

# contact



**IN THIS ISSUE:**

**ANALYSIS: Missed Opportunities for Jewish Life in Renewed Urban Neighborhoods**

STEVEN I. WEISS

**Hebrew on Campus: Why a Tough Sell?**

ARI L. GOLDMAN

**Transcultural Art: A Mosaic of Indian, American and Jewish Motifs**

SIONA BENJAMIN



THE STEINHARDT  
FOUNDATION  
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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.

Unless otherwise indicated, photographs in this issue appear courtesy of contributors and staff.

# Introducing the new CONTACT

**W**elcome to the relaunch of CONTACT, the magazine of The Steinhardt Foundation for Jewish Life that provides critical and constructive commentary on the Jewish community.

In its sixteen years of existence, CONTACT has offered a forum for leaders and academics to assess programs and trends in the Jewish world. Starting with this, our fifty-third issue, CONTACT will add journalistic pieces to the mix in an effort to investigate, isolate and uncover problems and potential solutions. We feel that the addition of independent voices calling out inefficiency, waste and missed opportunities will help make CONTACT a compelling force for change in the community.

In addition, while in the past CONTACT was a journal devoted to a different theme in each edition, the new CONTACT will explore a range of topics. It will feature at least four sections dedicated to various aspects of Jewish life today: LANDSCAPE, the structures of Jewish institutional life and borders of practice; LANGUAGE, the historic and current vernacular of Jewish expression; LIVES, personal profiles of people forging individual paths towards Jewish engagement; and LAYERS, the art, culture and joy that defines Jewish creativity today. Overall, the goal is to mix journalism with art, personal profiles and a focus on Hebrew to create a magazine that inspires and provokes.

We hope you enjoy the new format and find it a vehicle for new kinds of engagement. We welcome your reaction and feedback and look forward to hearing from you.

## in this issue

### 3 ANALYSIS: MISSED OPPORTUNITIES FOR JEWISH LIFE IN RENEWED URBAN NEIGHBORHOODS

*Steven I. Weiss*

### 7 POST-DENOMINATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES: IT'S ABOUT ATTITUDE, NOT STRUCTURE

*Rabbi Rebecca W. Sirbu*

### 8 A LANGUAGE OF LIFE

*Rabbi David Gedzelman*

### 9 HEBREW ON CAMPUS: WHY A TOUGH SELL?

*Ari L. Goldman*

### 10 THREE PROFILES

*Sarah Seltzer*

### 13 SIONA BENJAMIN: TRANSCULTURAL ARTIST

### 14 SLAMMING IT FOR A NEW GENERATION

*David Zvi Kalman*

### 15 RASHI AND THE ROLLING STONES

*Shira Dicker*



analysis:

## MISSED OPPORTUNITIES FOR JEWISH LIFE IN RENEWED URBAN NEIGHBORHOODS

by STEVEN I. WEISS

Real estate prices in Harlem and elsewhere have shot up immensely over the past decade; at the same time, the cost in Jewish families left without connections has grown as well.

**Steven I. Weiss** is an award-winning investigative journalist, and is news anchor and managing editor at The Jewish Channel. He has published in *Harper's*, *New York Magazine*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and many more.

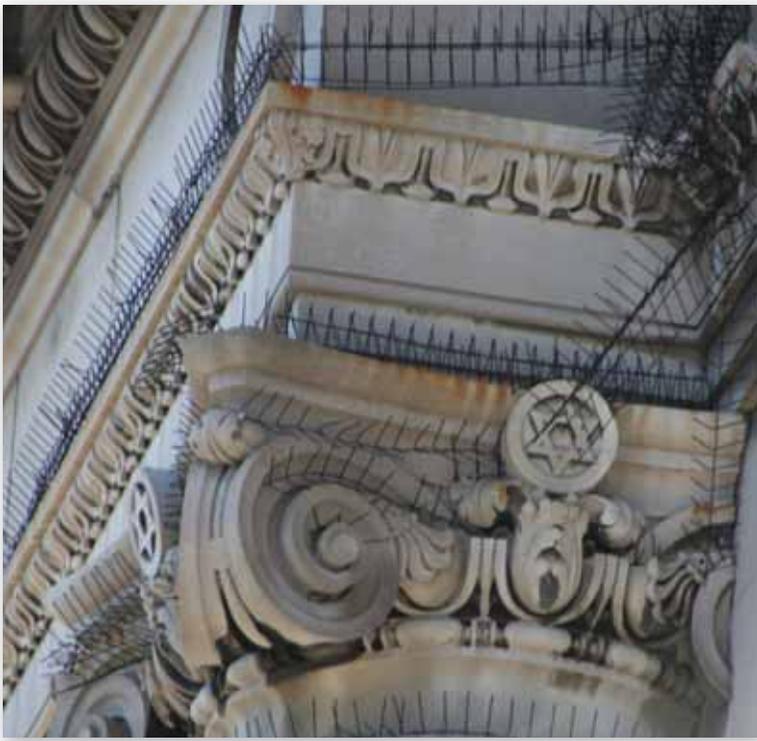
One hundred years ago, Harlem was among the largest Jewish population centers on the planet. Some 175,000 Jews called Harlem their home, and synagogues, Jewish schools and communal organizations dotted the landscape. Several of New York's most prominent congregations — such as Anshe Chesed and Ohab Zedek synagogues — were once located right in the heart of Harlem. Due to a range of economic and social factors in the years after World War I, however, there was a precipitous decline in the Jewish population. Jewish communal property was sold or abandoned and Harlem became the symbolic center of the nation's African-American community.

Last summer, my wife and I moved with our young children to Harlem. We are part of a wave of Jewish families priced out of much of Manhattan who are finding Harlem to be an affordable, amiable and safe place to live. But in terms of Jewish life, there's almost no formal presence or programming. Other than a tiny Chabad House taking up a ground floor apartment

in a building on Manhattan Avenue and the historic Old Broadway Synagogue just off 125th Street near Morningside Heights, there isn't a single Jewish communal address in the area today. While highly-engaged Jewish families make do, often by venturing out of Harlem for prayer services and other Jewish events, other families are left with little Jewish connection.

The traditional way that Jewish programming is funded doesn't work in a location like Harlem. While the typical Federation funding model provides grants to existing Jewish organizations in varied communities, Harlem doesn't have Jewish programs and institutions for which grants would be applicable in the first place. We've met Jewish families who have resided in Harlem for years but who have never had a real opportunity to engage their children Jewishly where they live.

Even though the local Federation, UJA-Federation of New York, spends \$150 million a year throughout the region, it disperses these funds to organizations that already exist, which are almost entirely in



Already, a great many families have lost the opportunity to connect to the Jewish community due to the failure of communal organizations to identify and accommodate Jewish families in these newly popular urban areas.

better-known Jewish neighborhoods. Harlem's Jewish families, therefore, benefit very little from the programming that such funding provides. As a result, locations like Harlem—as well as other parts of New York City such as the Lower East Side, Battery Park City, Crown Heights, Bedford-Stuyvesant and many more newly developing areas—need an alternative investment in Jewish growth. The few organizations that exist in these areas are Orthodox and do not meet the needs of many of the young people and families moving in.

