

contact



NO SPORT LEFT BEHIND: THE AMERICAN FAN LIVING IN ISRAEL

by ELLI WOHLGELERNTER

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FOR JEWISH LIFE

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CONTACT is produced and distributed by The Steinhardt Foundation for Jewish Life, 729 Seventh Avenue, 9th floor, New York, NY 10019.

All issues of Contact are available for download at www.steinhardtfoundation.org/journal.html

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Phone: (212) 279-2288**Fax:** (212) 279-1155**Email:** info@steinhardtfoundation.org**Website:** www.steinhardtfoundation.org

For media inquiries about The Steinhardt Foundation for Jewish Life, please contact Dan Gerstein at dan@dangerstein.com.



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The Steinhardt Foundation for Jewish Life is dedicated to strengthening and transforming American Jewish Life to ensure a flourishing, sustainable community in a fully integrated free society. We seek to revitalize Jewish identity through educational and cultural initiatives that are designed to reach out to all Jews, with an emphasis on those who are on the margins of Jewish life, as well as to advocate for and support Hebrew and Jewish literacy among the general population.

Cover photograph by Sarah Levi. Unless otherwise indicated, all photographs in this issue are courtesy of contributors, JSOnline, and Reuters.

The Autumn issue of CONTACT visits people across the world preserving memory, reinvigorating tradition, and opening doors to more vibrant connections to Jewish life. For our lead article, Elli Wohlgernter explores the fluid interplay of identities that plays out in sports fandom among Americans living in Israel.

Unable to let go of one of the more palpable reminders of home, they follow familiar teams from their pasts and adjust their lives to maintain connections with an invaluable part of their backgrounds.

The issue then delves into the spiritual and ritualistic realms, with Shira Dicker covering the growing Jewish chaplaincy movement. Incorporating healing and embracing struggle, the movement infuses Judaism with a renewed focus on compassion, personal growth, and the human need for relationship – and it's drawing increasing numbers of Jews to its ranks. Our Profiles Section visits three Jewish women making accessibility the watchword of the Jewish community, whether it's opening the doors of communal life in Berlin, expanding the opportunities for those with intellectual cognitive-development disabilities, or making Jewish texts and tradition more accessible to children, adults, and anybody in between with access to a screen. CONTACT then features an excerpt from a new biography of Gold Meir, chronicling her American activism prior to her arrival in Israel. Finally, we embark on a trans-Atlantic journey of memory and identity via the striking multimedia art of Yona Verwer. Taken together, the features in this issue reveal a community forging new paths of Jewish meaning while deepening its connections to personal and collective history.

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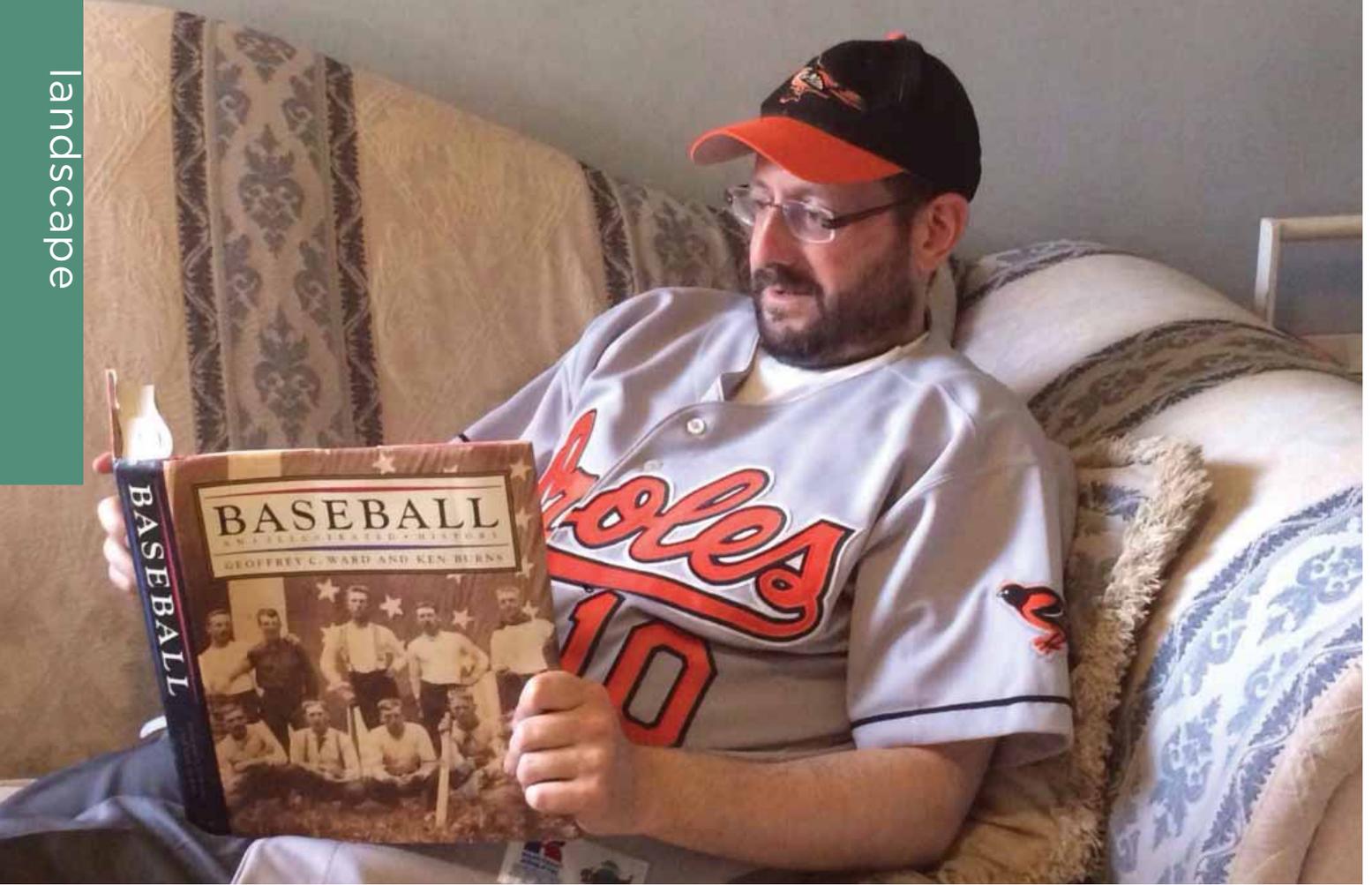
JERUSALEM

