

# B'NAI B'RITH

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## The Sisterhood of Salaam Shalom: Finding Common Ground

By *Miranda S. Spivack*

The women gathering in an elegant suburban home are adorned in an array of styles. Some wear headscarves; others are in casual tops and slacks. As they drift in on the spring evening, they quickly embrace, trade kisses and catch up on family news. They are young, middle aged and bordering on elderly. They are all friends. They are Muslims and Jews.

The tensions in the outside world between these two religious groups matter little to this group, whose members have known each other for four years. This is a Northern Virginia gathering of the Sisterhood of Salaam Shalom, an all-women interfaith group that meets regularly to celebrate their similarities, not dwell on their differences.

At a time when world peace seems a fragile, distant idea, exacerbated by mostly male leaders who speak in divisive and often hate-filled language, the Sisterhood offers a way to unite disparate groups and create lasting bonds.

The first Sisterhood group was formed in 2010 in New Jersey by Sheryl Olitzky and Atiya Aftab. Olitzky has a background in marketing; Aftab is a professor of Islamic law at Rutgers University. In its nine years of existence, the Sisterhood has grown to include dozens of groups of Muslim and Jewish women around the United States — at last count, there are at least 2,500 members in about 120 chapters in the United States and about 1,000 women on a waiting list. Most of the groups keep their membership to around 20 women — half Jewish and half Muslim. This is not always a simple mathe-



Over time, the women who belong to the Northern Virginia chapter have developed lasting and meaningful friendships.

matical calculus. It is harder to find Muslim women, organizers said, many of whom are younger than the Jewish women and are often caught up in the usual busyness of millennial and young parent existence, juggling work, home, children and spiritual life.

But Olitzky knows where to look, if anyone wants to form a chapter. “To recruit women, go to soup kitchens,” she said. “The largest number of volunteers are Muslim and Jewish.”

### **Modest but Chic**

Amany Jondy, a young professional Muslim mother in her 30s, is among the youngest in the Northern Virginia group.

Jondy and her sister Bayan run their own fashion company specializing in modest but chic clothing for women who need to navigate the world but adhere to religious strictures for modesty. Jondy said the Sisterhood meetings have provided her with opportunities to meet

## The Sisterhood of Salaam Shalom: Finding Common Ground

people she might not ordinarily encounter, to exchange ideas and to make close friends.

"I find we are really able to connect on a deeper level. It is very special. We are actually building friendships," Jondy said in a phone conversation a few weeks after the Northern Virginia gathering at the home of Leina Wahba, a pediatrician who is Muslim.

Many of the women have not been in inter-faith groups before, though Jondy has. "Forming the personal bonds first, now we are able to delve into what might be perceived as difficult conversations. We have a level of respect for one another on a personal level," she said.

That means, Jondy said, "we can all be true to ourselves." And it also means that she is at ease expressing her views "without being uncomfortable, irritated or upset with anyone else."

### Objects of Hatred Forging a Bond

Olitzky, who is married to a rabbi and whose two sons are rabbis, was inspired to start the Sisterhood after a trip to Poland. The visit, despite her knowledge of history, left her with a profound sense of unease. There were signs of anti-Semitism almost everywhere, including a male Jewish doll with peyos, or long sideburns, carrying a bag of money.

"From a Jewish perspective, we know what it is like to be hated and a community wanting to get rid of us," she said. "Our response as Jews is to make sure that this never happens to anyone else again."

Her Muslim friends in and around her New Jersey community of North Brunswick have seen an astonishing rise in overt displays of hatred directed at them, she said. "The hate they have seen in the past two years is unbelievable," Olitzky said.

She also has seen a rise in hatred toward Jews long before the 2018 Pittsburgh synagogue massacre, during which witnesses said the shooter shouted, "All Jews must die."

Olitzky has heard stories of Muslim children being bullied and intimidated at school and being told that their grandparents should be sent out of the country. "No kids should fear this. As Jews, as Muslims, as Americans, we have a responsibility to do everything we can to change this."



Photo credit: Samir Ahmad

Executive Director Sheryl Olitzky (left), a marketing professional and Atiya Aftab, an attorney and academic, founded the Sisterhood of Salaam Shalom.

Being objects of hatred has helped forge bonds among the Muslim and Jewish women, she said. But there are other, more pleasant bonds to dwell on, too.

Sisterhood groups often are struck by language similarities between Hebrew and Arabic, rituals such as funerals that have similar characteristics and similarities in cuisine and a sense that it is the obligation of both to repair the world.

Aftab was the first person Olitzky sought to help her form the first Muslim-Jewish women's group. After her trip to Poland, Olitzky contacted a local imam whom she knew and asked him to suggest a Muslim woman. He suggested Aftab. Olitzky called her. No response. She called again. And again.

"This was the last thing I was interested in doing at the time," recalled Aftab. "I did not call her back." After two more calls, Aftab thought "Oh my god, this woman is serious. Let me meet with her. It won't go anywhere." But it did. The two women met up at a local coffee shop. "We just hit it off. It felt like we had known each other for years," Aftab said.

And she accepted the hand that Olitzky had extended. "All busy people have to prioritize what is important and realize opportunities don't always land when they are perfect," Aftab said. "I was glad to recognize this and join her as a partner in this effort."

A month later, 12 women, six Jewish and six Muslim, whom Aftab and Olitzky had

recruited, got together at Aftab's house. "It was magical. We did not need any kind of agenda. We were so excited to realize how much commonality there was and how much of a connection there was. We were all interesting women. We happened to all be mothers. And we were all active in different areas," Aftab said. "Forget the religious aspect. We all just connected."

They also agreed that the meetings should continue in private homes. "We said we don't want this to be situated in religious institutions. They are still patriarchal. We wanted to open our homes and hearts to people. It changes the narrative when it is in someone's home," Aftab said.

### Building Bridges

In Northern Virginia Wahba and her fellow pediatrician Sue Kohn formed the group three years ago, after Kohn had learned of the organization and wanted to create a sisterhood in her community. The experience has been full of love and enlightenment, Wahba said.

"It is educational and enriching, and I am getting to know my sisters, whom I love." The husbands and boyfriends "are very jealous," she said, laughing.

"I am educating myself and educating the generation to come. We are building bridges and getting to know one another human to human. There is no baggage."

## The Sisterhood of Salaam Shalom: Finding Common Ground



Sisterhood members on a visit to Washington, D.C.'s Islamic Mosque and Cultural Center.

Kohn said their meetings usually have a focus. “We usually have something to talk about, but we understand that just getting together is worth it too.”

This night’s topic is the #MeToo movement, and Kohn is leading the discussion, using a whiteboard and calling on anyone who volunteers to speak. The conversation edges toward the notion of equality in relationships between men and women.

One Muslim woman describes her home life this way: “We both take out the trash, fold laundry and do dishes. My husband cooks. I stopped cooking a few years ago.” But she is the handiest: “Anything that needs to be fixed, I fix.”

Another woman, who is Jewish, pays the bills. “My husband would not do it,” she said.

A Muslim woman who said she is originally from Turkey, had a different view. “I don’t believe in equality, but I do believe in completing each other. My dad and my mom, they have their roles, they are happy in that,” she said. “We cannot be equal. They (men) can never give birth.”

Many of the women recounted incidents where they had been sexually harassed

and had not spoken up. “We could all tell stories,” said one of the Jewish women. “I didn’t know how to deal with it.”

Wahba said she was glad the #MeToo issues were attracting greater public attention. “I think we always have been talking about it.”

For Kohn, the conversations are inspiring. “Just sitting down in a room like this does a lot to break down stereotypes. That is what makes it so lovely to be in this group.”

Olitzky said that the small groups “are the heart of what we do.” There is a guidebook and a curriculum, monthly webinars, videos and a help desk for the leaders to call on for advice. Each group must have two leaders — one Muslim and one Jewish. There are regional meetings and an annual meeting. The challenge, as the organization expands, is to be sure to maintain contact “and be sure everyone is learning,” Olitzky said.

The last annual meeting, held in Doylestown, Pennsylvania, on the weekend after the massacre of 11 worshippers at the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh, focused on that horrific event. “When the shooting happened, our Muslim sisters reached out to the Jewish sisters to offer emotional and

physical support,” Olitzky said. “This was genuine and came about because of the relationship. It was demonstrated through phone calls, attending synagogue together, letter and card writing, delivering meals.”

But the Sisterhood intentionally stays away from Israel-Palestine issues. “This is not the purpose of the Sisterhood,” said Olitzky. Yet, she added, there is a curriculum “for our chapters to follow if they are ready to enter into this challenging conversation.” If the group decides to take on this topic, the conversations are tightly structured, with the women pairing up and each speaking for five minutes. The method, Olitzky said, is “one of the classic techniques used in interfaith dialogue.”

Besides the local and regional meetings, the Sisterhood has organized trips. In 2018, a group from around the United States took a tour of civil rights sites. Previously, there was a trip to Azerbaijan and the Balkans. There is also a recent effort to create chapters of teenage girls, Muslim and Jewish.

“You take two people who are different from each other, in this case a Muslim and a Jew, and bring them together in a safe space, in each other’s homes, this will build positive relationships,” said Olitzky.

She had little sense when she started the first Sisterhood group that it would grow into an internationally recognized organization. “We know that we can change the perceptions of Muslims and Jews in the Islamic community and in the Jewish community,” she said. “And we have proof that the Sisterhood is changing things.”

Olitzky’s trip to Poland in 2010 was jarring. “There was overt anti-Jewish behavior and rhetoric on the streets.” A guide, explaining why she saw no one who was of color, LGBTQ, Asian, Muslim or Jewish, told her: “Poland is for the Poles. There is no Muslim problem because they are not welcome here.”

Olitzky returned home to New Jersey, puzzling over what she had seen and heard. “There are lots of babies coming into this world. I could sit back and complain about the hatred or I could do my part to change it. It took me a while to figure out what to do.”

Initially, she thought about forming a small group in her community, which has

## The Sisterhood of Salaam Shalom: Finding Common Ground

sizeable Jewish and Muslim populations. “I decided, ‘let’s start there and let’s build relations.’ These are two communities that distrust each other.” There was a connection, although a not particularly happy one. “We are hated by the same people, so let’s come together.”

Soon there were 12 women, getting together on a regular basis, who now “are truly sisters,” Olitzky said. “Women come together as strangers, and they evolve into friends, and friendship changes dramatically as they become ‘sisters,’” she said. Now, “these are our family members and we will do anything to protect our family members.”

Most of the focus on Judaism in the news, Olitzky said, “has to do with Israel and the political situation surrounding that in Israel and America. As opposed to people really understanding the values of Judaism, what it stands for and what as Jews we are obligated to do.”

And for Islam, she said, the public perception is that it is a “religion of terrorism. Nothing could be further from the truth than that.”