Finding venues is a problem. In Harlem, a non-denominational, egalitarian minyan borrows space in churches and mosques. On the Lower East Side, non-Orthodox Jewish parents organize to rent out playrooms in apartment buildings for seasonal holiday events. In Battery Park City, the best anyone can hope for is the long walk to the Museum of Jewish Heritage, which hosts a few events a year for young children.

In order to serve these communities, Federation can't simply fund existing programs; it should consider procuring real estate that can incubate Jewish programming in these communities.

I'm convinced that putting even a tiny portion of UJA-Federation's \$900 million investment portfolio into real estate endowments in these communities could have had real impact on the growth potential of a community.

The lack of communal real estate is stunting this growth opportunity.

Already, a great many families have lost the opportunity to connect to the Jewish community due to the failure of communal organizations to identify and accommodate Jewish families in these newly popular urban areas.

UJA-Federation doesn't see it this way. Emily Kutner, the director of public relations for Federation, said that the purchase of real estate is not high on the organization's agenda. It's got to start from the bottom up, she said. "Our experience in Jewish community building has taught us that it requires a combination of indigenous bottom-up grassroots energy coupled with support and guidance from us that sparks the most likely energy to create new communities," she said. "Often the new institutions emerge later and real estate is the outgrowth of many years of new programming, leadership development and many new services and activities."

The need in Harlem and these other communities is too great to wait for this bottom-up approach. While waiting to do so, the cost of entry has skyrocketed. The opportunity to buy cheaply in Harlem has long passed. Real estate prices in Harlem and elsewhere have shot up immensely over the past decade; at the same time, the cost in Jewish families left without connections has grown as well. Real estate prices will in all likelihood continue to creep higher in the coming decades -- as will the cost of failing to act. By the same token, investing now or at any point in



the near future will perhaps provide strong financial growth, and assuredly provide strong communal growth.

A Jewish communal building in Harlem, Battery Park or Bedford-Stuyvesant could anchor Jewish life for the many young families moving in. It is an investment that will yield big dividends on both a financial and a communal level.

With their real estate costs covered by a long-term communal investment, local communities could fund the creation of programming. A diverse board could establish priorities and seek out ideas from the larger populace. These communities are already self-organizing and creating leadership structures; what they lack is a communal home in which to truly prosper.

## The Toronto Model

At least one other North American city has taken steps to ensure that there is a Jewish infrastructure where the local Jewish population would like to grow. Over a 15-year period in Toronto, the Federation, working alongside residential real estate developers, made what turned out to be a huge real estate investment. The Federation raised \$300 million to create a walkable Jewish village somewhat past where the Jewish community and city had expanded up to that point. According to Ted Sokolsky, the former president and CEO of UJA-Federation of Greater Toronto, until ten years ago new communities that tried to grow outside of the

communal core would find that “there was not a lot of infrastructure to hold it together.” They “died off” because not enough had been invested to keep them involved. The real estate program has stemmed that outflow.

Sokolsky’s team drafted an ambitious plan, thinking that “if we built a community campus here, and people could walk to shul, walk to school, walk to the JCC, and walk to Jewish restaurants ... it could recreate the experience our parents’ generation had in the old immigrant communities downtown.” Today, their Jewish campus has 70,000 Jews living around it, with a strong growth trajectory ahead. It’s also important to note that Toronto Federation played the role of real estate investor, having sold some of the raw land it had purchased at a profit.

The need for this kind of thinking goes beyond cities like New York and Toronto. All over the United States, an urbanization trend is shaking up our ideas of typical American life. People are moving back to the cities in record numbers. Communal Jewish organizations and their leadership are mostly missing this trend.

## The Walkability Score

“It’s happening in cities large and small, outside of cities large and small, including the suburbs,” explains Leigh Gallagher, an associate managing editor at Fortune magazine and the author of *The End of the Suburbs: Where the American*

*Dream is Moving* (Portfolio, 2013). In 2010 and 2011, Gallagher notes, there was a huge reversal. “The rate of growth in cities had outpaced the rate of growth in the suburbs for the first time in more than 90 years,” with “most of the growth in building activity” in “multi-family housing.” Through November 2013, according to data from the U.S. Census Bureau, construction of multi-family housing had roughly doubled since 2009; single-family housing construction had barely grown at all.

“Whether it’s millennials or aging baby boomers, everyone’s emphasizing a walking environment,” Gallagher asserted. “Walkability” as a category ascribed to neighborhoods and housing is an increasingly important part of real estate listings, which now often prominently feature a property’s “walkability score.” For Gallagher, the desire for a walkable neighborhood is “human nature: it’s more interesting when you can take a stroll and be in a beautiful, interesting space, and where you can bump into other people.”

It’s an idea that’s consonant with a Jewish tradition that has emphasized gathering for prayer, study, meals and communal functions. It’s no accident that in some urban areas that have seen the decay of most traditional Jewish institutions, it is the Orthodox, and especially the ultra-Orthodox — who have forever emphasized walking on the Sabbath — who stuck it out even through the trend

of suburbanization in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

Alongside all of the people moving to cities, companies — and, thus, jobs — are moving as well. Gallagher notes that “a lot is happening in Chicago,” where United Airlines, Archer Daniels Midland and Hillshire Brands have all moved their headquarters from the suburbs back to the urban environs. Even gathering spaces like sports stadiums are moving to the city: the Nets are now playing at Barclays Center, where biking and

on reaching young people who, in line with the nationwide trend, are moving to urban centers. The 33-year-old Heydemann’s efforts are directed through an organization she founded called Mishkan Chicago, named after the tabernacle that the wandering Hebrews used for prayers in the wilderness of the Sinai Desert.

And wander the young Jews of Chicago do, as the homes they claim in denser parts of the city — prized by younger folk for their walkability and

access to urban life — have little if any access to existing Jewish institutions. What synagogues and other establishments of Jewish life exist in those places for these young Jews to gather, build community, pray or teach their children? “For the most part, there are

none,” Heydemann notes.

Atlanta, America’s capital of exurban sprawl, is another great example. Eliana Leader is Executive Director of the Young Israel of Toco Hills, the suburban synagogue she attended as a child. But she doesn’t want to live there. Instead, she and her husband chose Virginia Highland, an old urban core originally developed in the early 1900s.

Leader says she and her husband knew in moving there that they’d be making a choice between access to Jewish resources and “whether we were going to live in a place that we wanted to live in, in terms of city life — in terms of walkability.” In nearby Midtown, “there used to be a JCC that was an active place when I was a kid in the ‘80s,” but in that decade, “they gave up the building, sold it and decided to invest in a neighborhood farther north, really in the suburbs.” As a result, the de facto Jewish community of young urbanites moving “in-town” (what Atlantans call their denser urban core) has “put together more independent, *chavura*-type groups” that have no Jewish-owned building in which to meet. Instead, they’re taking advantage of what

the city more broadly has to offer, with minyanim taking place in parks.

## What Can Be Done?

What if various larger Jewish non-profits saw their role as focused not exclusively on funding existing operations through grants, but rather in investing wholesale in communal growth and creating the facilities and infrastructure to allow that to happen?

Communal organizations could diversify their endowments by investing in real estate that would not only add value to their portfolios but could be directly used for the enhancement of Jewish communal life.