When American sports fans move to Israel, they often take their love of sports along for the ride. Even after becoming Israeli — fully acculturated and fully embracing the country's interests, language, politics, and culture — there is one piece they can't let go of: the crazy way they love American sports.

Elli Wohlgelernter is Night Editor at *The Jerusalem Post*. He made aliyah in 1991 and still misses his Sundays off to be able to watch sports all day, but remains a devoted fan of the Yankees and Cubs.

These former Americans have lived here for 20 or 30 years, have raised their children as Israelis, and have left behind their American lives — except they still passionately follow their Yankees, their Bulls, their Red Wings, or their Dolphins.

American immigrant sports fans face a specific problem in Israel: there is no professional league for three of the four major U.S. sports — baseball, football, and hockey. So, while the immigrant from England can relate to Israeli soccer while still following Manchester United, what team can a sports-mad American follow? Moreover, does



Dov Lipman, courtesy of subject

“We can connect to everything Israeli and bring something from where we came, without weakening our identity. Just the opposite: it can enhance our identity, and help us feel more secure and at ease with both parts...”

their infatuated devotion to the Cubs or Cowboys interfere with becoming 100 percent acculturated?

No, it doesn't, says Susie Keinon, who does not follow Israeli sports teams but is a loyal fan of her hometown Chicago White Sox.

“We can still hold on to our Israeliness, and it may even enhance our Israeliness,” says Keinon, a psychotherapist who has been living in Israel for 31 years. “We can connect to everything Israeli and bring something from where we came, without weakening our identity. Just the opposite: it can enhance our identity, and help us feel more secure and at ease with both parts — by outwardly saying ‘there is room for both.’”

Keinon says her passion helps her bond with other Americans in Israel. “A few people in our neighborhood understand my interest, and we stop to talk about it at the *makolet* (local grocery store), or at *shul*, or on the street,” she says.

Her husband, Herb, a columnist at *The Jerusalem Post*, says being an American sports fan is a topic of conversation, but he would not go so far as saying it helps him bond with other Americans. “Living here is bond enough,” he says.

One side benefit of having remained a fan of U.S. sports is that it helps stay connected with family back home. Says Herb, “I always speak about sports with my father and brother-in-law.”

What's difficult for the Keinons and other American sports fans is staying plugged in live — most baseball games begin at 2 A.M. in Israel, though NFL kickoffs on Sunday are at 8 P.M. and 11 P.M.

“Sleep has always been more important than sports,” says Susie. “During football season, I sometimes stay up a couple of hours later than usual to watch a good game. During baseball season, I generally settle for highlights or [for] watching a game the next day, but not live.”

Unlike in the pre-cable or pre-Internet days, when sports news from North America was difficult to access and real-time scores or play-by-play accounts were virtually unavailable, today's sports apps make it easy to stay connected. Herb, a former season ticket holder to the Denver Broncos, watches every Broncos game via the NFL's Game Pass app, which brings him the weekly games on demand.

“I do follow the football season from start to finish,” he says. Keinon watches each week's Broncos game right after morning prayers on Monday morning — without knowing the score. When his sports buddies call, he answers with “Hi, don't tell me who won.”

What has been difficult for American-born sports fans is to pass on a love of American sports to the next generation of children raised, if not born, Israeli. “My boys will amuse me by watching a few plays every now and then,” says Herb. “They do watch the Super Bowl

with me though — but that's because of the food spread."

"Growing up here is different than there," says Rabbi Dov Lipman, a native of Silver Spring, Maryland, where sports loyalties in those days stretched from Washington to Baltimore, encompassing the Redskins, Orioles, and Bullets. "There, it was every Sunday you go to school in the morning, come home, and sit from 12:30 'til seven watching football. Night times for baseball. So my son, Shlomo, didn't grow up with that culture of watching. He grew up watching highlights."

And that, says Lipman, is fine.

"I did not want him to be, 'Oh, I have to get up at 2 in the morning to watch the game.' He's a fan, he likes it, but he learns to live on the highlights and watching it that way."

But more than sharing with Shlomo his love of baseball was the *naches* Lipman experienced watching his son pitch for the Israeli under-21 national team. The immigrant had arrived.

Loving sports may be universal. Most people have feelings about their home or national teams and athletes and the outcomes of the games they play. But Americans don't seem able to get into Israeli sports. One reason is their unfamiliarity with soccer, Israel's prime sport. Americans didn't grow up with it, it's not second-nature, and many don't know the rules.

They are also unfamiliar with how sports leagues are played in the rest of the world, including Israel. Teams participate in multiple leagues or competitions simultaneously, such as the domestic league, a state cup tournament, and a European competition.

For religious Jews, there's the issue of games being played on Shabbat. Baseball is an everyday sport, so missing a night game on Friday or a day game on Saturday is not crucial to following a sport in which teams play 162 games a season. The NFL for the most part plays on Sundays, so that is easy to follow. In Israel, most soccer games are scheduled for Shabbat, so religious fans cannot follow the games in real time.