While the Sisterhood meetings don’t shy away from tough topics, Olitzky has a curriculum that lays out how to approach the first year, and it discourages talk of politics or the Middle East.

### Birthing a Chapter

Najiyah Khan is a PTA president, a consultant with a major firm and a Muslim member of the Sisterhood. With her Jewish counterpart Susan Morawetz, the women have organized a Sisterhood branch in suburban Maryland.

Khan had heard that there was a Washington, D.C., chapter of the Sisterhood. “I cold emailed Sheryl.” Khan got a response with information about a D.C. chapter. “Then I let it sit on the back burner for a while.”

But during the summer of 2016, she dug out the information. “During Trump’s campaign that summer, I reached out again and found there were a few women in Montgomery County also seeking to get together.”

The women — three Jews and two Muslims — gathered for dinner to talk about possibilities.

“We decided to slowly reach out to women we knew who we thought would be interested. We recruited about 12 to 15 women, trying to get it diverse, to get an even number of Jewish women and Muslim women. The main thing was trying to be equal. We also were trying to get different levels of interest, faith, ages, races.”

It was, Khan said, “a very interesting time to birth a chapter.”

The women try to meet once a month at someone’s home. “We try to have an agenda,” said Khan. “We put a poll on Survey Monkey, try to have topics, and general conversation about what is happening in the world. And we kind of just hang out.”

The group did a model Seder at Passover and a model pre-Ramadan meal. It also took part in a local protest about intolerance and participated in an interfaith walk in Washington, D.C., to show solidarity against hatred.

There has been some turnover of its membership, Khan said, partly because the Muslim women tend to be younger and busier. Attracting older Muslim women, who often have a more traditional background and less interfaith experience, has proved a challenge.



Sacramento, California Sisterhood members “pray with their feet” — Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel’s paraphrase of Frederick Douglass’s description of his actions to further civil rights – to keep families together.

“A lot of our Muslim women in their 30s and 40s have kids and a lot of pulls on their attention,” Khan said. “On the Jewish sister side, they are mostly older, they have more time to commit.” But for now, the group is pretty stable and members are very committed, she said.

### Nonpartisan and Nonprofit

By late 2013, the growth of the Sisterhood was so vast that Olitzky talked Aftab into organizing it as a nonprofit. Aftab is now the board chair; Olitzky is the executive director.

“We are nonpartisan as a nonprofit. But we deal with issues. We are living in a climate, quite frankly, when many of the political leaders subtly are supporting white nationalists, or nationalism, as it is called. We can’t help but talk about these issues. It just underscores the work that we do and how important it is,” Aftab said. The organization, for instance, has encouraged its members to participate in voter registration — a nonpartisan issue.

The Sisterhood has attracted international attention, and women in Europe and Israel have asked to form chapters. Olitzky says for now the organization is focused on North America, in part because it is still lacking sufficient bandwidth to expand, and in part because she views the need in North America as substantial and something she and her colleagues can tackle.

“There is so much work to do in North America. There is a need for this throughout the world for sure. But until we meet our goals in North America, we are not able to move out further.”

To learn more about the Sisterhood of Salaam Shalom, visit their website:  
<https://sosspeace.org/>

## Editor's Note

There is no easy way to say this. These are perilous, polarized times. Here in the United States and abroad, we see the resurgence of anti-Semitism — ranging from rhetoric to violence and coming from both the Left and the Right. Support for Israel in particular seems to be the *bête noir* on the Left; age-old canards fuel violent extremism on the Right. In this issue, B'nai B'rith International President Charles O. Kaufman and CEO Daniel S. Mariaschin offer their own perspectives on this vexing, seemingly intractable problem.

But lest hate go unchallenged, there is another narrative, told in our story of The Sisterhood of Salaam Shalom, a growing movement in which Jewish and Muslim women get together to share their everyday lives, discovering what they have in common rather than what divides them.

Elsewhere for the Spring, we offer a potpourri of features: A look back at entertainer Eddie “Banjo Eyes” Cantor, a B'nai B'rith superstar of his era who spoke out against the growing threat of Nazism; a touching recollection of the relationship between Julius Rosenwald, the Sears Roebuck owner and Jewish philanthropist, and a young Polish chess player; recipes and reflections on global traditions around the Passover Seder plate; and Israeli advances in adaptive technologies for the vision and motor impaired. Finally, our seniors columnist expresses the hope that the new Congress can find bipartisan solutions to long-festered problems.



— Eugene L. Meyer

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## From the Vault

## Eddie “Banjo Eyes” Cantor and B’nai B’rith

By Cheryl Kempler

A world-renowned superstar of his day and “America’s most well-known member of the B’nai B’rith,” Eddie Cantor was a vaudeville comic before making it big in one of the opulent Broadway revues produced by the legendary Florenz Ziegfeld.

Born Israel Itzkowitz on the Lower East Side, in Hollywood he was featured in some of the earliest big budget musicals filmed in color. An agile, rubber-legged dancer, Cantor rolled his expressive, often caricatured “banjo eyes,” while he delivered signature numbers like “Ida” — a tribute to his wife’s charms — and “Makin’ Whoopee,” a cynical riff on love and marriage. On Sunday nights, when the most popular programs aired, Americans tuned into Cantor’s 1930s radio show.

David Weinstein has attempted to revive the comedian’s reputation in his 2017 biography “The Eddie Cantor Story” (Brandeis University Press), which documents Cantor’s career, the pride he took in his Jewish heritage and his defense of causes that were not popular at the time.

A member of the Los Angeles Lodge from the early 1930s, he traveled extensively to raise money for B’nai B’rith, writing in the organization’s magazine that “All Jews, for their own protection, and for their families, should join B’nai B’rith, the greatest Jewish organization in the world [where] Jews of all shades of opinion...come.”

Cantor set aside his comic persona when he supported philanthropies that rescued German Jewish children and made speeches attacking anti-Semitism in Germany and



On the cover of the National Jewish Monthly (which would become today’s B’nai B’rith Magazine), a beaming Eddie Cantor (center) bonded with two distinguished Jewish visitors from the Soviet Union, Yiddish poet Itzik Feffer (left) and actor-director Solomon Mikhoels. They were sent to the U.S. to promote goodwill for Russia’s and America’s wartime alliance.

the United States. As the nation desperately attempted to avoid war, Cantor received death threats and was castigated as unpatriotic after speaking at the 1939 World’s Fair, where he vilified anti-Jewish radio preacher Charles Coughlin and leading auto manufacturer Henry Ford, who had published anti-Semitic tracts and had accepted an award from the Nazis.

Accused of choosing his religion over his country — evidencing the precarious tightrope American Jews were forced to walk — Cantor lost his radio sponsor and

did not return to the air as host until September 1941, after his fellow B’nai B’rith member, comedian Jack Benny, interceded for him. By then, most listeners agreed with his views.

After the war, Cantor starred on television and continued to record best-selling albums in Yiddish and English. In 1953, Warner Brothers released a movie about his life, “The Eddie Cantor Story.” He died in Beverly Hills in 1964 and, like Jack Benny, is buried in Culver City, California.



## From the President

# Unity Needed in the Fight Against Anti-Semitism

*By Charles O. Kaufman*

*President, B'nai B'rith International*

Yet, history proves we are remarkably resilient. We have survived pogroms and exiles, expulsions from one country to another, even the Shoah. Still, we are accused of secretly controlling world events — even the weather! Israel is our historic homeland, but we are even blamed for declaring the existence of the modern Jewish State.

For millennia, we've encountered and fought to overcome anti-Semitism. We distribute materials, invite guest speakers and hold conferences. We've tried to lessen the burden by assimilating, by embracing a universal perspective and, through tikkun olam, by attempting to repair the world. Even such benign efforts have failed to cure this insidious disease.

In America, freedom of religion is enshrined in the First Amendment. Yet, anti-Semitism not only remains alive but seems recently to have intensified, both at home and abroad. We remember Charlottesville. We remember Pittsburgh. But remembrance alone is simply not enough.

Within our varied communities, we have our denominational divisions, and our politics span the spectrum. A growing number of assimilated Jews resent a growing number of observant Jews — and vice versa. Our divisions sometimes overshadow our common goals, needs and responses.

On at least this one front, unity of purpose and a cohesive message may offer the path forward to combat if not erase anti-Semitism. During biblical days and since, when we Jews are united, we have



In Israel, the Committee to Recognize the Heroism of Jewish Rescuers During the Holocaust joins with the B'nai B'rith World Center-Jerusalem to honor the heroism of men and women who risked their lives to save co-religionists. The citation is awarded at a ceremony held at the B'nai B'rith Martyrs' Forest, planted in memory of those who perished during the Shoah.

furthered the common cause. Judaism gains strength when its followers come together.

But then we learn this: A recent survey conducted for the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany by Shoen Consulting reported that 41 percent of Americans couldn't identify Auschwitz. Among millennials, that number rose to 66 percent. And Holocaust denial continues

and seems to gain adherents throughout the world. How is this possible, what with eyewitness accounts, survivor testimonials, archival material, museums, books, films, the mass media? Is it indifference, as Elie Wiesel would warn, or plain ignorance? The answer is clearly both.

When educators and religious leaders devote more time and energy to teaching

## From the President

# Unity Needed in the Fight Against Anti-Semitism

our people and others how and why Jews have been vilified for centuries, the more future generations will be able to teach the broader community the truth about the lies. That reality, however, will require one thing summed up in a single word — Unity.

That means rabbis, educators, parents and college students will have to get educated about this nefarious, venomous belief system, no matter how uncomfortable the topic. We must stand together to learn the unvarnished truth, which is crucial to override the lies of haters.

B'nai B'rith, during its “Unto Every Person There is a Name” program, teaches “Never Again.” Yet, “Never” never comes. We need not only to confront but to educate ourselves and others. B'nai B'rith has two Facebook pages — Never Means Never and the Anti-Semitism Action Group of B'nai B'rith— that focus on the history and reports of anti-Semitism. They offer credible, factual sources. Read, “like” and “share” these pages with others.

We know knowledge is power, but we also know that we have the power of a Jewish homeland — the biblical and modern State of Israel. Regardless of what Diaspora Jews think of Israel politically, the vast majority of Israelis will do nothing they believe will jeopardize its security.

Fighting anti-Semitism has long been the hallmark of our work at B'nai B'rith. Others



Members of the Chesapeake Bay Region take part in “Unto Every Person There Is a Name,” a project in which the names of Holocaust victims are read aloud on Yom Hashoah.

have attempted to emulate our efforts; some have modified our mission. So, what’s missing? Unity.

So I call on the world Jewish community to follow B'nai B'rith in confronting anti-Semitism, either directly or indirectly by educating our youth and their parents.

Generations removed from the Holocaust have felt fatigued from being burdened by the Shoah, by religious observance or by

being different from others. The B'nai B'rith family is proud of its identity, its Hebrew name, aspiring to follow many observances and to perform mitzvot.