As Jews move to urban areas, the Jewish community isn’t meeting the demand for Jewish life there. And while grants for the operation of Jewish activities are helpful, the overall sentiment that many urban Jews feel as they invest their futures in denser areas is that Jewish communal institutions are not willing to invest alongside them.

It’s a problem for these burgeoning Jewish communities that will only get worse as real estate prices have skyrocketed over the past decade. In places like Harlem, East Rogers Park and Virginia Highland, the real opportunity to purchase cheaply occurred a decade ago.

**Communal organizations could diversify their endowments by investing in real estate that would not only add value to their portfolios but could be directly used for the enhancement of Jewish communal life.**

But those prices will be higher still in a decade or two, and the need will be even more urgent.

Realizing that these urban Jews need communal space, just as they lust after more closet space for their wardrobes, is what can transform today’s Jewish organizations into the angel investors in the Jewish life of tomorrow. Jews will continue to move to these areas; the only question is whether the traditional markers of Jewish life will be there to welcome them and help sustain their Jewish lives. ■

**What if various larger Jewish non-profits saw their role as focused not exclusively on funding existing operations through grants, but rather in investing wholesale in communal growth and creating the facilities and infrastructure to allow that to happen?**

taking public transit to events is emphasized over driving. Gallagher notes an informal study found that of “23 recent ballparks built since the mid-’90s, all but one or two of them were built in the downtown.”

Overall, “there’s this tremendous transfer of wealth out of the exurbs and suburbs, and into urban areas,” Gallagher says.

## Behind the Times

Except in the Jewish world. For many familiar with the glacial pace of change in the Jewish community, it’s perhaps no surprise that Jewish organizations are many years behind a popular trend that has seen major developments across both residential and commercial investment. But this lag serves to highlight the plight of Jews who have lost the opportunity to generate a sense of Jewish engagement for their young children.

An enterprising young rabbi in Chicago perfectly illustrates this problem. One recent day, I was talking with Rabbi Lizzi Heydemann as she was zipping around downtown Chicago on roller blades. She is a mobile Jewish community organizer with a mission: gathering mostly young Jewish adults for programming and prayer services in the denser parts of the city that haven’t seen Jewish development for decades. She is intent

# POST-DENOMINATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES: IT'S ABOUT ATTITUDE, NOT STRUCTURE

by RABBI REBECCA W. SIRBU

**T**rans-denominationalism and post-denominationalism are great words. They sound big and important. “We are entering a new post-denominational age,” the Jewish pundits declare. Often this declaration is meant to scare people. We are entering uncharted water; the great Jewish institutions of the 20th Century are crumbling. We don’t know where we are headed. Ahh! Watch out!

Okay, reality check: we have been here before. We are masters at navigating change. The Twelve Tribes of Israel become two Kingdoms, North and South. The Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes and countless other sects morphed into Rabbinic Judaism. Rabbinic Judaism survived the Exile, creating Babylonian and Yerushalmi centers of learning. Schools of Hillel and Shammai argued with each other for generations and then eventually gave way to new schools of thought. We are an ever-changing and growing people. No doubt that each of these historical transformations resulted in some loss, but it also helped us hone the skill that would carry us from era to era: resilience. Our resilience lies in the fact that we take the best of what has come before and build on that to respond to the needs of new generations.

In fact, that is how the denominational structure came to be in the first place. The three major Jewish denominations were created in response to the needs of Jewish immigrants to America struggling to make sense of a new world and their place in it. Jews could affiliate with whichever movement most closely mirrored their personal practices and beliefs: Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, Reconstructionist and the variations on those themes (Renewal, Ultra-Orthodox and Modern-Orthodox). There was enough of a range to choose from. The Jewish denominational model flourished in a society in which the largely Protestant Christian population also divided itself into various denominations among traditionalist and liberal lines.

These divisions no longer serve the needs of a growing group of Jews. We are not an immigrant population anymore, but a highly acculturated, cosmopolitan and successful group within the larger American scene. Our religious leaders will best be able to serve us when they understand the context individual Jews and Jewish communities operate in today and focus on the best of what Jewish wisdom has to offer to help us flourish in this time.

Leading a community during a transition is not easy, and there is not one blueprint for doing so. At Rabbis Without Borders, a program of Clal — The National Jewish Center for Learning and Leadership, we have developed several

methodologies to help rabbis navigate the changing religious and cultural atmosphere. There are three key traits we believe rabbis and other Jewish leaders need to cultivate to lead us into the next phase of Judaism: pluralism, meaning-making and a positive outlook.

**Rabbi Rebecca W. Sirbu** is the Director of Rabbis Without Borders at Clal—The National Jewish Center for Learning and Leadership

Pluralism is crucial to adapting to a changing denominational structure. The Rabbis Without Borders Fellowship, our signature program, brings together a group of about 20 rabbis a year. They span the denominational and post-denominational spectrum. They represent different geographic areas, ages and kinds of rabbinates. They learn together and challenge each other’s preconceived notions about who they are. They learn to cultivate curiosity and to leave their assumptions at the door. They grow to appreciate that rabbis who are “Reform” or “Orthodox” don’t fit neatly into the boxes these labels represent. Within our midst we have an Orthodox rabbi who is bringing together Jewish settlers and Palestinians to forge relationships and work towards peace. We have several Reform rabbis who identify as Republican, and self-identified feminist rabbis who observe the family purity laws.

We are all human and have multiple valances. Rabbis mirror communities. None of us is easily labeled. All of us have some kind of hyphenated identities. We learn to accept people whoever and wherever they are on the spectrum of Jewish life. This is an incredibly useful skill when rabbis are encountering an increasingly larger range of people in their communities. It allows for an expanded definition of what a Jewish community is and allows a community in transition to be more fluid, able to change, grow and transform while serving the needs of its members.

Serving the real needs of people is hugely important at this time. To quote my colleague Rabbi Irwin Kula, “What is the job that Judaism needs to get done?” For years the Jewish community has focused on giving people a “Jewish identity.” Focusing on giving people a Jewish identity per se is not the issue. We need to give *meaning* to people’s Jewish identities. At Rabbis Without Borders, we teach rabbis to do what generations of rabbis in the past have done: look at the context in which we are living, delve into our tradition and uplift the wisdom and practices that speak to people’s lives. As institutions and structures fall away, we need to ask why Shabbat practices, for instance, are meaningful today. How can we teach

about the concepts of rest and rejuvenation in a 24/7 society? What value is there in a family committing to gathering once a week for dinner together? What meaning is there in placing our hands on our children’s heads and blessing them

once a week? These questions are human questions. They speak to human needs and are not hampered by denominational divisions.

We cultivate a culture of “Yes.” We encourage our rabbis to read context generously. Often as rabbis and as humans, when we hear about something different from us, from our practice or from how we understand something, our knee-jerk reaction is to say “No.” No, we can’t do that. No, it is not done that way. No, they can’t join us if they are like that. Think about the opportunities that present themselves when we don’t give an automatic “No,” especially when, for example, we look at the diverse beliefs and backgrounds of people who are part of Jewish families. If we pause, ask questions, ask why people are doing something differently, it gives us an opportunity to learn about them, to create a relationship and to find out what need we might help them meet.