There are also the different rhythms of the seasons to which immigrants are unaccustomed: soccer and basketball schedules here overlap almost completely, while football and baseball cross only two months of the year.

Then there's politics: rivalries in Israel are shaded with biases remaining from the days when clubs formed in pre-state Palestine were offshoots of political movements. Sports teams named Beitar were once closely affiliated with nationalist right-wing Herut/Likud; Hapoel with Socialist left-wing Mapai/Labor. Hapoel wears red, Beitar yellow.

While identification with party has narrowed, the teams are still marked, at least to some extent, by their original cultural, political, social, and ethnic ideologies. Subsequently, rooting sentiments are different from what fans are used to in America, where loyalty is based by and large on geography — most sports fans in Pittsburgh or Cleveland like their town's team.

Some immigrants are also turned off by the nature of the sports experience in Israel. The comportment at stadiums is more akin to the rowdy, male-centric atmosphere of European sports than the more family-oriented atmosphere in North America.

"Fan behavior plays a role," says Benjamin Glatt, a native of Toronto, who nevertheless found his devotion across the Detroit River following the Motor City's Red Wings and Tigers. "There has been behavior that I do not want my children to witness," Glatt says. "Looking back at my North American experiences, which are plentiful, I am in no way willing to take children or myself to these types of venues."

Susie Keinon concurs. "I wish there was better sportsmanlike conduct, specifically after a 'bad' call, or losing a game," she says.

As for fans of professional basketball, a sport played in Israel and familiar to the American-born sports enthusiast, it's not the same. From a sporting perspective, and with all due respect, the brand of game displayed here is not NBA-caliber basketball. It's what an Israeli might call *zoog bet* — second-level quality (though certainly on a given night a top tier Israeli team could beat an NBA team, and has).

All sports offer fans an escape, a pleasant diversion, and that is no different for American sports fans living in Israel. But for immigrants specifically, that diversion can trigger emotions that evoke a blissful time in another country. It's a place they don't mind revisiting.

"When I connect to my sports,

I connect to the comfort and to the innocence of a great childhood that I had," says Lipman, a Yesh Atid MK in the previous Knesset. "It's not America, it's just sports, and it's something that brings me back there, to that innocent time, in the most beautiful ways. It's to just enjoy — simply connecting to something fun and entertaining." Moreover, says Lipman, "you grow up in the world of America, and you move to Israel — it's difficult to completely separate yourself from everything you had growing up, to say to yourself, 'I'm in a whole new life right now.'"

Some immigrants go completely the other way — the pride they feel being Israeli encompasses sports as much as anything else. "What sense does it make to get involved in every other aspect of Israeli life except sports, when I am an avid sports fan," says Brian Freeman, a journalist, whose credentials as a passionate sports fan rooting for his native Cincinnati's Big Red Machine are indisputable.

"Although I will never lose my connection to American sports, my desire for Israeli sports teams and individuals to succeed is much stronger," Freeman says. "I don't understand an American living here who is more devoted to his college team, where he attended for three or four years, but can't, after three or four decades in Israel, build up a greater loyalty to whichever Israeli sports teams, or individuals, or national achievements strike his fancy. In individual sports — tennis, judo, sailing, Olympic medals — I always want an Israeli to beat out an American, or anyone else. Otherwise, what's the point of being here?"

The problem, says Freeman, is not that someone follows sports from the old country, but that it's done to the exclusion of Israel. "Sports is a part of the fabric of Israeli society," he says. "The triumphs and heartbreaks of Israeli sports teams, or individuals in the Olympics, are just as strong as they are in the U.S., with its own history of failure, heartache, and thrill of victory that helps define Israeli culture. Anyone already following sports who doesn't connect to Israeli sports is missing out on an important element of Israeli culture and cultural references — 'We are on the map!' being the most blatant, but by no means only example," he said, referencing Tal Brody's famous quip after his Maccabi Tel Aviv team won the 1977



Benjamin Glatt

All sports offer fans an escape, a pleasant diversion, and that is no different for American sports fans living in Israel. But for immigrants specifically, that diversion can trigger emotions that evoke a blissful time in another country. It's a place they don't mind revisiting.

European Cup Basketball Championship.

Most Israelis become interested fans and root with national pride when an Israeli team competes internationally. The enthusiasm across the country for Maccabi Tel Aviv, an individual club, not an Israeli national team, is as momentous as if it is a national team when it's playing well in a European tournament. "I remember when Maccabi Tel Aviv won its first European basketball championship after I made *aliyah* in '96," says Ron Dermer, a devoted fan of his hometown Miami Dolphins, referring to the Maccabi club facing Panathinaikos in the 2001 final. "It was a big deal."

For American immigrants like Dermer, who has read the sports pages religiously every day since the age of eight, seeing newspapers put a sports story on page one — because the country is going gaga over an Israeli team — can be a welcome-to-Israel moment. "It was one of those

moments when I felt most connected to Israel, when we had that kind of national celebration when Maccabi Tel Aviv won," says Dermer, Israel's ambassador to Washington. "And I'm a Jerusalemite, which probably means I wasn't fully Israeli, because if you're fully Israeli, no person who lives in Jerusalem would get excited about Maccabi Tel Aviv winning anything. But I felt deeply connected to the whole country."

While Dermer says it's exciting to root for Israel while watching the Olympics, he nevertheless retains an ongoing affection for his Dolphins and Heat, because that's what he knows. "It's like saying that you grew up loving a certain kind of music, and then all of a sudden you move to a new country and you forget about the music that you like," he says. "It's the same thing with sports."