But what B'nai B'rith does best and what all Jews of all stripes must do is, as the Talmud teaches, comprehend the power of “Kol Yisrael Arevim Zeh Bazeh”— “all of Israel is responsible for one another.” That is where we begin.





From the CEO

## The Many Faces of Contemporary Anti-Semitism

By *Daniel S. Mariaschin*

*B'nai B'rith Executive Vice President and Chief Executive Officer*

It didn't take long for Rashida Tlaib, the newly elected Palestinian-American congresswoman from Michigan, to launch a classic anti-Semitic canard at supporters of pending anti-BDS (Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions) legislation in the U.S. Senate.

In a Tweet, four days after being sworn in, Tlaib said "They forgot what country they represent. This is where boycotting is a right and part of our historical fight for freedom & equality."

Our Tweeted response was quick and to the point: "We are disgusted by incoming Rep. Rashida Tlaib's insinuation that supporters of an anti-BDS bill 'forgot what country they represent.' Tlaib's unsubtle questioning of pro-Israel supporters of allegiance to the U.S. is the latest iteration of the age-old anti-Semitic trope of Jewish 'dual loyalty.'"

Questioning the loyalty of American Jews is indeed an old tactic of anti-Semites, but the chutzpah of Tlaib, having no compunction about trumpeting it through the internet, is a deep cause for concern. That these words tumbled out from a member of Congress only serves to legitimize the use of such language not only by confirmed anti-Semites, but by others who will be drawn in by her slightly veiled dog-whistle rhetoric.

Tlaib's was not an uninformed comment or a slip of the tongue. I have personally heard foreign diplomats, some government officials and even some clergymen refer, in conversation about Israel, to "your country." Oftentimes, a tactful reminder that "America is my country, but we are strong



supporters of Israel," is enough to clarify the situation. We are identified with Israel, and it is possible that among some, there is confusion, since most of these folks do know we are Americans. But Tlaib's intention was to injure Israel's standing in Congress and in the country.

The eminent jurist Louis D. Brandeis understood this issue early on. In a speech delivered in 1915, Brandeis said, "Let no American imagine that Zionism is inconsistent with Patriotism, Multiple loyalties are objectionable only if they are inconsistent. A man is a better citizen of the United States for also being a loyal citizen of his state... every American Jew who aids in advancing the Jewish settlement in Palestine... will likewise be a better man and a better American for doing so. There is no inconsistency

between loyalty to America and loyalty to Jewry."

Two years before that, in 1913, my mother — then 12 years old — representing the young people of the community, was asked to speak at a celebration for the new building of Bangor, Maine's, Congregation Beth Israel. In her remarks quoted in the Bangor Daily Commercial, she said: "Our purpose is to help once more uplift the Hebrew flag, without wishing in any way, to detract from the greatness of, or letting it in any way, affect our allegiance to, the Stars and Stripes."

Indeed, that is the American way. Ethnic Americans — Irish, Greeks, Italians, and so many others — hold strong ties to ancestral homelands. Those connections are not just cultural; in support of close

## From the CEO

# The Many Faces of Contemporary Anti-Semitism

bilateral ties with the United States, these communities often lobby Congress, take out advertisements online and in print, mount demonstrations and sponsor parades and celebrations marking annual national days and other important dates on the calendar. That they can openly and actively engage in such activity is what has separated the United States from the rest of the international community.

The good news is most Americans understand this, and see it as not only normal, but a valued part of our lives as Americans. The not so good news is that, to borrow a line from the Passover Haggadah, “in every generation there are those who rise against us.” By bringing the bilge of dual loyalty to the surface, Tlaib has already signaled her interest in doing all she can to demonize Israel and those who support it, and especially to mark those supporters as disloyal to our country.

Tlaib's remarks come against the backdrop of a significant rise in European anti-Semitism. In Europe, we're witnessing a perfect storm of anti-Semitism from the Left the Right and from Islamist groups across the continent. From the Left it is often anti-Israel focused; from the Right, it usually manifests itself through classic tropes about control of the banks and the media. The threats are real: Violent acts and intimidation against European Jews fill a list that seems to grow by the day.

A recent poll of European Jews from 12 European Union States, conducted by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, produced some startling, but for many not surprising, results. Ninety percent of those polled felt that anti-Semitism is on the uptick in their country. Ninety percent are deeply concerned about anti-Semitism

online, 70 percent about its presence in public spaces, and 30 percent have been personally harassed. Perhaps most discouraging: 80 percent don't report incidents to the police because they feel it will make no difference. Thirty percent are contemplating emigrating.

That anti-Semitism in Europe is a concern is not necessarily news. That it is so widespread, thanks to the internet (but not only that), and nearly every Jewish person polled feels it is now impacting their daily lives in the countries they live, should serve as more than just a wake-up call.

Our European Union office in Brussels, headed by Ben Naegele, has been very much at the center of action aimed at addressing these threats. Ben works closely with Katherina Von Schnurbein, the European Commission's Coordinator on Combating Anti-Semitism, and with members of the European Parliament, among others, to build structures and programs to counteract the proliferation of hatred directed toward the Jewish communities of Europe.

B'nai B'rith Europe has hosted a major conference on the future of Jewish communities in Europe. Last year, the Italian government, in its role as chair of both the OSCE (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe) and the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA), hosted a conference on anti-Semitism that drew high-level European diplomats and representatives of human rights organizations, including B'nai B'rith. I was one of those who made a presentation at the gathering.

In February, I was honored to provide the opening remarks at a conference, “The Fight Against Anti-Semitism: From Policy to Action,” which focused on anti-Semitism in



European Commission Coordinator on Combating Anti-Semitism Katharina von Schnurbein addresses delegates attending the October 2017 B'nai B'rith Leadership Forum in Prague, Czech Republic.

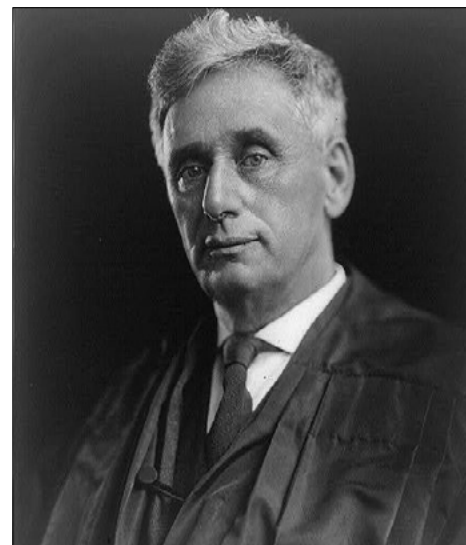


Photo credit: Library of Congress Prints and Photo Collection, Washington, DC

Supreme Court Justice Louis D. Brandeis.

Europe and was held in Brussels under the auspices of the Romanian presidency of the European Union (EU) Council.

To say that with regard to anti-Semitism, “the more things change, the more they stay the same,” would be to minimize what is happening. That after more than

## From the CEO

350 years have passed since Jews arrived on these shores, we still must deal with a dual loyalty charge, and nearly 75 years after the Holocaust, we are seeing a dramatic increase in anti-Semitism in the continent which saw the greatest tragedy to befall our people, clearly demonstrates how important it is that we substantially increase our efforts to beat back the virus of hatred in the 21st century. IHRA's working definition of anti-Semitism, which incorporates wording that addresses the demonization of Israel, and which is beginning to be adopted by governments, political parties and others, is an important step in the right direction, since to prevail in these battles, we need friends and allies from outside our community.

You can count on B'nai B'rith to continue to be at the forefront of these absolutely vital efforts.



B'nai B'rith CEO Daniel S. Mariaschin with then-Italian Ambassador to Israel Francesco Maria Talo at the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance meetings on anti-Semitism sponsored by the Italian government in Rome in January 2018.

To hear a podcast, "B'nai B'rith's Work Combating Anti-Semitism in Europe," a conversation with Daniel S. Mariaschin and Benjamin Naegele, visit:

<https://www.bnaibrith.org/podcasts/bnai-briths-work-combating-anti-semitism-in-europe>

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# To See and Walk: Israeli Start-Ups Adapt Technology for the Blind and Disabled

By Michele Chabin

Moshe Fischer has been legally blind his entire life.

Born with a rare genetic disorder called ocular albinism, Fischer, 68, has spent much of his life struggling to read and navigate in a sighted world.

In the years before magnifiers, Fischer, a longtime health care administrator, was unable to read things on a blackboard, so he taped his university's lecturers' classes.

"Sometimes it took four hours to go over a two-hour lecture," Fischer recalled. Once video magnifiers were invented, "I read what I needed to read, hunched over a desk and had frequent headaches."

Fischer's life was transformed four years ago, when he learned about the OrCam MyEye, a tiny Israeli-made artificial vision device that audibly reads text — any text — on any surface, and without the need for Wi-Fi or strong lighting.

Roughly the size of a finger and weighing just .8 ounces, the device clips onto the user's eyeglasses. When the user points to some text, MyEye reads it aloud at the desired volume. It also recognizes money notes (a dollar bill, for example), products (a credit card, a brand of cornflakes), street signs, faces and shades of color.

Before the OrCam, Fischer said, "I couldn't go to a bookstore and find a book and read the blurb on the back cover. I would go to a mall but couldn't see products or read display signs. I couldn't read street signs. Now I can go into a bookstore and choose a book, or into an electronics store and read about a product. I can read the overhead signs posted in the Central Bus Station. I can read street numbers, building numbers. The OrCam helps me tremendously."

The OrCam MyEye is one of the many assistive or adaptive technology products that address the needs of elderly people



Photo credits: Courtesy of OrCam Technologies

Incorporating a camera, speaker and artificial intelligence, the latest version of the now-wireless OrCam MyEye relies on cutting edge technology. It has greatly enhanced the lives of visually impaired users.

and people with disabilities. Some of the best are being developed in Israel.

## Israel at the Forefront

Samantha Rush Soclof, innovation associate at the ALYN Hospital for children, Israel's

## To See and Walk: Israeli Start-Ups Adapt Technology for the Blind and Disabled



Photo credit: Courtesy of Firefly by Lecky

Debby Elnatan invented Upsee, a harness which enables young children with mobility issues to stand and walk, assisted by an adult. Elnatan is the mother of a son who has cerebral palsy.

only pediatric and adolescent rehabilitation facility, said Israel is “at the forefront” of assistive technology and rehabilitation technology.

“Israel is the start-up nation, so this is a natural extension of this,” Soclof said.

In the past few years, she has seen a growing number of companies that have created not only products specifically for people with disabilities, but also companies that have realized that their existing technologies can be adapted for their use.

“One example is that companies that utilized virtual reality for gaming are now focusing on rehab,” she said.

ALYN, which custom-builds assistive devices for individual children in its 5,400 square-foot “Innovation Space,” also brings together hospital staff and high-tech entrepreneurs to develop, and eventually market, such products.