For too long, the Jewish community has been obsessed with defining people as being “in” or “out” of the community. We label people as “core,” “marginal” or “intermarried.” Like denominational labels, these too are changing. People define themselves. For the first time in Jewish history, people actually want to attach themselves to the Jewish people and see Jews positively. This is unnerving for a community that has been persecuted for generations. We are not used to non-Jewish relatives and others wanting to see themselves as part of our community. Instead of saying no to them, let’s take this moment to explore what Judaism has to offer them as well.

Challenging our borders, though, is not the same as eliminating them. Every individual has borders and every community has borders. But in this time of transition, I believe we should explore these borders, understand why they are there and ask what purpose they serve. This applies no matter where one is on the spectrum.

We also need to let go of the idea that Jews are the ever-dying people. We are not dying. We are uniquely adept at transforming ourselves to meet the needs of the current generation. Yes, there is loss during times of transformation, but we remain resilient. The loss of a particular institution does not mean that Judaism itself is dying out.

If rabbis and other Jewish leaders can cultivate pluralism, meaning-making and a positive, open outlook, we will be well situated to move in to a post-denominational or trans-denominational age. I look forward to seeing what the future holds. ■



# A LANGUAGE OF LIFE

by RABBI DAVID GEDZELMAN

Modern Hebrew reflects many innovations of language that were purposely developed and introduced by a range of thinkers, writers and leaders in the context of one of the Zionist movement's greatest achievements: the resurrection of the Hebrew language. One of those thinkers was Aharon David Gordon, who came to the Land of Israel during the Second Aliyah in 1904 at the age of 48 and who was a significant spiritual teacher for the founders of practical Zionism and Labor Zionism. He lived out his years at Degania, the first Kibbutz. In his expansive collection of Hebrew essays called *HaAdam veHaTeva, The Human and Nature* (1910), he laid out his thinking on how building a new life for the Jewish people in the Land of Israel could manifest a more healthy and natural relationship between human potential and the majesty of nature than what he believed was happening in the mechanized and unnatural trajectory of the industrial world. At the center of Gordon's teaching was a two-fold notion of the Human, which comprised two essential anthropological elements: 1) the visceral element of human experience that plugs directly into the pulse and flow of nature in an unmediated way, for which Gordon coined the new Hebrew word, *Chavaya*, and 2) the conscious element of human experience that gives people the ability to analyze, perceive and objectify the world around them, and which Gordon called *Hacarah*, intellection or perception.

For Gordon, the problem of the indus-

trialized world was one in which the *Hacarah* was disconnected from the *Chavaya* and overshadowed it. Modern human beings were all intellection and objectification cut off from their root in nature. This unnatural human condition contradicted the ideal Gordon posited, by which the Human is at one with the cosmos, making nature more beautiful rather than using the mind to pollute and corrupt the natural environment. When human beings achieve a more natural relationship to nature, the *Chavaya* feeds and fuels the true potential of the *Hacarah* and human intelligence perfects and enhances the natural environment; human enterprise and technology contribute to the majesty of nature rather than being a blight on it. In



describing this utopian vision, Gordon referenced a verse from the Hebrew Bible calling the *Chavaya* “oil for the lamp” of the *Hacarah* (Ex. 25:6) — an allusion to the Biblical Menorah that is meant to illuminate the world.

In creating this new word, Gordon interposed the Hebrew word for being or existence, *Havaya*, with the Hebrew word for life or alive, *Chai*. In so doing, he changed the initial letter of *Havaya* from a *Heh* to a *Chet*, yielding this new word which puts life and existence together, identifying the earthly phenomenon of life as the ultimate expression of all existence. By seeing the *Chavaya* as the gut element of Human experience, Gordon viewed Human beings as the highest realization of

Creation. Gordon was clearly aware from his religious background and education that the word *Havaya* was used in Hasidic tradition to pronounce the four letter name of God related to the Kabbalistic notion of how the Divine flows into and constitutes existence. Gordon's naturalization and humanization of the theological in the coining of a word represents a world view that puts tremendous faith in what human beings can achieve if they are in healthy relationship with the cosmos. This fit his role in inspiring a generation of Zionist pioneers to see Jewish settlement in the land as a creative human enterprise rather than something that needed to wait for Divine supernatural action.

Although the subtleties of Gordon's philosophical views and teachings were not understood in a widespread way, the use of this new word caught on and became part of the Modern Israeli vocabulary. Israelis use the word *Chavaya* to mean an experience of intense feeling or to reference an event in which one feels the power of life in an intense way. Without necessarily being conscious of it, by using a word which structurally means “life-existence” to speak about intense experience, Israelis reveal a cultural predi-

lection for life and living with intensity. Without necessarily understanding the complexities of Gordon's philosophy, the use of this word in common parlance reflects a civilizational commitment to living a bigger life. As Ari Shavit argues in the conclusion to his recent

book, *My Promised Land: The Triumph and Tragedy of Israel*, what Israel has to offer is “the intensity of life on the edge” (Spiegel & Grau, 2013, p. 418). He goes on to say, “I think Zionism was about regenerating Jewish vitality. The Israel tale is the tale of vitality against all odds.” Those of us who have spent time in Israel know what Shavit is talking about. A.D. Gordon coined a word over a century ago to put forward a beautiful view of how the reconstitution of Jewish life and the Hebrew language in the land of Israel could better the overall human condition. That goal is still a work in progress, but it is one that is reflected and expressed through the innovations and evolutions of the Hebrew language. ■

Rabbi David Gedzelman is President and CEO of The Steinhart Foundation for Jewish Life.

In the late 1700s, Ezra Stiles, the president of Yale, urged his students to study Hebrew lest they get to Heaven and not understand the Psalms that the angels are singing to God. He would be “ashamed,” one of Stiles’ students wrote, “that any one of his pupils should be entirely ignorant of that holy language.”

The argument of Stiles, a Christian Hebraist, did not carry much weight back then. Stu-

nity.” Last summer, for example, she said she had almost 100 applicants for programs in Middlebury’s Hebrew at the Center Institute.

According to the Hebrew professors’ group, Hebrew is taught at 175 American colleges and universities, including many state schools, Christian colleges, elite private universities and, of course, rabbinical seminaries. But professors in many schools report that the programs in Hebrew are often underfunded, do not attract

Netanyahu, more professorial, stood his ground. “He spoke Aramaic, but he knew Hebrew.”

That cordial exchange may not send college students rushing to study either language. Why take Hebrew today? Dr. Leibovitch, who is based in New York City but prefers to speak Hebrew to anyone who will understand him, gave several reasons.

“Hebrew is not just a language,” he said. “It is a culture, a key for Jewish history. It is the connection to Israel. The importance of this language for keeping our nation alive cannot be overemphasized. For me, the revival of Hebrew is a miracle no less than the establishment of the state of Israel.”

In fact, the revival of Hebrew preceded the establishment of the state in 1948, said Alan Mintz, Chana Kekst Professor of Hebrew Literature at The Jewish Theological Seminary. Hebrew was a primary goal of Zionism and represented “a portable part of Jewish nationalism,” he said.

In his book *Sanctuary in the Wilderness* (Stanford University Press, 2011), Dr. Mintz traces how Hebrew in America moved from the province of Christian educators in the 18th Century to the province of a small band of American Jewish Hebraists in the early 20th Century.