Freeman says it's only natural for a Jew living in Israel to root for a Maccabi

Tel Aviv team playing in the Euroleague, because the pride of being Israeli applies to sports as well. "Basketball is a sport we grew up with in the States, but here it's 'our guys' wearing a uniform with the Star of David, going against the European giants," he says. "And the same with the Israeli national team in basketball or soccer or any other sport."

Freeman says that just as Israelis take pride in Israeli achievements in other fields such as drip irrigation, medical research, Iron Dome and others, "there is no reason those feelings of 'us' doing it should not apply to sports as well. Do you think that Abraham, when he made *aliyah*, kept allegiance to the Ur Idol Worshipers, and passed on his loyalty to his children? Or did he realize that *Lech Lecha* [God's admonition to travel to Canaan] meant it was time to change his devotion to the Moriah Mountaineers and Shilo City Slickers?" ■

THE NEW AMERICAN JEWISH CHAPLAINCY BOOM

by SHIRA DICKER

Practitioners are re-inventing the role of spiritual counselor at a moment when the American family is fractured, long-standing institutions are crumbling, the environment is imperiled, racism and hatred are rampant, the nation is divided, and life often feels broken beyond repair.

On a sun-drenched Thursday on the penultimate day of June, pedestrians walking past Manhattan's venerable Jewish Theological Seminary could not possibly guess that within the fortress-like façade a multi-ethnic, multi-faith, multi-generational group — over 100 strong — was banging on djembes, shaking tambourines and homemade maracas, calling out Seneca Indian chants, touching, leaping, dancing, and connecting in ways that recall workshops at places such as the Omega Institute or Kripalu rather than the uber-intellectual flagship institution of Conservative Judaism in America.

The event was “The Art of Healing,” a daylong workshop sponsored by JTS's Center for Pastoral Education in cooperation with UJA-Federation of New York, New York Presbyterian Hospital, and Brooklyn Presbyterian Hospital. Intended for those currently working as chaplains as well as those training for or considering the field, it drew ordained clergy and laypeople alike from diverse allied fields. This edgy, standing-room-only event is only one recent indication of a notable surge of interest in the chaplaincy as well as a discernible shift in the parameters of the field, which has flowered far beyond its traditional roots.

Shira Dicker is a New York-based writer, performer, and consultant.

“People today are looking for responsive religious leadership, leadership attuned to the struggles and challenges of life, big and small,” explains Rabbi Mychal Springer, Director of the Center for Pastoral Education at JTS, which opened in 2009. Springer sees her program as responding to a need within the American Jewish community for a new paradigm of spiritual care. Offered as a certificate program in tandem with other accreditation agencies, it “offers clergy and clergy-in-training in-depth supervision which enables them to journey deeply with Jews and people of all faiths, meeting them in their greatest vulnerability. This is what our moment calls for.”

Within the rabbinate and cantorate, the bar has been reset over the past decade to mandate pastoral counseling at leading seminaries. But well beyond the walls of these institutions, Jewish professionals are flocking to a new field called Spiritual Direction, which forms a rubric for the chaplaincy. This burgeoning interest is being tracked by Neshama: Association of Jewish Chaplains (NAJC), the professional organization of Jewish chaplains worldwide and its sole accreditation association. They estimate that there are currently 1200 working Jewish chaplains, though a smaller number are fully accredited.

Rabbi Rafael Goldstein, Executive Director of NAJC, likes to speak of the

work of the chaplain as “soul-touching.” As a chaplain you are “accompanying people through the worst days of their lives,” he says. “We are specialists in how to work with people in times of physical and spiritual crisis.”

Goldstein asserts that there is a quantifiable increase both in rabbis and cantors who are seeking to professionalize their chaplaincy by gaining Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) training as well as Jewish laypeople entering the chaplaincy. CPE units are the gold standard of chaplaincy education, now required by many institutions such as hospitals.

The practitioners of the New Jewish Chaplaincy are expanding the boundaries of their profession to include birthing rooms and board rooms, homeless shelters and animal shelters. They are trained to deal with sexual abuse, substance abuse, gender confusion, and body dysmorphia. They are re-inventing the role of spiritual counselor at a moment when the American family is fractured, long-standing institutions are crumbling, the environment is imperiled, racism and hatred are rampant, the nation is divided, and life often feels broken beyond repair.

The opening of JTS's pastoral counseling program — and The Chaplaincy School at Los Angeles's Academy for Jewish Religion (AJRCA) in 2003 — is a significant milestone along the road to

the professionalization and proliferation of the chaplaincy. Just this past summer, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in New York inaugurated Bekhol Levavkha: A Training Program for Jewish Spiritual Directors. Other New York-based seminaries have followed suit. Yeshivat Chovevei Torah mandates pastoral counseling for its rabbinical students for all four years of their study; Yeshivat Maharat (a liberal Orthodox rabbinical seminary for women) offers similar training; and recently, a new graduate program in pastoral counseling was created at Yeshiva University through a joint venture of the Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary (RIETS), its rabbinical school, and YU's

relationship with holiness has exploded" since women became ordained rabbis. Refocusing the discourse within the synagogue has had a snowball effect, she says, impacting all aspects of contemporary Jewish life.

"At first the question was: Can we have women on the *bima* [synagogue podium]? Then, if women are on the *bima*, should we start ordaining them? And then if we are ordaining them, we need to look at pronouns in our liturgy. Then we realized that neither of those really described God; we realize what He and She to describe God represented was a God created in our image rather than the other way around. And then we began to redefine God and become real God wrestlers. I think the chaplaincy and spiritual direction are ways

a radical concept in our self-help society.

The ability to address the individual and the "human need for relationship" lies at the heart of the New American Jewish Chaplaincy boom, said Rabbi Joseph Potasnik, Executive Vice President of the New York Board of Rabbis and a chaplain of the New York City Fire Department since 1999.