Several years ago Debby Elnatan designed an upright mobility device called the Firefly Upsee that enabled her son Rotem, who has spastic cerebral palsy, to walk, run and play while harnessed to an adult. Today, the device is manufactured in Ireland (Elna-



Photo credits: courtesy of ReWalk

The FDA-approved ReWalk, a wearable robotic exoskeleton designed for paraplegics with sufficient upper-body strength, is also used by the United States Veterans Administration for rehabilitation therapy.

tan receives royalties), and thousands have been sold to customers in 140 countries.

“My goal has been getting children out of their wheelchairs,” Elnatan, an American Israeli from Syracuse, New York, said during a presentation at a tech incubator in 2016, when she described herself as a “serial inventor and entrepreneur” in the assistive technology sphere.

Now, Elnatan is seeking investors in the hopes of developing a therapeutic device to reduce spasticity, a condition where the brain produces involuntary muscle contractions. Millions of people worldwide live with spasticity, a potential multi-billion dollar per year market.



Always seeking ways to help her son, the entrepreneurial mom, who is also a musician, discovered that his spasticity decreased dramatically within a week of listening to certain sound frequencies. In a small trial, Israeli researchers matched nine pairs of children with spastic cerebral palsy. Half the children received auditory stimulation combined with music, while the other half listened only to music. Improvements in motor function, communication and an easing up of the caretaker burden were some of the outcomes reported in the research that was recently published in PLOS ONE.

## To See and Walk: Israeli Start-Ups Adapt Technology for the Blind and Disabled

“The youngest child learned to independently crawl, sit and walk with a walker” after the trial, while the other child in the matched pair “barely progressed,” Elnatan said.

### Re-Walking to Regain Self-Control

Amit Goffer, a former Air Force captain who has a doctorate in electrical and computer engineering, was inspired to create the ReWalk after he suffered a spinal cord injury that left him almost completely paralyzed from the neck down. The FDA-approved device, a wearable robotic exoskeleton that enables paraplegics who have upper-body strength to walk, is used by hundreds of private individuals and the Veterans Administration for rehabilitation and everyday use.

Goffer calls ReWalk an “excellent device” for people who have the use of their arms and can use crutches — only a small percentage of wheelchair users.

Still, Goffer, a quadriplegic, dreamed of developing a product that would provide mobility to people like him while standing upright. Called UPnRIDE, the wheeled robotic device

allows users who find it difficult to stand up to sit in a “standing” position. The adjustable seat height also allows users to be at eye level with others, in a seated position. The device is both for sitting and standing — two different positions. It also reclines and, in a seated position, can elevate so the user can sit and be at eye level with someone sitting on a high bar stool, for example. The company hopes to gain FDA approval by the end of 2019. It is expected to cost between \$20,000 and \$30,000, the same price as other high-end wheelchairs.

What makes UPnRIDE “unique,” Goffer said, is that it can be used outside on terrain that isn’t flat.

“It’s very, very stable, even on slopes, uphill and downhill. Whether you stand or sit, you are in the same center of gravity. Our technology keeps the user vertical. With other standing wheelchairs there’s a risk of tipping over.”

Goffer said the device, which he uses when attending professional conferences, has changed his life.

“I don’t have the words to describe what it means to be eye level with peo-

ple who are standing. Having to look up all the time is a loss of dignity.”

From a medical perspective, he added, being upright helps individuals with mobility impairment to maintain their blood pressure, prevent pressure sores and improve bowel function.

After the media reported that Goffer used the device during his own daughter’s wedding, Adir Simantov, a young paraplegic who works in high-tech, contacted the company to ask whether he could use the UPnRIDE during his wedding in November 2018.

Several weeks after the wedding, Simantov, who was injured in a car accident six years ago, called the device “so user friendly.” Being able to stand upright under the chuppah “made my wedding,” he said. “When I stood up and looked into my bride’s eyes, I felt like a whole person again. Amit made my dream come true.”

### Investing for Better Lives, and for Profit

Jon Medved, CEO of OurCrowd, a Jerusalem-based equity crowdfunding platform for investors to provide venture capital for early-stage Israeli startups,



Photo credit: Courtesy of Adir Simantov

With the help of UPnRide newlywed Adir Simantov realized his dream of standing under the chuppah with his bride.



Photo credit: courtesy of Softwheel

Softwheel, a Tel Aviv-based start-up, produces specialty wheels with shock-absorbing internal suspension systems, suitable for wheelchairs and other vehicles.

## To See and Walk: Israeli Start-Ups Adapt Technology for the Blind and Disabled

said the company has invested in both ReWalk and UPnRIDE because these devices help people live better lives.

“We like impact investing. We’ve found that you can make money, do good and do it all in Israel.” The combination “attracts investors and helps people at the same time.”

When Medved saw photos of Simantov standing in the UpnRide under the chuppah, he shed some happy tears.

“It’s hard not to have an emotional response when you see what this tech can do for people,” he said.

Tzipora Lubarr, director of marketing for SoftWheel, a Tel Aviv-based startup that produces specialty wheels for wheelchairs (as well as bicycles and cars) with an internal suspension system that works as a shock absorber, said speaking with clients who have benefited from the product is the best part of her job.

“It’s an amazing thing to create a product that’s making an immediate difference in people’s lives. Wheelchairs don’t ordinarily have suspension, so the vibrations enter the frame and the wheelchair rider’s body, especially on uneven surfaces. I see people roll in who are clearly in pain and roll out with a smile. I see how technology is impacting people’s day-to-day lives,” Lubarr said. The product is sold mainly in the United States, Europe and Israel, and costs vary, depending on insurance coverage and other factors.

Ziv Aviram and Amnon Shashua, the co-founders of Mobileye, the collision avoidance system and autonomous driving innovator, could have retired after Intel acquired their Jerusalem-based company in 2017 for \$15.3 billion, but they wanted to continue to “influence the world on a big scale,” Aviram said.

“We love the idea that tech can assist humanity.”

Still, he emphasized, it can take years for technology to catch up to an inventor’s vision.

The first generation of the MyEye came with a pack the size of a smartphone that held the battery and computer, which was connected to the head unit by



Photo credit: Michael Lev

Ziv Aviram is president and co-founder of OrCam.

a thin cord. Today’s second-generation device is completely wireless, the size of a cigarette lighter, but not as heavy.

Recent advancements in the device’s hardware, including the tiny camera and speaker, and in artificial intelligence and algorithms, have made all the difference, Aviram said as he demonstrated the newer device in his Jerusalem office.

While the technology is cutting edge, he said, “We also put a lot of effort into creating a human interface in a very intuitive way. It’s easy to operate.”

After placing the device on the arm of his eyeglasses, Aviram opened a book and pointed to some text with his index finger. MyEye read the text out loud.

Next, he mentioned this reporter’s name and pointed to me. A moment later the device stated, “Woman. Michele.”

“Usually our users will use the device to recognize 20 to 50 people,” Aviram said, something that allows them to distinguish between, say, their various grandchildren, or friends or work colleagues.

The company is developing a version of the device for sighted people who want to keep track of the people they meet at conferences or other large settings.

Regardless of how the devices are used, “we maintain the full privacy of our customers.

We don’t need the internet at all. Nothing goes to the Cloud” storage system, Aviram said.

Fischer, one of the first people to utilize the device, said he doesn’t know how he lived without it.

He values the face recognition feature because he has five married children and many grandchildren.

“I have a few grandchildren who are almost the same age, and in the workplace, it can be difficult to discern who is speaking in a group of four, five or six people.

“It’s happened to me that I was speaking to the wrong person for five minutes, but the person didn’t correct me because he didn’t want to embarrass me. Now I put that person into the OrCam’s memory.”

Thanks to the reading feature, Fischer can now enter bar codes to check to see which supermarket item is on sale and also check its nutritional value.

### The Joy of Reading

He is also reading for the joy of reading, something he rarely did before.

“Now I have a lot less strain when I read. Before, I read what I had to read, stooped over and avoided the nonessentials, like magazines. Now I can sit back in a recliner and read for pleasure.”

Fischer also finds it a lot easier to navigate, because he can read the lettering on a building or a street sign and orient himself.

“I’m able to be more independent,” he said, whether ordering food in a restaurant or reading a phone bill.

Perhaps most unexpectedly of all, Fischer can now read subtitles on the television screen if they don’t rush by too quickly — a handy skill in Israel, where programs in many languages are broadcast with subtitles.

Having lived with very low vision throughout his life, Fischer called the OrCam MyEye “a life-changer.”

“It’s made a tremendous difference in my life and I want to spread the good news.”

# Give Global Traditions a Seat at Your Passover Table

By Paula Shoyer

The Seder plate tells the story of the Israelite slaves in Egypt as well as their redemption. I have discovered that the particular items placed on the plate and table — as well as unique customs — tell another story of the many homelands of the Jewish people.

As my husband, Andy and I began hosting our own Seders, we developed our own customs. One year, Andy decided to tell the Maggid (story of the Exodus) part of the Seder through a play, and a family tradition was born. Each year, our guests vie for the plum roles, and once a friend brought actual costumes for the roles of Moses and the Israelites.

Another custom we hold dear is singing Chad Gadya, sounding out each part. I will never forget my serious father voicing goat sounds, which had the entire table in stitches.

The items on our Seder table are typical of other families whose ancestors hail from Eastern Europe. Over the years, I have seen couples in mixed marriages, meaning Ashkenazic and Sephardic, who have learned to blend their customs. We have learned that there are many more differences between Ashkenazic and Sephardic practices beyond the spelling of charoset/haroset, respectively. Susan Berger has a Hungarian father and an American mother of Syrian descent. At their Seder, each member takes turns holding a pillowcase sack of matzoh. The other guests ask the person, with the sack where they are coming from and the holder says “Egypt.” When asked where they are going, they respond “Jerusalem.” The holder then swings the sack to the next person and the ritual is repeated. Melissa Arking, an Ashkenazi friend married to a Syrian, said that at their table, when the matzoh is passed around, a poem is read in Arabic.

Other interesting ceremonies include a tradition in Italy, Sicily and Morocco to bring the Seder plate to the table covered with a beautiful scarf while the family sings. In Tunisia and Sardinia, the Seder plate is placed on the head



Photo credit: Wikipedia

President Barack Obama celebrates Passover at the 2011 White House Seder.

of the leader, then passed around from person to person and held briefly on each head. This custom is to recall that as slaves in Egypt we carried heavy burdens on our heads.

According to Laurent Bensimon, whose family is Moroccan, when the Seder plate is passed over everyone’s heads at her family Seder, they sing “bevhilu yatzanu mimitzrayim” (in haste He took us out of Egypt).

Ethiopian Jews break all of their dishes before Passover and make new ones that they use for the year until the next Passover. This symbolizes a complete break from the past and a new start.