On the American college campus, interest in Hebrew arose after Israel’s victory in the Six Day War of 1967 and grew as other groups, such as African-Americans, feminists and later the LGBT community, began to establish programs that reflected their interests. It took decades for programs centered on Israel, Hebrew and Jewish studies to take root. These programs especially flourished in the 1990s, in part fueled by philanthropic and foundation support, but they’ve taken a hit in recent years, corresponding to the declines in the study of the humanities and the liberal arts.

Dr. Mintz said one of the problems with Hebrew instruction on campus is that it often focuses too much on the spoken word. “The expectation of oral fluency is the greatest stumbling block,” he said. Understanding the building blocks of the language is more important than speaking it, he added.

“Once you show them a word stem, the *shoresh*, like [the letters] *bet tet chet* — and demonstrate that its permutations create the words for security, insurance, religious faith and bodyguard — you can see the neurons light up and down the whole chain of Jewish historical knowledge.”

But Dr. Ringvald said that both fluency and understanding are within the reach of students. In fact, she said, there are those who relate better to the spoken word than they do to concepts. “The *shoresh* approach is very narrow,” she said. “I am surprised to see how many people are interested in learning the language. They want to communicate with Israelis. They want to understand the Hebrew culture, both past and present. They know that if they want to be connected to this culture, language in the key.” ■

## HEBREW ON CAMPUS: WHY A TOUGH SELL?

by ARI L. GOLDMAN

dents complained so much about Hebrew that it was soon dropped as a requirement at Yale, and most everywhere else.

Ever since then, it seems, educators have been trying to come up with reasons for the academic study of Hebrew. While its popularity has waxed and waned on campus, it seems to be facing a special challenge today.

“Hebrew in academia, much to my sorrow, is in a crisis,” said Gilead Morahg, Executive Vice President of the National Association of Professors of Hebrew. “It is really dangerous because this is where the future leadership of the American Jewish community is forged.”

“Keeping Hebrew alive on campus is critical,” Dr. Morahg added. “This is the last stage of identity formation.”

The numbers are troubling. According to the most recent figures from the Modern Language Association, 8,245 students are studying Modern Hebrew on American campuses, a drop of 14 percent from three years earlier. Biblical Hebrew is faring somewhat better, with 13,807 students, but these numbers too are in decline.

Of the students enrolled in Hebrew courses, there are nearly twice that number studying Arabic and three times that number studying Chinese and Japanese, all of which have experienced record growth. Spanish, French and German topped the MLA list.

Not everyone is pessimistic about Hebrew on campus, however. “If you define crisis by numbers there’s a crisis,” said Dr. Vardit Ringvald, Director of the Middlebury Hebrew at the Center Institute for the Advancement of Hebrew Language. “But it’s not a crisis in that there is less interest in Hebrew. Interest in Hebrew remains high.” It’s just that universities have been cutting back on the humanities and liberal arts, “and the first place they cut is in languages.”

“I don’t believe there’s a lack of interest” in Hebrew, she said. “There’s a lack of opportu-

many students and cannot find a secure footing at the school. They are sometimes placed in Classics departments, sometimes in Oriental Studies or Middle Eastern and Asian Studies, sometimes in Religion.

Last year, the World Zionist Organization (WZO), working with Israel’s Education Ministry, established a Hebrew Language Council dedicated to the promotion of Hebrew among Diaspora Jewry. The council’s mandate is to upgrade the state of Hebrew everywhere, from pre-schools to Jewish summer camps to adult education. Among its most difficult challenges are university campuses, said Simcha Leibovitch, the WZO Executive’s representative in North America.

“There is a great deal of anti-Israel sentiment on American campuses,” Dr. Leibovitch said. “And people identify Hebrew with Israel.” While Israel is not beyond criticism, he added, campaigns to isolate and punish Israel, such as the BDS Movement, are misguided. They take an unfair toll on Israel as well as on Hebrew language on campus.

At the inaugural conference of the Hebrew Council, held last year in New Jersey, organizers asked a group of university professors to come up with ways to improve the teaching of Hebrew on campus. Several professors said that Israel, which has one of the world’s leading high-tech sectors, has not developed the best technology for the teaching of Hebrew. The materials, labs and sites for teaching more popular languages, such as Spanish and Chinese, are far more sophisticated. They called for more development in this area.

But more important than the technology, several said, is the rationale. They are trying to take the argument for Hebrew beyond Ezra Stiles’s invocation of the angels in Heaven.

Certainly, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was making a pitch for the importance of Hebrew when Pope Francis visited the Holy Land in May. “Jesus was here, in this land,” Netanyahu told the Pope when they met in Jerusalem. “He spoke Hebrew.”

“Aramaic,” the Pope interjected with a smile.

**Ari L. Goldman**, a professor at the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism, is an editorial consultant for CONTACT. He is the author of four books, including *The Search for God at Harvard* and *The Late Starters Orchestra*.

# THREE PROFILES

In each issue, *Contact* will profile young Jews and their individual paths towards Jewish life — on their own terms. In this issue we look at three young people who've found their Jewish expression through writing: one of them through comedy, a second through fiction and a third through journalism.

PROFILES by SARAH SELTZER



## JON DANFORTH-APPELL **The Golem Nebbech**

**W**hen he was growing up, Jon Danforth-Appell didn't know some people would consider him non-Jewish. Raised in the Washington DC suburbs by a Jewish dad and a mom who wasn't born Jewish, Danforth-Appell, 28, wasn't exposed to traditional laws about matrilineal descent determining Jewish status. "I just assumed I was Jewish," he says. "I didn't know that your mom had to be Jewish." Danforth-Appell considered his family Reform, and he attended a Hebrew school that taught Yiddish as well.

When he was thirteen, Danforth-Appell's mom converted, and his family started keeping "somewhat kosher." Still, he says, he didn't share many of the cultural signifiers that others used to demarcate their Jewish identity. "I didn't have kugel until I was 18," he jokes.

And later on he began to resent some of the messages he received from Jewish authorities. "Since I was a product of an interfaith marriage, it got awkward when rabbis gave speeches about marrying Jewish."

Entering college at the University of Southern California, Danforth-Appell was influenced in two directions. He stopped keeping kosher and decided to avoid campus Jewish life. "I tried to get down with the Hillel but couldn't," he said. "Like USC at large, everyone was

very rich and more conservative, and very Zionist."

At the same time, he got his hands on the newly-formed hipster Jewish publication, *HEEB* magazine, and it blew his mind. "Their 'Passion of the Christ' issue was super influential for me," he says of the magazine's controversial Mel Gibson-spoofing spread, featuring a nipple-pierced Mary among other provocative features. "You saw this snarky irreverent Jewish tone, and it wasn't just being aimed at other Jews."

Ultimately, those college experiences defined his later adult journey towards being a Jewish comedy writer who intertwines his Jewish identity with his passion. "I prefer being Jewish as a jumping off point for your identity rather than the whole thing," says Danforth-Appell, who fittingly uses the twitter handle @GrouchoMarxist. "It's the difference between a Judd Apatow or Woody Allen film and a Judaica store. Judaica stores are so single and narrow. But in these films, Jewish identity is just one part of you which influences who you are."

