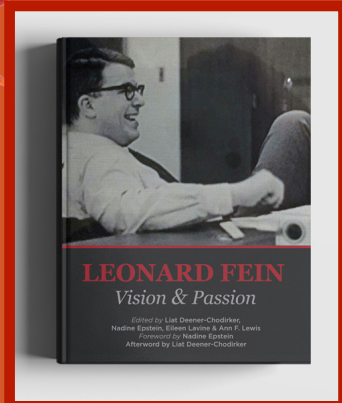
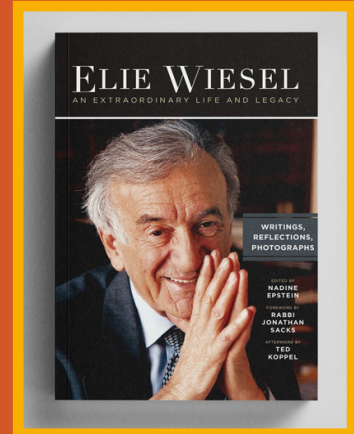
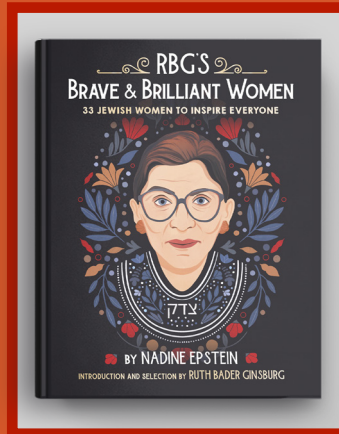
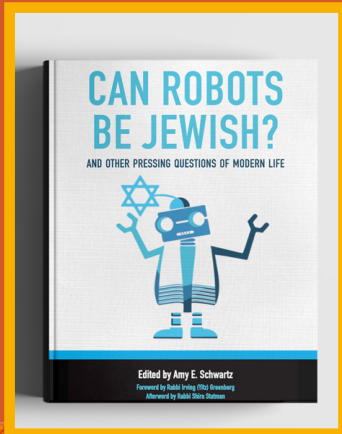
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Submitted by
Debbie, Brisbane, Australia

Brisbane
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