Potasnik conducted prison visits in Albany this past summer. He reflected upon his encounters with inmates: "The visit of a chaplain is critical because the experience of an inmate is so isolated; they welcome the moment of a face-to-face encounter. That's what it's about; that's what people are craving."

Chaplains can help those who feel detached from life, observes Potasnik. "People are seeking to personalize their environment, so much is impersonal. We offer strength and support; the uptick in chaplaincy is a response to the direction of our culture."

Sixteen years after the first large-scale terrorist attack on United States soil and less than one year into the most tumultuous American presidency in memory, some catalysts for the New American Jewish Chaplaincy boom are easy to identify. Brener quotes the rabbinic teaching about the world being a narrow bridge (*gesher tzar*). That perception of life as tenuous feels especially apt as of late, she says.

"The fact that people have heightened concern about the future and (unstable) political realities creates a lot of anxiety," notes NAJCs Goldstein. Further, these deep-seated anxieties often can't be addressed exclusively by social workers and psychologists. "It is a pretty classic Jewish response but in times of crisis, we turn to God, to a higher power. We turn not to fix a difficult situation but to find the strength to get through it. In a world where we are feeling that our security has been threatened, we need our chaplains and faith leaders even more."

While the traditional rabbinical role has been to provide answers to life's perplexing queries and quandaries, the American Jewish chaplain of today — likely not an ordained rabbi or cantor — engages the seeker in further inquiry. "We will ask: 'What is the question for which your life is the answer?'" Brener explains, quoting Rabbi Jonathan Omer-Man. It's a query that distills the essence of a new and profound spiritual revolution. ■



We will ask: 'What is the question for which your life is the answer?'

Ferkauf Graduate School of Psychology.

The New American Jewish Chaplaincy boom coexists with other spiritual trends where practices such as yoga, meditation, or mindfulness are being integrated into synagogue and communal life.

This move signifies a change in the zeitgeist, illuminating an evolving concept of God in an increasingly perilous world, explains Rabbi Anne Brener, a professor of ritual and spiritual development at The Chaplaincy School of AJRCA and the author of *Mourning and Mitzvah* (Jewish Lights, 2001), a classic Jewish bereavement guide. She attributes part of this shift to the admission of women to the rabbinate, which began in 1972.

Brener observes that "the focus on compassion and speaking about our rela-

of struggling with that," she said.

If Sigmund Freud is the father of modern psychology, then Viktor Frankl, founder of logotherapy and author of *Man's Search for Meaning*, is the granddaddy of this movement. Many chaplaincy educators — including Brener — quote liberally from his existential philosophy, which emerged from his experiences as a survivor of a concentration camp.

The New American Jewish Chaplaincy promotes the ability to incorporate struggle, adversity, and even tragedy into one's personal growth. "I had cancer a few years ago and I learned a lot," reveals Brener. "When cancer survivors say 'cancer didn't slow me down,' I say why not?" The wisdom of spiritual direction lies beyond our penchant for "fixing" things, she says,

THREE PROFILES

In this issue we visit three individuals working to reduce barriers in the Jewish community to help strengthen, enhance and revitalize the Jewish experience for all.

by LIAM HOARE

NINA PERETZ Building Bridges in Berlin



“Being a Jew means being part of a community that shares a purpose and shares a belief. It is about more than simply a framework that is keeping us together. It is about shaping and maintaining a community and creating a home.”

Liam Hoare is a contributor to *Moment* and writes frequently for *The Forward*, *Tablet*, and *Slate*. He is based in the United Kingdom and is a graduate of University College London's School of Slavonic and East European Studies.

In the southern central Berlin districts of Kreuzberg and Neukölln, nations, languages, and cultures brush up against one other. For generations, these neighborhoods have housed migrant communities, particularly Turkish, Arab, and Kurd. Today, however, Kreuzberg and Neukölln's low rents and counter-cultural image have made them attractive to English-speaking newcomers. Writing in *The Awl*, Rebecca Schuman pointedly termed this part of Berlin “ExpatVania,” home to countless British and American “under-the-table tour guides, podcasters, conceptual artists.”

Amid this multicultural transformation, by a bend in the Landwehr Canal, stands Fraenkelufer Synagogue — or rather, what remains of it. The main structure, once decorated with medieval and baroque adornments, was set ablaze on Kristallnacht in November 1938, prior to its destruction by aerial bombardment in 1944. What was originally the synagogue for young people adjacent to the main hall survived, though, and was re-consecrated by Holocaust survivors after the war. In recent years, the synagogue has experienced something of a revival, due to the work of a small but enterprising band of volunteers with a vision for Fraenkelufer's future.

Nina Peretz, Chairperson of the Friends of Fraenkelufer, first started attending services at the Kreuzberg synagogue with her Israeli husband, Dekel, prior to her conversion to Judaism in 2011. That conversion was a most natural thing, as Peretz described it to me, coming out of her experiences of being with Dekel's family, becoming intrigued by Jewish culture and religion, and learning Hebrew to the point of fluency. Together, they “created a shared Judaism,” though as a Jew-by-choice she thinks she “sometimes has a more critical approach” to things. “I

ask more questions. Nothing is taken for granted.”

Peretz, who moved to Berlin from southern Germany when she was 21 to continue her studies in languages and business administration, lived with her husband in the vicinity of Fraenkelufer and likely wouldn't have gone there were it not for its convenience. On first look, the synagogue wasn't very welcoming, and the community's size was rather diminished. Over successive visits, however, “we realized how wonderful this synagogue was and that here was an opportunity to create a community” given its catchment area. Peretz said she began to feel some sense of responsibility for the synagogue's future, for without new members, there “was a certain threat that the synagogue might not exist anymore.”