He didn't participate in communal life for much of his 20s, but when Danforth-Appell went on a Birthright Israel trip at age 26, he felt "reawakened" — but not in a religious or nationalist sense. "I've met Israelis, and they're not us," he said of the cultural differences he discov-

ered. He also felt discouraged, again, by matrilineal descent rules. "It's problematic that I wouldn't be considered Jewish there," he says. "It's supposed to be a homeland for all Jews, which is kind of not true."

But what he did feel was a renewed desire for Jewish community. "What's great about Birthright isn't the trip to Israel, it's that you forge connections," he says. With a (now ex-) girlfriend he met on the trip, he began making a video series called "Jew on This."

"We'd seen Jewish comedy videos online, like the *Macca-beats* and *Bubala Please*," he says. But they found these series way too "cheesy" and "vanilla." "To use surreal comedy that was strange and edgy and have it aligned with Judaism felt dangerous because so much of Jewish comedy is schmaltzy," he says. Now, as a copywriter in Los Angeles trying to break into TV comedy, Danforth-Appell says "I try to write [characters] as explicitly Jewish, even more than Judd Apatow."

As he forges forward with his career, making vegan matzah ball soup and sporting a tattoo that says "*golem nebbech*" in Yiddish — standing for strength and neuroses — his focus is on using his Jewishness as a fuel for creativity. "The most energy I put into negotiating my Jewish identity is in my work," he says. ■

**Sarah Seltzer** is a writer of contest-winning fiction, essays, journalism, listicles and more. She's based in New York City, where she grew up. Find her on twitter @sarahmseltzer.



CHANEL DUBOFSKY

## From Secular to Religious and Back Again

It was her Hebrew school classmates that initially turned Chanel Dubofsky off. Dubofsky, 34, grew up in Western Massachusetts with very little Jewish involvement. “I went to day school for a minute in third grade,” she says. “And then Hebrew school until fifth grade. But I quit because it was too hard socially for me.” In particular, she now realizes, the wealth of the students in her Hebrew school compared to her own family’s financial situation made it hard for her to fit in.

It’s vital that there be a space where you can speak without repercussions or censorship.

Without a Bat Mitzvah but with plenty of bacon, she was not particularly primed for major involvement. “Observance didn’t matter as long as you knew you were Jewish,” she says of her family’s approach.

But then, at college at UMass Amherst, she sought out Jewish community at Hillel and elsewhere. “It was a huge school and I wanted to find people like me,” she says. “And then my mom died, and it was a place I went to for community.”

She was grateful, if somewhat bewildered. “I had no idea what was going on,” she says. “Literally. People were asking me if I wanted a *shiva minyan* and I was like, ‘Sure, but what is that?’”

At the same time, she began pursuing Jewish studies. She was obsessed with her Jewish women’s studies professor, she recalls. “I was genuinely excited about Jewish academia, and feminism was always important for me. So it was a natural fit.”

Her interests became even more serious. “I decided I might want to be a rabbi because I could be a professional Jew and write and learn,” Dubofsky says. She began to keep kosher, observe holidays and wear skirts — and went to work at Hillel after college. “I tried really hard to fit in,” she says. “But it didn’t work. The fronting got really tiresome after a while.”

After getting laid off in a round of cuts, which she said was devastating, Dubofsky began freelance writing, which opened up a whole new world for her. “I just wanted to make stuff, create,” she says. “Once I began getting in touch with that side of myself again, I couldn’t go back.”

But she still needed to pay the bills, so she accepted a position at a social-justice minded Jewish nonprofit. For a while, Dubofsky also lived on the Upper West Side of Manhattan, in a Jewish neighborhood where she says “the pressure to be observant was crushing,” and “the marriage

rat race” depressing. Eventually, she began to make her break from organized Judaism, dropping out of religious observance and, eventually, after her contract at the nonprofit was up, going back to get an MFA and committing fully to writing fiction and journalism.

Her work can be found at the *Forward*, *Lilith*, and *Jewishchool*, the radical blog she co-edits with a “collective” of volunteers. Their willingness to publish criticism of Israel’s policies and mainstream Judaism is important to Dubofsky because of the line-toeing she’s seen in Jewish spaces. “It’s vital that there be a space where you can speak without repercussions or censorship,” she explains.

For now, Dubofsky’s exploration of Jewishness is mostly taking place in her writing. In her fiction work-in-progress, she says, Israel is a key setting and Jewish identity a theme. “My characters are Jewish. The main character was more observant, now she’s not,” she says, in a case of art imitating life.

In some ways, she’s satisfied with her life as a secular Jew weaving Judaism into her art, but in others, Dubofsky still frets about her future involvement. “The Jewish world has this really effective way of making you feel like it’s easy to never work in it again,” she says. “I worry sometimes that if I’m out of line, saying things critical of the status quo, I’ll never get a job in a Jewish organization again.” ■



J.E. REICH

## Writing and Otherness

**G**rowing up in Pittsburgh, J.E. Reich had “one foot in one world and one in the other.” And although both worlds were Jewish, they clashed. Her mother’s family was southern Jewish, living in America since the beginning of the 19th Century — a long placeholder that led a sense of Judaism that was “vibrant” and “evolving,” says Reich. Her father, however, was British, a child of Holocaust survivors, which added a double layer of foreignness

to Reich’s sense of self. She calls her dad’s version of Judaism “a museum of sorrow.” There were photos of deceased relatives lining his walls. But he was “secular and assimilationist,” while her mother observed rituals like *kashrut* and went to synagogue regularly.

This schism in Jewish identity created a sense of “otherness” for Reich, an alienation that increased when her parents split up and intensified when she realized, at age 13 or 14, that she “preferred women to men.”

“Hi! I’m from Pittsburgh, I’m Jewish and I’m gay,” she would say to people she met at Emerson, a private college in Boston that lacked the diversity of the public schools she’d attended as a child. “Most students were

white and from a privileged background, upper middle class,” she says. “There was a large Jewish demographic, but almost all were cultural and not practicing.”

But even among those who practiced, she felt estranged. “I never got my footing in Hillel,” says Reich. She found the scene conformist, even at her progressive school. She explains that Emerson was “where everybody who is different goes to be the same.”

So Reich kept her complex and evolving thoughts about God and belief to herself and felt isolated, largely because she couldn’t turn to mainstream Conservative Judaism. In institutionalized Judaism, “There was so much I don’t agree with, particularly in terms of interfaith relationships,” she says. “I have probably dated more non-Jews than Jews.” In fact, Reich’s article “Why I Date Shiksas,” published on *The Huffington Post* last year, garnered lots of attention.

Reich has written for *Lilith* magazine and *Blueprint*, a New York Jewish blog, and is currently editing and writing Jewish-tinged fiction, too. In her writing, Reich explores questions of identity, including her worries about being treated as “exotic” or “commodified” by the non-Jews she dates or befriends. “Thematically, the biggest thing that ties different strains of Jewish American literature together is that sense of otherness and marginality,” she says. “This intersects with me as a queer writer and female writer, and as someone who likes to think writing can

change the world.”

Reich is a proud resident of Crown Heights, where she finds herself torn between a traditional Jewish community (Chabad Lubavitch) that she sees as warmly embracing her Jewishness, and that same community’s questionable stances on civil rights and acceptance for LGBT Jews. When she lived in the area with her non-Jewish ex, “I often felt both welcome and also in the closet” in Jewish settings, she says. “I was not comfortable holding her hand. We were invited to *seders* and Rosh Hashanah dinners, but we had to pretend we were just roommates, fielding questions that were pushing me towards a nice Jewish boy.”