Persian and Afghani Jews place long green onions on the Seder plate to remind them of the whips of the Egyptians during slavery. Right before the song Dayenu, they pass them around for everyone to “whip” each other.

At our table, we dip a finger into wine during the recitation of the 10 plagues. Dalia Mor Stav, of Iraqi descent, said that at her house, the Seder leader takes a cup of wine and, at the mention of each plague, pours some of the wine into an old vessel while the guests chant the names of enemies of the people of Israel past and present, such as Haman and Amalek. At the end, the wine is discarded to symbolize casting a plague onto our enemies.

Jennifer Abadi, a writer in New York who seeks to preserve Sephardic and Judeo-Arab food traditions, published “Too Good to Passover” last year, an impressive book that is both deeply historical and full of delicious recipes and traditions. The book is organized by geographic region. For each area, she lists the items on the Seder plate, unique customs, menus for the Seder and throughout Passover, as well as what is eaten to break Passover. She



## Give Global Traditions a Seat at Your Passover Table

shares lovely personal family stories from the people she interviewed.

From Jennifer's research and others I interviewed, I learned that the Seder plate components, which I thought were fairly standard, vary widely around the world.

Brenda Gazzar, who comes from a Karaite Jewish family from Egypt, wrote about their unique customs a few years ago in the Jewish Journal. Karaite Jews rely solely on Torah rather than Rabbinic Judaism, and, for maror, her mother makes a bitter herb salad with endives, anise, butter lettuce, lemon and salt.

In her book "King Solomon's Table," Joan Nathan explains how horseradish root is not available in Recife, Brazil, which has a Jewish community dating back to the 1600s, so there is a version with wasabi powder, beets, sugar, vinegar and salt.

Vegetarians place a roasted carrot or beet on the Seder plate in lieu of the shank bone. In Georgia and Moldova, they use a roasted chicken wing as their shank bone.

Sarah Brooks, a convert, says she gets "to choose her background" and leans toward Sephardic because "the food is better." Because she is part American Indian, she includes wild rice on her Seder plate.

Many North African Jews have bowls of red wine vinegar instead of salt water. Greek Jews put out cider vinegar and Mexican Jews use lime juice.

As for matzoh, among the Bene Israel community of India, extended families went from home to home to help each one bake enough matzoh for the entire week.

Dana Marlowe of Washington, D.C., says, "We place an orange on our Seder plate every single year, as a sign of inclusion for all Jewish lesbian women and gay men. By showing this symbol of solidarity, we make a statement toward inclusiveness in modern society."

Regarding the roasted egg, Susan Barocas, a D.C. chef and writer of Turkish background,



In the 21st century, Passover honors tradition....



... and encourages innovation.

## Give Global Traditions a Seat at Your Passover Table

serves her guests the Sephardic huevos haminados, eggs simmered for 6 to 8 hours with lots of onion skins, peppercorns and some oil to keep the water from boiling out so fast. Some Turkish Jews add coffee grinds to the cooking liquid. Yemenite Jews eat eggs as the main course at their Seders.

In the country of Georgia, they play a game before the meal where each person takes a hard-boiled egg and bangs it against another person's egg to break it. The winner is the person whose egg has no cracks.

Charoset is what sets the Jewish world apart on Passover and I discovered so many variations made with local ingredients — recipes far more interesting than I ever imagined.

Charoset is almost always a paste to remind us of the mortar used by Israelite slaves for building in Egypt. In Gibraltar, Jews add actual dust from bricks to their charoset.

Maryland resident Sofia Abraham Mendoza was born in Guatemala, but her background is Spanish-Portuguese. At her house, charoset is made with dates, apples, toasted almonds, date or pomegranate syrup, wine, cardamom, cinnamon, cloves and orange. She also uses grated ginger for maror, but she's certain "someone, somewhere would object."

In Cuba, traditional fruits are often not available, so Cuban Jews created "Charoset of the Oppressed" made of matzoh, honey, cinnamon and wine. If you incorporate this tradition, it will remind everyone at the table of the plight of Cuban Jews and other oppressed people around the world.

### ITALIAN STYLE HAROSET



Yield: Serves 8 / Makes 2 cups

6 large Medjool dates (about 10 regular), finely chopped (need about 1/3 cup)

1 cup peeled and finely chopped red and/or green apples (about 1 medium red or green apple, or half of each)

1 medium whole navel orange, peeled, sectioned, then cut into

Algerians, Moroccans and Tunisians all roll charoset into balls. Barocas, a guest chef for several White House Seders during the Obama administration, served the First Family Moroccan charoset balls.

Nathan, in "King Solomon's Table," offers several charoset recipes from around the world, such as a Persian version that has cardamom and pomegranate juice. Tunisian charoset is apples, almonds, dates and dried ground rose petals. The Afghani version has oranges and cashews.

Pati Jinich, a Mexican chef who has a PBS cooking show and several cookbooks, shared how her family's charoset comprised apple, pear, walnuts or pecans and the required Manischewitz wine. Yet as a modern cook, she adds rehydrated hibiscus leaves.

Nicole Totah, whose father emigrated from Syria to the United States, serves a charoset "flight," and each guest receives small amounts of charoset from around the world. Guests discuss the origin of each ingredient. This tradition is a beautiful way to connect with Jews all over the Diaspora.

Last Passover, in Israel, I discovered Ben and Jerry's charoset-flavored ice cream, first introduced in 2015 and produced only in Israel. After my family and friends laughed about it, we were delighted with how tasty it was. The flavor demonstrates how essential charoset is to our Passover experience. The taste was definitely Ashkenazi.

Clearly, Passover traditions continue to evolve. We should use our Seders as an opportunity to connect not just with our ancestors in Egypt, but also with Jews of different backgrounds from the past and present.

small 1/4-inch chunks (need 1/2 cup)

1/2 cup finely chopped chestnuts (from package or freshly boiled and peeled)

1/3 cup pignoli nuts

1/2 cup mashed bananas (about 1 medium banana)

2 tablespoons sweet red Passover wine

1/8 to 1/4 teaspoon ground cinnamon

1/8 teaspoon ground cloves

1/2 to 1 teaspoon of sugar, if desired

Pinch of salt

2 to 3 teaspoons freshly squeezed lemon juice, strained

1. Combine all the ingredients in an airtight container and refrigerate at least 2 hours or overnight to allow flavors to meld.

2. Serve haroset at room temperature in one or two small dessert bowls at either end of the Seder table.

© Jennifer Abadi, from "Too Good To Passover: Sephardic & Judeo-Arab Seder Menus and Memories from Africa, Asia and Europe."

## For the New Year: Old World Tastes and Modern Methods

### SEDER PLATE SALAD



Serves 6

Prep time: 10 minutes

Cook time: 10 minutes

Advance prep: Dressing and lamb may be made 2 days in advance

Equipment:

Cutting board

- knives
- measuring cups and spoons
- small saucepan
- tongs
- small bowl
- whisk
- large serving bowl

For the salad

2 pieces of lamb shoulder (about 20 ounces/600 g total)

2 teaspoons extra virgin olive oil

Salt and black pepper

1 large head romaine lettuce, cut into 2-inch (5-cm) pieces

2 stalks celery, thinly sliced

1 cup (40 g) loosely packed fresh parsley leaves, roughly chopped

1/3 cup (40 g) walnut halves, roughly chopped into 1/2-inch (12-mm) pieces

2 apples (Red Delicious, Fuji, or Gala), cored and cut into 3/4-inch (2-cm) cubes

3 large eggs, hard-boiled and quartered

For the dressing

1/2 cup (120 mL) mayonnaise

4 teaspoons jarred white horseradish

1 tablespoon sugar

2 tablespoons sweet kosher wine

Salt and black pepper

1. Preheat oven to broil or an outdoor grill to medium-high heat.  
2. To make the lamb: Rub the lamb shoulder pieces with oil and sprinkle with salt and pepper to taste. Broil or grill for 4 to 5 minutes per side for medium rare, or until desired doneness. Let cool for 5 minutes and, if serving immediately, slice into thin, 2-inch-long (5-cm) pieces. If making in advance, wait to slice the lamb until after reheating. The lamb may be roasted 2 days in advance; cover and store in the fridge.

3. To make the salad dressing: In a small bowl, whisk the mayonnaise, white horseradish, sugar, and wine until well combined. Add salt and pepper to taste. The dressing may be made 2 days in advance; cover and store in the fridge.

4. To assemble the salad: Place the romaine pieces in a large bowl. Add the celery and parsley and toss to combine. Sprinkle the walnuts and apples on top and arrange the egg quarters around the perimeter of the bowl. Scatter the lamb pieces on top. To serve, scoop some of everything onto each plate and drizzle with the dressing.

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For more on global international Passover culinary foodways, see two articles from B'nai B'rith Magazine by Seth Shapiro in the online archives.

Gourmet for Passover: Finding Inspiration in Tradition (Spring 2013)

Charoset: A Muddy Footprint on the Seder Plate, featuring Egyptian, Persian, Turkish, Moroccan, Mexican and Italian recipes (Spring 2014)

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RECIPES SHOWS LIFESTYLE COMMUNITY

# The Philanthropist and the Phenom

By Cheryl Kempler

Stories are best told by those who lived them. This story illuminates the relationship between a humble and generous man, who happened to be one of the world's wealthiest, and a young boy, who happened to be one of the world's greatest chess players.

Aviva Kempner's 2015 documentary film "Rosenwald" and Hasia Diner's recent biography have rekindled the reputation of Julius Rosenwald, the Chicago-based owner of Sears, Roebuck and Co., who donated millions to Jewish causes and to the poor of his own city during the early 20th century.

Inspired by black leader Booker T. Washington, the philanthropist gave almost \$5 million — more than \$62 million today — toward the construction of 4,000 "Rosenwald Schools," elevating educational standards for African American children throughout the South. For many years, the communities observed his birthday, February 4th, as "Rosenwald Day."

Improving the world according to his Jewish values, Rosenwald dedicated his life to funding concepts and projects assisting countless people, but he continued to demonstrate sympathy and compassion for the individuals in his own life. Perhaps he was motivated by his feelings toward his own children when he learned about Samuel Reshevsky, a Polish boy sorely needing his help.

Descended from a line of famous Chasidic rabbis, including the legendary Kabbalist Isaac Luria, Sammy learned to play chess from his father, and was beating formidable opponents by age 4, in 1915. Like the genius Mozart, he was paraded by his parents around Europe, where he demonstrated his brilliance by engaging with his rivals in up to 30 matches simultaneously.

## Little Samuel, the Wonderchild

At age 9, he was launched on the same freak existence in the United States, taking



Photo credit: Harrie Grondijs collection.