This wish to revive a community derives, in part, from Peretz's conception of what it means to be a Jew in Berlin today. While it was and is important to have a religious context to her life, Peretz also believes “being a Jew means being part of a community that shares a purpose and shares a belief. It is about more than simply a framework that is keeping us together. It is about shaping and maintaining a community and creating a home.” That Fraenkelufer is an all-volunteer community adds to this, for “having a community based on volunteers means you are asking people to do something instead of demanding something of them. People are active because they really want to do it.”

Though it receives little official support, today Fraenkelufer is one of the most active and best known synagogues in Berlin. The revived Fraenkelufer is Orthodox but balances tradition with openness. Men and women sit separately during services but without the obstruction

of a *mechitza*; the rabbi and chazan are male but roles are also available to women to participate in religious life. At once, it is important to Peretz that the synagogue is open to everyone, including mixed Jewish and non-Jewish couples, non-religious Jews, and the LGBTQ Jewish community in Berlin.

“Living together in the same neighborhood as Muslims and Arabs is challenging and interesting,” Peretz said of Fraenkelufer's unique location. Ever since the summer of 2015, when Germany took in hundreds of thousands of refugees from the Middle East and North Africa, Fraenkelufer has attempted to counter the prevailing narrative within Berlin's Jewish community that by closing the gates, you can isolate and protect yourself at a time of risk. On the contrary, Peretz believes it is important to go into refugee shelters “and show them and the world that Jews are just like any other people who live here, that Jews are part of German society. I believe this was the right way to act. We have to make the best of this situation. It is about not being afraid.”

Having gained recognition from the German state as a nonprofit organization in 2015, Fraenkelufer celebrated its centenary in 2016 while continuing to grow and change with its congregants, establishing more programming for families as its young couples have their first children. Its next big project, aside from making plans for the holidays, is to raise \$10,000 in order to keep and preserve an exhibition of photographs taken by Robert Capa at Fraenkelufer Synagogue in September 1945 of the very first Rosh Hashanah service in Berlin after the Second World War.

“During the 1980s and 1990s, there was a silence” at Fraenkelufer, Peretz said. Now she feels “as if we have restarted a community.” ■

SHOSHANA BLOOM

A Focus on Accessibility



Shoshana Bloom has worked in the British Jewish community since she graduated from the University of Birmingham in 2003, at organizations ranging from the United Jewish Israel Appeal to Britain's Holocaust Centre. Over time, Bloom increasingly became aware of a part of the community that was, either intentionally or unintentionally, marginalized or excluded from the mainstream of Jewish life: those with intellectual cognitive-development disabilities. Today, Bloom works to correct that injustice.

"A lot of organizations may think they are accessible because they understand that to mean physically accessible: whether people can get into the building or use the bathroom," Bloom explained to me. "But a lot of the time, those organizations aren't thinking educationally: about making their materials and resources accessible, their communication methods, the language of their marketing. These things are not written in a way that is accessible for people with intellectual disabilities."

"We need to also be looking at content," Bloom said, and indeed, content was the main issue when Bloom reviewed practices at Limmud, one of Britain's major events dedicated to Jewish learning and culture. Bloom has twice chaired Limmud, and in 2011, "one of my priorities was: How can we make Limmud more accessible? We were looking at the program and how to present

it in a different way, to encourage presenters to be more accessible, and to increase opportunities for volunteering" for people with intellectual disabilities.

With this in mind, Bloom founded and chairs Limmud LAm to open the Limmud experience to people with intellectual disabilities. The aim of Limmud LAm was not to create a kind of segregation. Visitors to Limmud in 2011 likely wouldn't have noticed any differences at the conference, save perhaps for greater visibility of people with intellectual disabilities. Rather, in making a series of discreet changes to the program, such as including more introductory sessions or sessions that might involve crafts or music, the idea simply was to make the entire conference more inclusive and pluralistic, creating further opportunities for learning in a variety of styles.

All of this has led up to her newest endeavor: LivLuv. From the Hebrew word "to blossom," LivLuv aims to empower Jewish people with intellectual disabilities to take control of their Jewish identity. While LivLuv is still in an embryonic stage at the moment in terms of getting its organization set up, Bloom explained that LivLuv will bring together different components of her work under one banner.

With LivLuv, Bloom will "write and create accessible resources on different aspects of Jewish life" so people are "able to find out a little more and make informed decisions about what they want to do or go on to access across the Jewish spectrum." In this respect, she advocates for no particular strand of or approach to Judaism, since the ethos of LivLuv is to empower the

individual, acting as a gateway to a scope of information, in a variety of accessible formats.

Another critical part of LivLuv's work, Bloom explained, will be leadership development, "creating leaders within these communities to become change makers." Therefore, instead of Bloom being the advocate for people with intellectual disabilities, perpetuating the problem of disabled persons being voiceless, she will defer to being their ally. "Once people are aware of the issue, [they] are very interested in making their communities more accessible and inclusive, to ensure there are no walls." This cuts across the religious spectrum — inclusiveness in this sense is not associated with one particular movement. Generally, there is a recognition that "we need to change in order to become a more fair, inclusive, and equal community."

"Essentially, LivLuv is about enabling and empowering people to take control and ownership of their own Jewish identity," Bloom said, "to be who they want to be and discover how they want to express that."