Reich often feels caught between her more spiritual inclinations — she prefers Hebrew prayers to English translations — and a dissatisfaction with the institutional Jewish *modus operandi*. She attends services whenever she can but doesn’t belong to a *shul*. In fact, “I rarely go to the same synagogue twice,” she says.

“The Jewish community as a whole has to make more strides to be more inclusionary to LGBT Jews,” she says, noting that generational trends away from organized Judaism might have to do with this attitude, as well as the approach to interreligious dating and marriage. “There was no data in the Pew Study, no polling about how people identify in terms of sexuality and what Jews think about gay rights,” she says. “But a lot needs to be done in that area.” ■

We were invited to *seders* and Rosh Hashanah dinners, but we had to pretend we were just roommates, fielding questions that were pushing me towards a nice Jewish boy.

# SIONA BENJAMIN: TRANSCULTURAL ARTIST

**T**he artist Siona Benjamin is a Jew from Mumbai who grew up among the predominant Hindu and Muslim societies that make up India. To add to her cultural influences, she was educated in Catholic and Zoroastrian schools. “I have always had to reflect upon the cultural boundary zones in which I have lived,” explains Benjamin, who now lives and paints in New Jersey. “In my paintings I combine the imagery of my past with the role I play in America today, making a mosaic inspired by both Indian/Persian miniature paintings and Sephardic icons.”

Benjamin sees herself as a “trans-cultural artist” and as a bridge between the traditional and the modern. “A transcultural person,” she explains, “is rather like a chameleon, being able to change his/her colors according to the situation and environment.” When she first started painting, the various influences in her life “seemed difficult and unnecessary to apply to my work,” she said. But she learned to embrace her past. “Now I have found a way to use it, to be able to weave current issues and parts of my life in its intricacies, thus making this ornateness strong and meaningful.”

The use of color is among the most striking features of her work. Benjamin has a special fascination with the women of the Torah, as reflected here in her portrayal of Rachel, Leah and Vashti. In addition to the multiplicity of identities, her work explores the contrasts between violence and hope, past oppression and future contentment, personal pain and the redemptive power of art.

Benjamin wants not only to make beautiful art but to change hearts and minds. “I would like my audience to re-evaluate their notions and concepts about identity and race,” she said. “I believe that transculturalism will help in artistic and other ways to be a bridge.” ■



From top:  
Finding Home #81  
(Fereshteh) “Leah  
and Rachel”  
25” x 20” gouache  
and gold leaf on  
board 2006.

Finding Home #89  
(Fereshteh) “Vashti”  
7” x 10” gouache and gold  
leaf on wood panel 2006.

Finding Home #82  
(Fereshteh) “Joseph” 22” x  
17” gouache and gold leaf  
on museum board, 2006.

# SLAMMING IT FOR A NEW GENERATION

by DAVID ZVI KALMAN

Let me explain why SermonSlam, which was conceived in October, 2013 as an open-mic, Jewish-themed performance series with almost no budget and no paid staff, has been taken up by communities in 23 cities in four countries and has been sponsored by rabbis and professionals of every major denomination, by every age group, and by synagogues, Hillels, Moishe Houses, independent *minyanim*, JCCs, local Federations, rabbinical schools, high schools and summer camps — often at the same time. Let me explain how the SermonSlam concept has so quickly entered Jewish communities across America that we, its coordinators, are now discovering SermonSlams popping up independently, for which we are acting not as coordinators but simply as consultants.

I believe that we are entering an age of massive Jewish inequality, where a tiny fraction of Jews — those who are blessed with excellent Jewish educations and excellent teachers and who live in New York or a handful of other vibrant young Jewish communities — are responsible for the vast majority of new thought, teaching and Torah, while the core Jewish texts and ideas for the vast majority of Jews have been essentially unchanged for more than 50 years. Most new Jewish ideas will never be heard by most Jews, and the majority of the individuals best suited to revolutionize Jewish culture in America, the leaders of the next generation, will largely remain known only to their friends and colleagues, the emerging “1 percent” of the Jewish world.

In the fall of 2013, I co-founded an online Jewish media platform together with six friends, with the stated purpose of popularizing Jewish innovation and encouraging its continued growth by engaging in the

difficult process of translating the best ideas (from excellent teachers, from Jewish studies departments, etc.) into accessible and entertaining language and by creating more venues where modern Jewish expression could find a home. We called the platform Open Quorum, and SermonSlam is one of our first programs.

SermonSlam began as an attempt to reinvent the *dvar torah* for the web. The internet is generally not kind to homiletics — who wants to hear a rabbi read into a microphone for 20 minutes, stripped of even the reverential atmosphere of the synagogue, when there are millions of other things to see and do? A *dvar torah* podcast recorded before a live audience, we reasoned, would make for a better listening experience, where one could imagine being in the audience.

The podcasts (and now YouTube videos) have proved popular, but the live events have been more popular still. SermonSlams can be recorded in a synagogue or a social venue (bar, café), and feature between 8 and 12 performers. The rules are simple. First, every event has a theme (“Revelation,” “Exodus,” etc.) and all performances must relate to that theme. Second, all performances must be less than five minutes. Third, anyone can perform. That’s it.

Though the event is called SermonSlam, many performances are neither sermons nor poetry slams. Of the 150+ people who have slammed so far, we’ve seen some sermons, but also lots of poetry, prose, music, singing, the use of digital media, and even duets. The character of the event is shaped by the culture of the city, too. In Washington D.C., many performances grapple with politics; in Jerusalem, they interweave Hebrew and English.

Since registration is open to all, people who would have never publicly shared their Torah ideas sign up, too. Many SermonSlams feature performers who no one would have expected to slam — or to win. Content is never pre-screened or censored, but since all events are competitions with prizes, and since all performances are recorded, there is a strong incentive for slammers to bring their A-game when they step up to the mic.

The radically open nature of the SermonSlam stage — within reach of all, more fun than a lecture and more substantive than a mixer — means all varieties of Jew-

The radically open nature of the SermonSlam stage — within reach of all, more fun than a lecture and more substantive than a mixer — means all varieties of Jewish connection (even deeply skeptical ones!) now have a place where they can be voiced and where they can be applauded (sometimes).

ish connection (even deeply skeptical ones!) now have a place where they can be voiced and where they can be applauded (sometimes). And the fact that there are no standards or dogmas about what counts as “good Torah” means that SermonSlams don’t cut along normal denominational, educational or age lines. All that matters is sincere delivery. There is a deeply captivating power in Torah that is shared for the sake of exposing a beautiful and heartfelt relationship to Judaism — even if that relationship is extremely complicated.

SermonSlam’s simplicity also makes it adaptable. Students at the University of Maryland combined their year-end SermonSlam with an art show, pairing beautiful words with beautiful images. After reading about us online, the director of Houston Hillel asked about running an Interfaith SermonSlam — which he did, to a crowd of more than 100. A high-school teacher wanted to adapt the model for his students; the first annual high-school SermonSlam was held in June. Since every place that has run a SermonSlam has expressed interest in running them on regular basis, we expect the model to continue being adapted and adopted for years to come.