Enjoying a friendly game, Julius Rosenwald and 18-year-old Samuel Reshevsky study the board under the watchful eye of Reshevsky's friend, national amateur checker champion Nathan Rubin.

part in competitions lasting well beyond midnight. Dubbed "Schmulik der vunderkind" (Little Samuel, the Wonderchild), the young celebrity was pursued by reporters who featured articles about the games he played with Charlie Chaplin and President Warren Harding. Since he had to earn enough to support seven other family members, his mother and father didn't waste time educating their valuable commodity and, after being cited for violating truancy laws, registered him at a yeshiva.

In an age when scandalous abuse of child vaudeville and film performers — several of whom died drug addicted, malnourished or ill — made headlines, people who cared about Sammy feared for his welfare. In 1924, Sam's friend, Morris Steinberg, a prominent inventor, expert and writer on the game of checkers, took action that changed the adolescent's life.

Nine years later, B'nai B'rith's magazine interviewed Steinberg for "Back in the

Limelight," an article that shed light on Sam's fate. It was Steinberg who reached out to Rosenwald, who agreed to support the Reshevsky family in Detroit, where Steinberg lived. In exchange, Sam would stop competing, and receive tutoring so that he would be prepared to attend high school. Rosenwald made sure that Sam experienced normalcy and, perhaps, true parental love. Sam's regaining his anonymity, Steinberg observed, "was just what Mr. Rosenwald had wanted."

Steinberg was with Sammy one Friday night in the summer of 1929 when Rosenwald took him to the opera in Ravinia, a Chicago suburb. "After the performance, Sam proposed walking to the [Rosenwald] residence, about a mile away, because he preferred not to ride on the Sabbath. Mr. Rosenwald went with him, although he was not robust, and it was evident that the walk tired him. Yet he appeared happy on his return, knowing that he had shown

## The Philanthropist and the Phenom



Photo credit: Wikipedia

Grizzled opponents and amazed onlookers gaze in disbelief at triumphant Sammy the Wonderchild.

deference to the religious observance of his young guest.

Strictly Orthodox, Sam ate meals especially prepared for him when he visited with the Rosenwald family. At a restaurant, "Sam ordered a chocolate soda. Mr. Rosenwald announced to the server 'that's what I like, so please get one for me, too.' Sam remarked that he was glad to know they both liked the same things. I learned later that Mr. Rosenwald had not indulged in that sort of thing for a long time, but he asked for the soda in order 'just to be a

regular fellow.'"

During a friendly game played with Rosenwald's neighbor, the philanthropist entreated the teenage Sam "to beat him. Otherwise, his wife and family will never hear the end of it. Sam, of course, smilingly complied."

In 1929, Rosenwald penned the following note:

"My Dear Sam:

Permit me to congratulate you upon the event which you are celebrating, namely, your graduation with honors from high

school [where he played on the baseball team]. It gave me much pleasure to learn of this as well as your matriculation at the University of Detroit. Your good friends Mr. Steinberg and others who have been so devoted in their attention to you will, I am sure, be as happy as I am over your progress. This brings to you my cordial and best wishes for continued work."

Rosenwald's gestures conveyed his continued affection for Sam. From his sickroom some months before his death in 1932, at age 70, he sent down a flower as a

## The Philanthropist and the Phenom

remembrance to the now 20-year-old Sam, who was downstairs playing chess with the philanthropist's two sons.

Announcing the potential for his comeback, "Back in the Limelight" appeared at about the time that Reshevsky obtained his degree from the University of Detroit. For some years, he worked as an accountant, but he later returned to the world of chess and was considered one of the great players of the century. Both his name and his games are held in high esteem today. Making history, he was the only person to ever defeat

seven out of 11 reigning world champions. Serving as the chess columnist for the New York Times, he went on to write many books on the game.

Strictly observant, Reshevsky didn't play on the Sabbath, leaving even the Soviets with no choice but to alter their tournament schedules. His spiritual mentor, Lubavitcher Rebbe Yosef Yitzchak Schneerson, agreed to bestow a blessing on one of his competitive matches if he undertook study of the Torah, to which Sam devoted a part of his day from then on. The Rebbe's

son-in-law and successor, Menachem Mendel Schneerson, counseled Reshevsky not to retire when the intellectual power necessary to compete against emerging rivals would have been expected to fade. Indeed, the iconic champion Bobby Fischer and others more than a generation younger, continued to fear and respect him.

In 1984, at the age of 72, Reshevsky would go on to score his last great victory at the Reykjavik Open tournament. He died in 1992.



Credit: Wikipedia Commons

A former Rosenwald School in Midway, Alabama.



Photo credit: Wikipedia Commons

Chess champion Samuel Reshevsky contemplates his next move, circa 1968.



Credit: Library of Congress Print and Photo Collection

Philanthropist and businessman Julius Rosenwald.

During monthly meetings with his congregants, Rebbe Menachem Mendel Schneerson would expound on the spiritual nature of their daily lives. Read his religious insights on the game of chess, delivered, perhaps extemporaneously, on a day when Reshevsky was in attendance.

[https://www.chabad.org/therebbe/article\\_cdo/aid/528301/jewish/Chess-The-Game-and-its-Players.htm](https://www.chabad.org/therebbe/article_cdo/aid/528301/jewish/Chess-The-Game-and-its-Players.htm)

# B'NAI B'RITH TODAY

## B'nai B'rith Unit Opens in South Florida

By Katherine Dolgenos

A new B'nai B'rith unit, Unit #5592, opened in South Florida last fall. The October kickoff of B'nai B'rith South Florida was celebrated with a gala in Miami, where Argentine-born and Miami-based Pepe Bronce, a famed choreographer, entertained the guests with a Spanish ballet.

The gala drew more than 200 attendees. Among the distinguished guests were Horacio Aarón Saavedra Archundia, the consul general of Mexico in Miami; Gabriel Baredes, director of Hispanic affairs at the Consulate of Israel; Beth Spiegel, the mayor of North Miami Beach, who was also one of the honorees; and all of the city commissioners. Emmy-nominated NBC 6 journalist Amanda Plasencia emceed the event.

B'nai B'rith International CEO Daniel S. Mariaschin and President Charles O. Kaufman presented the new unit's charter.

Leaders of Excellence Awards were bestowed on several individuals with Latin American ties to Miami. The honorees were: Nancy and Morris Antar; Fanny and Samuel Assael; Elena and Joseph Edelman; Jennie and David Serur; Beth Spiegel; Moishe Smith; Irene Belozercovsky; Ester Garazi and, of blessed memory, Daniel Belozercovsky, Salomon Garazi, Jose Guttmann and Rachel Lior.

Reflecting the intercontinental city of Miami, about half of the unit's members originally hail from Latin America. There are members who have immigrated from Venezuela, Mexico, Cuba and Argentina.

Gina Strauss, the president of the new unit, began recruiting members in 2017. That October she traveled to Prague to talk



Photo credits for all pictures: Alec Degen, Paola Mitre, Keyla Rubenstein and Dianne Strauss

The charter for Miami's new South Florida unit is proudly displayed. Pictured, from left: B'nai B'rith International President Charles O. Kaufman, Uri Strauss, Unit President Gina Strauss, Sammy Eppel, B'nai B'rith Board of Governors, Isaac Portno, Doris Salinas, Cindy Degen and Cintia Guinberg.

up the idea of her new unit at the B'nai B'rith Annual Leadership Forum. Strauss also represented her community at the United Nations in New York. In Miami, she hosted two breakfasts and gave a presentation about B'nai B'rith.

New B'nai B'rith units require 50 members to receive a charter. After all of Strauss's hard work, 60 members had signed on.

Picture

Participating in the festivities were (L-R): Dan Tartakovski, president, B'nai B'rith Mexico; B'nai B'rith CEO Daniel S.

Mariaschin; Gihan Neme Bechara Archundia; Horacio Aarón Saavedra Archundia, consul general of Mexico in Miami; Charles O. Kaufman; Yuri Tartakovski; Marcelo Burman, president, B'nai B'rith Northern Latin America and the Caribbean; Eduardo Kohn, director of Latin American Affairs, B'nai B'rith International.

Strauss says much of the credit belongs to Dan Tartakovski, president of B'nai B'rith Mexico. He encouraged her to start the unit, which he conceived of as a liaison between Latin America and B'nai B'rith

## B'nai B'rith Unit Opens in South Florida

International. B'nai B'rith International Honorary President Gary P. Saltzman was also instrumental in starting the unit.

"Dan has been our mentor in all the ways, from A to Z. He's the one who's been telling us what to say, how to say it. He has been presenting us to everybody at B'nai B'rith," says Strauss. "This year, we've been participating in a lot of different events because of him."

Tartakovski has held numerous volunteer positions within B'nai B'rith for decades, including president of the Human Rights Commission of the B'nai B'rith Cultural Association, member of the Board of Governors, special advisor to the international president and B'nai B'rith International ambassador.

Tartakovski and Strauss are cousins. Strauss's mother and husband are also founding members; her mother is the unit's treasurer. Other unit members moved to Miami from numerous Jewish communities in the United States and Latin America.

Now that the unit is officially chartered, Strauss and the other co-founders are looking for ways to become involved in service to the community. Potential projects include sponsoring multi-generational cooking classes to teach grandparents and grandchildren how to prepare traditional Jewish food and providing financial assistance for boys from low-income families preparing for their bar mitzvahs.



Participating in the festivities were (L-R): Dan Tartakovski, president, B'nai B'rith Mexico; B'nai B'rith CEO Daniel S. Mariaschin; Gihan Neme Bechara Archundia; Horacio Aarón Saavedra Archundia, consul general of Mexico in Miami; Charles O. Kaufman; Yuri Tartakovski; Marcelo Burman, president, B'nai B'rith Northern Latin America and the Caribbean; Eduardo Kohn, director of Latin American Affairs, B'nai B'rith International.



L-R: Daniel S. Mariaschin, Renee Smith, Marion Vaisman, B'nai B'rith Honorary President Moishe Smith, Irene Belozercovsky and Charles O. Kaufman.



# B'nai B'rith Brazil Celebrates First Brazilian Lodge

By Katherine Dolgenos

**B'**nai B'rith International celebrated its first Brazilian lodge at a gala event in December, part of a year of festivities celebrating the 175th anniversary of the organization.

The gala was held in São Paulo, where the first lodge was formed in 1932. B'nai B'rith Brazil now has four lodges — in Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, Curitiba and Porto Alegre.

“Today’s special day brought us [together] from all over Brazil,” said B'nai B'rith Brazil President Abraham Goldstein, addressing the 110 supporters present. “They met each other with enthusiasm and joy and ratified their commitment to fraternity, harmony and beneficence for peace, light, truth and justice.”

Brazil’s lodges are active on a range of fronts. The São Paulo lodge conducts programs for seniors and distributes toys and sews clothes and costumes for children. Last year, it also hosted a screening of the movie “Solomon’s Awakening” and a lecture on Brazil’s relationship with Israel. The Rio lodge hosted a “Women Wage Peace” event promoting Jewish-Muslim coexistence.