For Bloom, her work with Jews with intellectual disabilities is not a personal matter. "People often assume that I have a family member" with an intellectual disability, she said, "but this is not the case." Neither does Bloom frame this as a *chesed* (kindness) project or a *mitzvah* (good deed), for inclusion "is not something we should do because 'it's a nice thing,'" she said. Rather, her involvement "comes from becoming aware of equal rights and human rights issues. Anyone should have the option of celebrating their Jewish identity." ■

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SARAH LEFTON

Making Quality Time Online



When Sarah Lefton was growing up in Columbia, South Carolina, she yearned for the sort of ancient yet modern, educational yet creative Jewish content she would later create with BimBam.

“I grew up in a very small Jewish community in the south, a one-synagogue town in the Bible Belt. I had the best Jewish education on offer. I went to Hebrew school on Wednesdays and Saturdays, I had my *Bat Mitzvah* and my confirmation in the Reform movement, I went to summer camp,” she explained to me. But after college, Lefton

found herself living in New York City and discovered, after falling in with a crowd of people who had a very different sort of childhood from hers — informed by Jewish day schools and gap years in Israel — that she was essentially, in her own words, “functionally illiterate.”

Thus in her early twenties, Lefton took to devouring all the Jewish information she could get her hands on, including online material in the early days of

the internet. At the same time, she was beginning her career in education and digital media at NYU’s Interactive Telecommunications Program, going on to produce projects for *The New York Times* on the Web, *The Village Voice*, Princess Cruises and several children’s toy brands.

These two strands of Lefton’s life would meet, eleven years ago now, with the creation of BimBam (originally called G-dcast). What began as a labor of love snow-

balled over the years to the point where BimBam is now an established nonprofit media studio that creates and distributes fun, accessible, and smart digital media about Judaism for kids, adults, and families who want to spend quality time online. Lefton sees BimBam’s role as expanding the conversation about Judaism — a kind of onramp for the Judaically curious, taking people from a place of zero or minimal knowledge to wherever they need to go.

Indeed, in the beginning, creating the content for BimBam formed part of Lefton’s education, too. She was teaching herself as much as she was instructing others. “I’m actually very transparent about the fact that I think everyone should have the experience I had, to be able to animate the *parshah* week by week. I couldn’t write it so I reached out to rabbis and educators whom I respected and found them all amazingly interested in collaborating on the project. I worked on the sound and visual production. It was an incredible education.”

BimBam is based in Oakland, California, where Lefton now resides. She has been involved in countless other initiatives in California. After leaving the world of corporate tech, she joined northern California’s independent Jewish summer camp, Camp Tawonga, as its marketing director for four years. She has also been the president of San Francisco’s pluralist Mission Minyan, a board member of the San Francisco JCC, and a founder of the entrepreneurial project Jewish Fashion Conspiracy.

But it is BimBam that consumes Lefton today. Over time, the project has found its audience, in part because Lefton was able to utilize her experience in

telecommunications but also because it was producing content that, in her gut, she knew to be at once exciting and valuable. One noteworthy example is Shaboom!, an animated series centered around two magical “sparks,” Gabi and Rafael, who live in a playhouse in the clouds. As these characters learn about fixing the world, each short episode imparts a certain lesson or value such as gratitude and altruism along with Jewish knowledge like Hebrew words and songs.

“If we could turn the screen off and do something else, we would,” Lefton told me, when I asked whether encouraging children to have even more screen time was the best thing for them. Her proposition is that if kids are going to be in front of a screen for an average of an hour and fifty minutes a day, why not try and make twenty minutes of that time meaningful and educational? YouTube contains a lot of garbage, Lefton said, but it can also be an amazing forum for imparting knowledge, be it about arts and crafts, cookery, or Judaism.

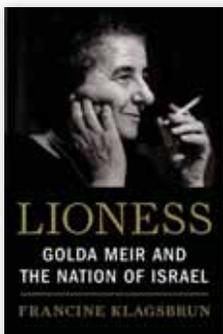
As BimBam grows and evolves, Lefton and her team continue to play with form and content, from a follow-along video where the end result will be a homemade mezuzah constructed from paper to the holiday of Sukkot as explained with Lego stop-motion animation. “This is all a little bit of us playing with this idea of what if there was a daily 10- or 30-minute virtual Jewish afterschool program for elementary school kids not going to day or Hebrew school,” she told me enthusiastically. “This has been a personal dream of mine,” Lefton said, and through BimBam, “I can see it coming true.” ■

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THE MAKING OF A PRIME MINISTER

by FRANCINE KLAGSBRUN



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Born in Kiev in 1898, Golda Mabovitch immigrated to America in 1906 with her mother and two sisters. Her father had come earlier and settled in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, where he worked as a carpenter to bring his family over. Like many other immigrant Jewish children, Golda attended the public Fourth Street School, and by age eleven

stood out as a leader to be reckoned with.

Golda's first "public work" was organizing

Francine Klagsbrun, a columnist for the *Jewish Week*, has written more than a dozen books, including *Voices of Wisdom: Jewish Ideals and Ethics for Everyday Living*. She also edited the best-selling *Free To Be You and Me*. Her latest book is *Lioness: Golda Meir and the Nation of Israel* (Schocken, 2017).

a group of schoolmates to provide textbooks to poor children. Accounts of that episode, like many narratives of Golda's childhood, have an almost mythic cast, often told and repeated. Untold, however, is the background for this narrative, the real issue that prompted Golda's actions and the recognition those actions received.

Although Milwaukee public schools charged no tuition, students were required to pay for their textbooks. Traditionally, they bought secondhand books or received them from older siblings, but in the spring of 1908 the textbook committee of the Milwaukee school board began a review to determine which texts might be outdated and in need of replacement. The very idea of replacement, which meant that children could no longer count on used books in those subjects, set off a firestorm of protest from parents and politicians. For months, newspapers carried editorials and news stories on the topic, sometimes allotting them equal space with pieces about the presidential hopefuls William Howard Taft and William Jennings Bryan.