Our tremendous and immediate success is a testament not to our ingenuity, but to the vast and varied perspectives on Torah and Judaism trapped within American Jews of all kinds, with few valves for release. SermonSlam is a valve, and there is now a rush towards it. Open Quorum seeks to create more such venues for the release of Jewish creative energy of all kinds. There is much work to be done. ■

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**David Zvi Kalman** is Co-Founder and President of Open Quorum/Jewish Public Media. By day a University of Pennsylvania doctoral student specializing in medieval Jewish and Islamic law, he is also the creator of AtonetNet ([atonenet.com](http://atonenet.com)) and Adashot ([adashot.com](http://adashot.com)). David just finished designing and editing a fully-illustrated “bencher” based entirely on medieval and early-modern manuscripts. Together with his wife and son, he serves as Mechon Hadar’s Campus Scholar at Penn. To find out more about SermonSlam, go to [www.openquorum.org](http://www.openquorum.org).

# Rashi and the Rolling Stones

Excerpt from a SermonSlam by Shira Dicker at Congregation Beth Elohim in Brooklyn, NY, earlier this year.

**H**ave you ever stood with one foot at Sinai and the other in Sin City?  
What if your sanctuary was also your home and the ancient prayers pierced you to the core... like the music of Pink Floyd?

I'm Shira.

I was a rabbi's kid during the wackiest, tackiest decade in American history — the 70's — a Yeshiva Girl during the heyday of sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll.

Instructed to love God with all my heart and all my soul and all my might... while politely applauding the rock and roll revolution from my family pew...

Doing the Hustle... and the hora.

Stayin' alive.

You see, I'd been to Day School on a horse with no name.

And heard laughter in the chrein.

As a Rabbi's Girl in the 70s my life was a meshuggeneh mash-up I like to call Gefilte Groovy: (Play That Funky Music White Boy)

Rashi and the Rolling Stones

Shalom Aleichem and Sonny and Cher

Talmud and the Time Warp

Keeping kosher and kissing boys

Carlebach and Don Kirschner

Birkat Hamazon and Billy Joel

Star Trek and the State of Israel

Soviet Jews and the Family Stone

Abba and my Aba

Watergate and One God in Heaven

Gilligan's Isle and Golda Meir

Monty Python, Moshe Dayan

Pink Floyd and Purim

Bowie and Babka! Hendrix and Halvah!

Getting wasted and going to shul

Rambam, Ratners and the Ramones

Davening and David Cassidy!

They're COMING TO TAKE ME AWAY Ha Ha!!!

I didn't need a funk band to tell me to freak out.

I was a brown-eyed girl in a psychedelic world.

Leah in the sky... with diamonds.

I wanted Hot Stuff but settled for hot pastrami.

I was Born to Run but shackled to the sanctuary.

My life was totally schizophrenic. One minute I was singing "Adom Olam," and the next, "Love to Love You, Baby."

On Friday night I blessed the Sabbath Queen but on Saturday night I worshipped the music of Queen... from my house in Queens. ■

A promoter of art and culture, **Shira Dicker** is a strategic thinker, master networker, activist and entrepreneur. She balances her writing life with teaching and performance art. Her *Bungalow Babe in the Big City* is literary and often irreverent, with a global readership.



PHOTOGRAPH BY STEPHEN EPSTEIN

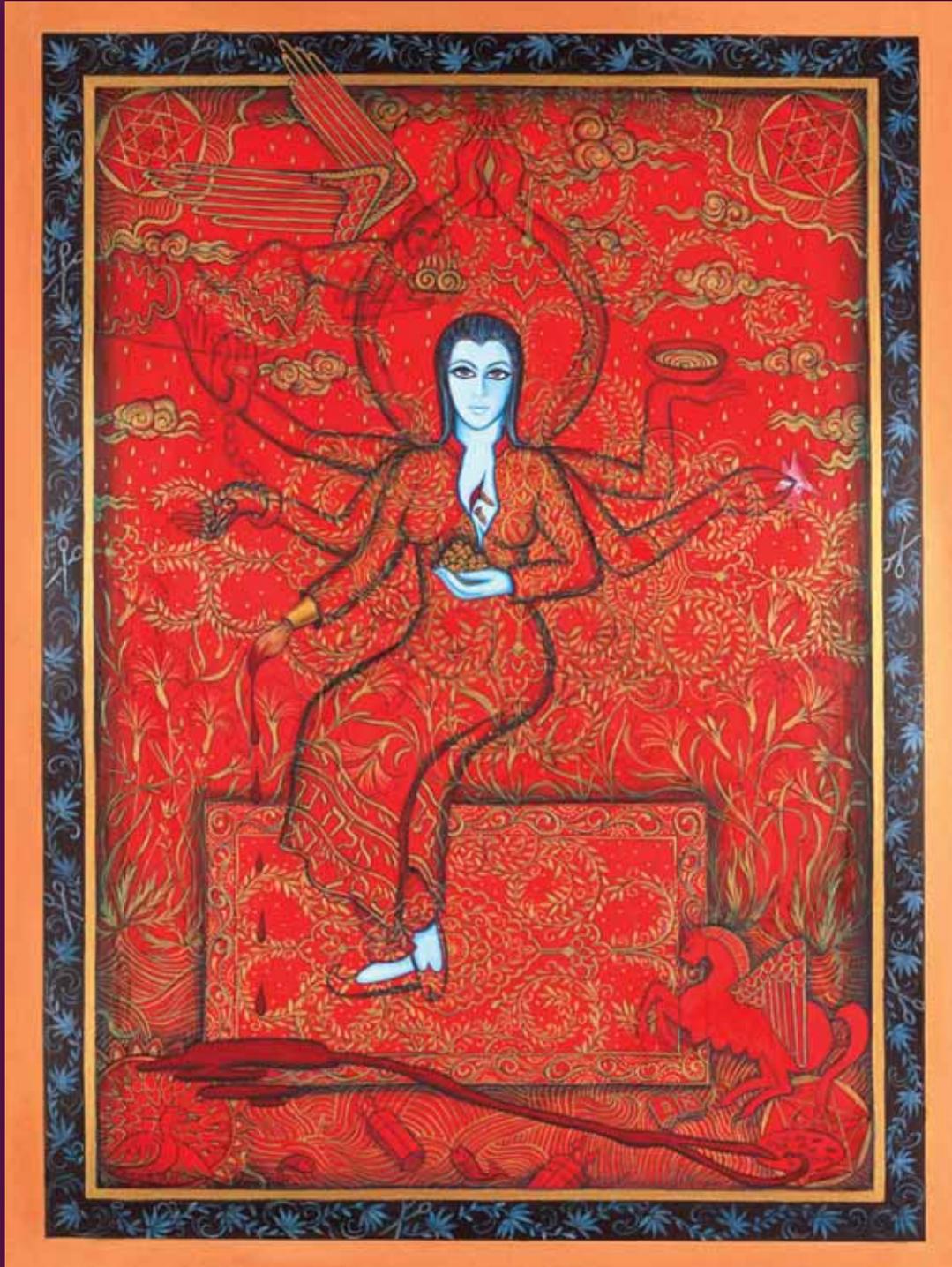
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