The Curitiba lodge brought crafts to

children in the hospital, held a Sukkot event, participated in local theater and hosted a lecture on understanding Brazil. Lodge members in Porto Alegre held programming for high school students on the Holocaust, the impact of the new Israeli nation-state law (which affirms Israel’s status as a Jewish nation) and the Nazi war crimes trials held in Nuremberg in 1946.

B'nai B'rith Director of Latin American Affairs Eduardo Kohn also spoke at the gathering, and International Vice President Jacobo Wolkowicz delivered a message on behalf of B'nai B'rith International President Charles O. Kaufman.

Wolkowicz, quoting Kaufman, emphasized B'nai B'rith’s commitment to fighting anti-Semitism: “This is a very important time for Jews around the world. We are experiencing a high rate of anti-Semitism in Latin America and Europe, as you know, and increasingly in the United States. But together we in B'nai B'rith will stand up to this terrible disease. We have no fear. Israel is a strong and innovative Jewish nation, a light unto the world. Remember that as you continue your good work.”

Kaufman also urged more participation

from members on the international stage. Kaufman said that, in 2019, “we plan to have a meeting of the International Council of B'nai B'rith in Lisbon, Portugal, and I hope to see you there. We are also seeking donors to join us in March in Geneva and Paris, where we will work as advocates for Israel at the United Nations Human Rights Council and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). Am Yisroel Chai.”

In his remarks, Kohn recognized B'nai B'rith’s work fighting anti-Semitism in the region, including combating pro-Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) rhetoric from celebrities like Pink Floyd co-founder Roger Waters. “Anti-Semitism is the ongoing and restless threat we have to face daily in our region. Our organization is a strong tool to face anti-Semitism in social media, before academia aggressions, before media aggressions. We are the strong voice of our communities to point out people like Roger Waters and his hate message when he has been more than a month giving concerts in our region spreading anti-Semitism and inciting hatred of Jews.”



Photos: Marco Antonio C.G. Araujo, São Paulo, Brazil

L-R: Eduardo Kohn, B'nai B'rith director of Latin American Affairs, Patricia Tolmasquim, president, Albert Einstein Lodge, Rio de Janeiro; Jacobo Wolkowicz, international vice president, B'nai B'rith; Abraham Goldstein, president, B'nai B'rith Brazil.



Alberto Danon, public relations director, B'nai B'rith Brazil, shares the podium with Zeila Sliozbergas, president, São Paulo Lodge and district representative to the B'nai B'rith Board of Governors.

# James Cohn: B'nai B'rith's Ageless Composer

By Katherine Dolgenos

James Cohn, a B'nai B'rith member for six decades, has written nine symphonies, six piano sonatas and four string quartets. His music has won a number of awards and has been performed in countries from Italy to Costa Rica; even since turning 90 last year, he has continued to take commissions. But Cohn, though he had wanted to be a composer since he learned to play piano from his mother as a child, almost gave up on his dream.

After graduating from The Juilliard School in New York City, he decided that the politics of the professional classical music world were too toxic. Although he continued to compose in his spare time, Cohn worked as a clerk for a food supply company. The job paid the bills, but Cohn could not shake the idea of being a full-time composer.

Cohn might never have become one if his bosses at the supply company had given him a raise. Impulsively, he quit and bought a copy of the New York Times to search the help wanted ads.

The ad that changed Cohn's life was from a musical organization and simply gave a telephone number. When he called, he found out that the job was with the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers (ASCAP), which represented thousands of performers across the United States and was affiliated with similar organizations around the world. Cohn was hired immediately and soon was working in the classical musical realm again, albeit performing clerical work.

After working at several different jobs at ASCAP, he ended up in the department that licensed orchestral music. His new boss encouraged Cohn to submit one of his symphonies to the Detroit Symphony Orchestra. But Cohn wasn't optimistic. Paul Paray, that orchestra's conductor, was French and tended to favor French composers. Cohn submitted his symphony anyway.

Cohn's timing was impeccable. It hap-



Photo courtesy of James Cohn

Still actively composing, James Cohn celebrated his 91st birthday this year.

pened that Paray was interested in French repertory and had contacted a European publisher, but the scores took too long to arrive by boat from Vienna, and it was prohibitively expensive to send them by air. Two weeks before the composition was to be performed, Paray gave up and looked through the scores that composers had sent him, including one from an unknown composer named James Cohn.

It was Cohn's big break. When the phone rang at ASCAP the next day and the caller asked for Cohn, he assumed that it was for his boss. It was only when the secretary who answered the phone told him that Paul Paray was interested in Cohn's Symphony No. 3 that he understood. The piece got rave reviews in the two major Detroit newspapers, and Cohn's career as a composer was launched.

Jewish themes have infused Cohn's work. In 1956, when Soviet forces invaded Hungary, he composed his Symphony No. 4 in honor of those who resisted, especially the Jewish people who suffered under Soviet

rule. Cohn dedicated his piece "to the stubborn people." The symphony purposely suggested Eastern European themes and melodies, which Cohn says was meant to evoke his admiration for "the people who had persevered amidst all of such horrors" under Soviet rule.

It was not Cohn's first piece honoring the sacrifices of European Jews.

When he was drafted for the Korean war, he flunked his physical, due to a mysterious rash on one of his hands. After his doctor had determined that the rash was caused by a vitamin deficiency, he introduced Cohn to his wife, the Polish classical pianist Maryla Jonas.

She was a Holocaust survivor; her first husband was taken away in the middle of the night and did not survive the war, and she had spent time in a concentration camp before escaping to Latin America with the help of connections in Brazil. Although she was too traumatized and depressed to continue playing music once she had escaped Europe, with the help of friends like fellow exiled musician Arthur Rubinstein, she eventually resumed her musical career.

When she met Cohn, Jonas told him that many of her composer friends had written miniatures for her to play on the piano during encores and asked whether he would like to write one for her. Cohn composed a series of nine miniatures for her and later dedicated his "Variations on The Wayfaring Stranger" to the memory of her and her late husband.

For years, Cohn was involved in the Jewish performing arts community as the recording secretary of the B'nai B'rith Performing Arts Lodge in New York. Its meeting location was close to ASCAP, and a friend convinced him to start attending meetings. Soon enough, Cohn became the recording secretary. He has remained a member of B'nai B'rith for 60 years, and still keeps up with B'nai B'rith Magazine. The lodge, which eventually became associ-

## James Cohn: B'nai B'rith's Ageless Composer

ated with the Sports Lodge, honored big names like Johnny Cash, Phil Ramone and Patti LaBelle with awards at lavish annual dinners hosted with the Songwriters Hall of Fame. Sammy Davis, Jr., who converted to Judaism with his wife in 1961, was a member of the lodge.

For his 90th birthday last year, Cohn's friends hosted a concert in his honor and played pieces that he had composed over decades. For more than two hours, musicians of all ages and backgrounds performed Cohn's music and recounted how he had mentored them.

"All the wit and wisdom that I could possibly muster can't compete with the music that Jim writes," said the master of ceremonies, Tris Willems. "That's a rarity in the world of music... It's a rarity that composers today, or of any age, can put so much wit and wisdom and intellect into music and make it organic. And if Jim has contributed anything to the canon, it's wit. You know that just from speaking to him. He doesn't have to say anything; he's a man of very few words, you can see why. He doesn't have to. It's all there on the page. All you have to do is listen."

Cohn's methods have changed over the years. He now uses a computer, but musical composition remains his passion. "Some people, if they get bored, they play tennis or go to the movies or what have you, but I'm 90 years old," he laughed. "I'm not going to take up tennis!"

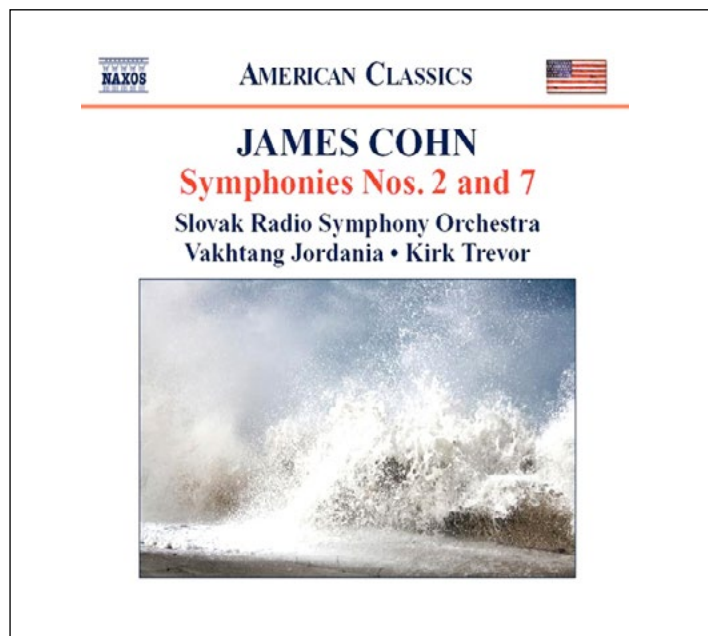


Photo credit: Courtesy of Naxos of America, USA

Cohn's recorded music includes some of his major orchestral pieces, as well as works for solo instrument.

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## U.N. Ambassador Nikki Haley Receives B'nai B'rith Award for Excellence in Diplomacy



All photos: Steve Berkowitz, New York, New York.

Then United States Ambassador to the United Nations Nikki Haley (center), with, left to right: Stewart Cahn, B'nai B'rith Banking and Finance Unit; Dr. Sandra Horowitz, B'nai B'rith Executive Board of Directors; Charles O. Kaufman, president, B'nai B'rith; Nikki Haley; Daniel S. Mariaschin, B'nai B'rith CEO; Seth Riklin, B'nai B'rith Chair of the Executive; Millie Magid, chair, B'nai B'rith Council on U.N. Affairs; Larry Magid, International Center for Human Rights and Public Policy board; David Michaels, director, B'nai B'rith Office on United Nations Affairs.

In recognition of her longstanding public service and stalwart defense of Israel at the United Nations, B'nai B'rith International recognized then-United States Ambassador to the U.N. Nikki Haley with B'nai B'rith's Award for Excellence in Diplomacy.

At the Dec. 18, 2018, presentation, B'nai B'rith leaders recognized Haley for, among other things, strongly defending American recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital and vetoing U.N. Security Council condemnation of that just and important step. She also spearheaded and lobbied for a resolution that, while prevented by a procedural maneuver, garnered a majority of the U.N. General Assembly in favor of condemning attacks by Hamas, the Palestinian terrorist group that controls the Gaza Strip.



After receiving the award, Ambassador Nikki Haley spoke with President Charles O. Kaufman and CEO Daniel S. Mariaschin.