Despite controversy, on June 3 the full board accepted the committee's recommendations to replace eleven books. With school opening in September, *The Milwaukee Journal* noted that there had been 146 applicants for free books by people who could not afford new ones, 80 of the applicants from the "Russian Jewish section of the Sixth ward," Golda's neighborhood.

To young Golda, the situation called for action. With her friend Regina's help, she rounded up a group of girls and formed a club with the ambitious name American Young Sisters' Society to raise textbook money for the following year. Club members sent out invitations to their entire district announcing a public meeting and somehow managed to finagle a small hall for the event. On the scheduled Saturday evening, with dozens in attendance, Golda "said a speech from my head" explaining the purpose of the group. Afterward, she recited two Yiddish poems, "*Der Schneider*" (The tailor) and "*Die zwei Korbones*" (The two sacrifices), followed by little sister Tzipka, known now as Clara, who also recited a Yiddish poem. Their parents beamed with pride, while a sympathetic audience contributed generously to the cause.

"We had the greatest success that there ever was in Packer Hall. And the entertainment was Grand," Golda boasted in a letter on August 2, 1909.

A month later, a news story about the group appeared prominently in *The*

Milwaukee Journal. It carried the headline "Children Help Poor in School" and the subhead "Little Sisters' Society Is Well Organized." The project "was organized Dec. 5, 1908, at 623 Walnut St.," the paper said, giving Golda's address. "The children are not of rich parentage... To every child, perhaps, the 3 cents a week that constitutes the dues, means some little childish wish unfulfilled." With the money collected, the children had bought fifteen books and, after taking applications from parents, distributed them to the neediest. Coincidentally, advertisements surrounding the article offered children's socks on sale for "7 cents" and shoes for

school, then study to become a schoolteacher. Bluma had other expectations. Golda could go to a secretarial school, as her friend Regina was planning to do, and learn to type so that she could find an office job. Moreover, Milwaukee did not permit schoolteachers to be married. Did that mean, Bluma harangued her, that Golda wanted to be an old maid? In later years, Golda would speak warmly of her mother and quote her frequently as a wellspring of maternal wisdom. Colleagues rolled their eyes when they related anecdotes that she told and retold about the older woman. When she was a young girl and the family very poor, one story went, she would



For her, the prospect of office work was "worse than death."

"95 cents," reinforcing the value of the children's three-cent-a-week contributions. At the end, the column listed the members and officers of the club, with "Goldie Mabowetz, president," and Clara Mabowetz a member. An accompanying photograph showed thirteen serious-looking young girls and the notation that "President Goldie Mabowetz is in top row, fourth from right."

Here, at age eleven, was the earliest glimmer of Golda Meir's formidable lifelong skills at organizing and fund-raising — and attracting public notice.

Meanwhile, Golda continued her studies at the Fourth Street School and in 1912 graduated valedictorian of her class. At the ceremony, she noticed her father's "moist" eyes as he looked at his middle daughter in her white graduation dress. Her grandfather had barely been literate, and here she was, the first member of their family to graduate from school. But the tender moment passed quickly. She had expected to go on to high

school, then study to become a schoolteacher. Bluma had other expectations. Golda could go to a secretarial school, as her friend Regina was planning to do, and learn to type so that she could find an office job. Moreover, Milwaukee did not permit schoolteachers to be married. Did that mean, Bluma harangued her, that Golda wanted to be an old maid? In later years, Golda would speak warmly of her mother and quote her frequently as a wellspring of maternal wisdom. Colleagues rolled their eyes when they related anecdotes that she told and retold about the older woman. When she was a young girl and the family very poor, one story went, she would

refuse to wash the dishes for fear something would break. But once, when her mother was ill, Golda had to do the dishes. "Gold-ele," her mother said after that, "now you really should be beaten, because if you didn't know how to do it and you didn't, that's one thing; but you did know and you didn't do it. For that, you ought to be hit." The adult Golda admired the lesson behind the story and found it worth repeating often, especially to her staff.

The teenage Golda considered her mother's lessons a burden and the rejection of her school plans intolerable. For her, the prospect of office work was "worse than death." To make matters worse, her father backed her mother, preaching his own lesson in practicality: It doesn't pay to be too clever. Men didn't like smart girls. Golda persevered, no less driven than her mother or sister to get her own way. Defying her parents, she enrolled in North Division High School on September 3, 1912. ■



THE BOOK OF YONA

THE ART OF YONA VERWER

Yona Verwer, a multimedia artist based in New York, uses painting and interactive video installations to explore themes of borders, identity, transformations and the Jewish experience. Her art mirrors her life: A convert to Judaism who was born in the Netherlands, Verwer draws literally from her experience bridging universes to reflect on the nature of identity and the fluidity of personal heritage.

Her most recent installation, in collaboration with Polish-born artist Katarzyna Kozera, culminates years of probing the passageways between cultures and continents. A play on her name and the Biblical figure of Jonah, “The Book of Yona” transposes the Biblical whale to a submarine charting the Atlantic and arriving in New York’s East River. The submergence of the submarine also serves as metaphor for immersion in the mikveh as part of the conversion process. The paintings are interactive, accompanied by images and videos accessible via smartphones to offer additional layers and gleanings that enhance the viewing experience: The artist as a toddler submerged in water and as an adult at a New York shoreline, interspersed with Hebrew passages from The book of Jonah. Taken together, the multimedia series grapples with issues of identity, upheaval, migration, renewal, and personal and collective encounters with Judaism as it charts two women’s paths from old worlds to new. ■

Left: Book of Yona 6 (detail). Opposite, top: Book of Yona 9. Opposite, bottom: Book of Yona 8. Back cover: Book of Yona 7 (detail).



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