# Honoring Jewish People and Heritage through Stamps

By Katherine Dolgenos

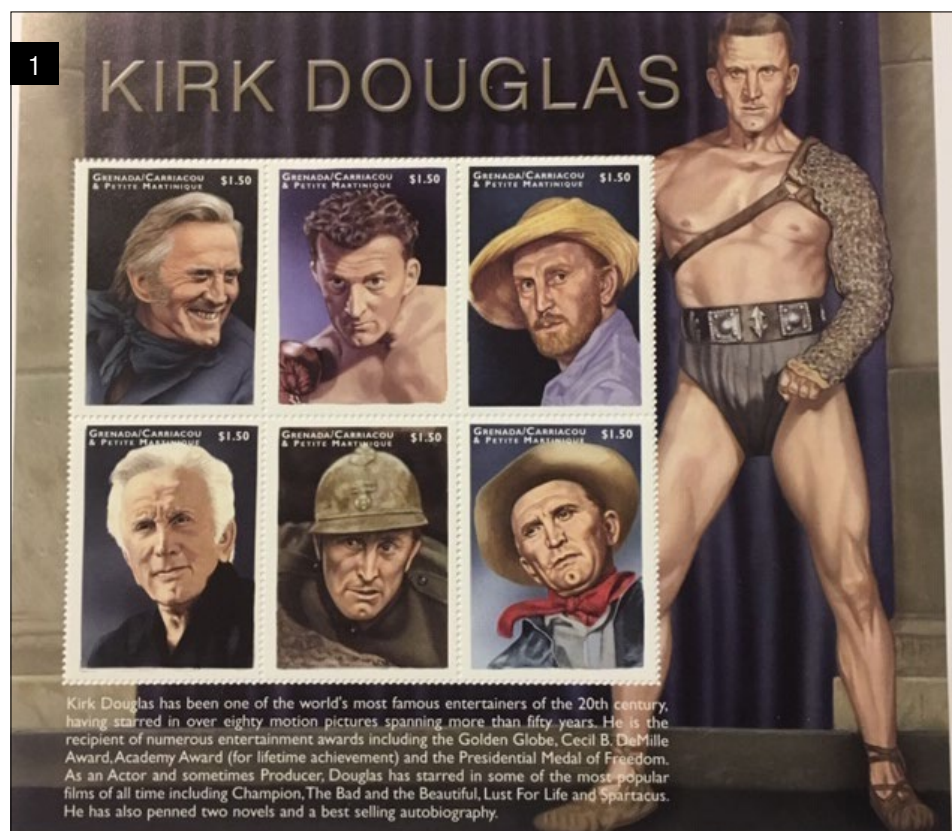
**M**arvin Beleck never intended to start a collection of stamps depicting Jews and Jewish themes, much less publish a book entitled "Noted Jewish People of the World on Stamps." But then a friend inherited a collection entitled "Jews on Stamps." It was impressive, but it was dated, ending in 1971. Beleck purchased much of his friend's collection with plans to bring it up to date.

Beleck, who sells mattresses for a living, had been collecting stamps for decades. He was also active in Jewish life in his native Texas. A member of B'nai B'rith Lodge 269 in Fort Worth, and later its president, he served as president of his synagogue and on the boards of several Jewish organizations, and he was named the B'nai B'rith Isadore Garsek Lodge Jewish Person of the Year in 2014. Beleck also serves on the board of directors of the Mollie and Max Barnett and Tarrant County B'nai B'rith Apartments.

To bolster his collection, Beleck used the internet to reach stamp dealers from around the world, in locations as far away as India and Eastern Europe. Ultimately, the collection encompassed more than 50 different countries.

The stamps he collected are not simply portraits of Jews, but also those with Jewish or Holocaust themes; stamps jointly issued by the United States and Israel; stamps commemorating friends or supporters of Jews; buildings designed by Jewish architects; and biblical stamps depicting scenes like Moses parting the Red Sea and David slaying Goliath. Anyone with a Jewish parent or grandparent, recognized Jewish ancestry or who converted to any denomination of Judaism counted as Jewish.

Some of the figures in the book are immediately recognizable as Jewish. Readers will not be surprised to learn that Albert Einstein, Leonard Bernstein or the Three Stooges were members of the tribe. How-



Kirk Douglas has been one of the world's most famous entertainers of the 20th century, having starred in over eighty motion pictures spanning more than fifty years. He is the recipient of numerous entertainment awards including the Golden Globe, Cecil B. DeMille Award, Academy Award (for lifetime achievement) and the Presidential Medal of Freedom. As an Actor and sometimes Producer, Douglas has starred in some of the most popular films of all time including *Champion*, *The Bad and the Beautiful*, *Lust For Life* and *Spartacus*. He has also penned two novels and a best selling autobiography.



In countries worldwide, philatelic tributes honor Jewish people and their wide-ranging achievements. Illustrated: (#1) the many faces of American movie star Kirk Douglas (Grenada/Carriacou & Petite Martinique); (#2) the athletic prowess of baseball great Hank Greenberg (United States); and (#3) the world-changing Theory of Relativity, discovered by renowned German physicist Albert Einstein (Paraguay).



Photo credit: United States Post Office

## Honoring Jewish People and Heritage through Stamps

ever, there are also some lesser-known Jewish figures included. Marilyn Monroe, who converted to Judaism before marrying Jewish playwright Arthur Miller, is featured in the book. So is Katharine Hepburn, who grew up Protestant before becoming an atheist but descended from Jews on her father's side.

Beleck says he did not know of the Jewish connections of many of those featured before he began the collection, especially actors and writers. That may be partially because many artists, facing overt anti-Semitism, changed their names. Silent film actress Theda Bara, who is featured in the book and was known as the first silent film sex symbol, changed her name from Theodosia Goodman. Also featured is Oscar-winning actor Kirk Douglas, born Issur Danielovitch Demsky to Yiddish-speaking immigrant parents.

Beleck published his stamp collection in a book in 2017. Although the stamps in his collection have no official cutoff date, most of them were issued before 2010 — almost 40 years after the “Jews on Stamps” collection Beleck purchased from his friend was published. “Noted Jewish People of the World on Stamps” can be purchased on Amazon.

Beleck's collection is not the only link between B'nai B'rith and stamps. The Israel Postal Authority issued two stamps commemorating significant B'nai B'rith anniversaries. In 1988, the first stamp commemorated the 100th anniversary of B'nai B'rith's presence in Jerusalem. The second, which recognized the 150th anniversary of B'nai B'rith, was issued in 1993.



An Israeli philatelic issue called a “souvenir leaf” from 1988 commemorates B'nai B'rith's centenary in that country, including images of the Martyrs' Forest “Scroll of Fire” sculpture and the Moledet B'nai B'rith Colony. The stamp itself (bottom left) illustrates the Abarbanel Library, built by the Jerusalem Lodge and opened to the public in 1902.

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## First-Person Account: Kakehashi Project

By Katherine Dolgenos



Tsuruga's mayor met with our delegation and described his city as a welcoming place for outsiders. Back row, left to right: Assistant Director of Donor Services Richy Leitner, Tyler Baram, Daniel Horn, Ali Cohen, Deputy Director of the B'nai B'rith International Center for Human Rights and Public Policy and Director of Legislative Affairs/Trip Leader Eric Fusfield, Gidon Feen. Front row, left to right: Jeffrey Greenberg, Media Relations Associate Katherine Dolgenos, David Magida, Logan Tessler, Alixandra Buckelew, Mayor of Tsuruga Takanobu Fuchikami, Randi Sabbagh, Leyla Eraybar, Mary Ann Weiss.

This February, I was honored to participate in the B'nai B'rith Young Leadership Network's 2019 mission to Japan as part of the Kakehashi (Building Bridges) Project, a Japanese government-run program that aims to increase the number of tourists who visit Japan annually and promote the country's image abroad. Our delegation was comprised of 11 Jewish young professionals, as well as three B'nai B'rith International staff members. As deputy leader of the trip, I was mindful of the need to represent B'nai B'rith well in an official international setting. But as a 24-year-old traveling to Japan for the first time, I was just thrilled to be there!

Our first full day in Tokyo was jam-packed with meetings and official engagements. We paid a visit to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, where we heard a lecture on the relationship between Japan and Israel and were given the opportunity to ask

questions. From the Japanese perspective, we received a thorough overview of both historical Japan-Israel relations, which officially started after the end of the postwar occupation of Japan in 1952, and the modern-day economic ties that increasingly bind the two countries.

The lecture and Q&A were followed by a courtesy call on Ambassador Hideo Sato, a Japanese diplomat and longtime advocate of closer relations with Israel. During his time in the foreign ministry, Sato served four times in Israel, including a stint as ambassador to Israel from 2011 to 2014. He told us about the beginnings of his affinity for Israel, in the 1970s, when he moved there with his wife and studied for his master's degree in Tel Aviv before being recruited to the Japanese Foreign Ministry.

After hearing about Israel-Japan relations from a Japanese point of view, it was intriguing to visit the Embassy of Israel and

discuss the same topics from an Israeli lens. We met with Deputy Chief of Mission Irit Savion Waidergorn and Head of Public Affairs and Spokesperson Jonathan Lebel, who were also eager to discuss Japan and Israel's burgeoning economic ties, including both countries' efforts to start direct flights between Tel Aviv and Tokyo.

From Tokyo, we continued on to the small town of Yaotsu in Gifu Prefecture. We were greeted there by the mayor at Yaotsu Town Hall, who gave us a brief introduction to his town with the assistance of a translator. Afterward, we visited the Chiune Sugihara Memorial Hall, a museum focused on Chiune Sugihara, Japan's only Righteous Among the Nations. Sugihara was a Japanese diplomat who was stationed in Lithuania during World War II. He used his position to illicitly issue transit visas to thousands of Jews, even those who did not meet the legal requirements for the visas,

## First-Person Account: Kakehashi Project



We met with Special Advisor to the Prime Minister Kentaro Sonoura, who answered our questions about Japan's relationship with Israel and the national security implications of Japanese energy usage. Top row, left to right: Ali Cohen, Tyler Baram, Assistant Director of Donor Services Richy Leitner, Daniel Horn, Logan Tessler, Gidon Feen, David Magida, Jeffrey Greenberg. Second row: Randi Sabbagh, Alixandra Buckelew, Deputy Director of the B'nai B'rith International Center for Human Rights and Public Policy and Director of Legislative Affairs/Trip Leader Eric Fusfield, Special Advisor to the Prime Minister Kentaro Sonoura, Leyla Eraybar, Mary Ann Weiss, Media Relations Associate Katherine Dolgenos.

who were only able to travel through Siberia and escape the carnage in Europe if they had transit documents allowing them into Japan. He is credited with rescuing about 6,000 Jews in just a few weeks of issuing visas.

We left Yaotsu for the medium-size coastal city of Tsuruga, another significant place in the story of Sugihara. Tsuruga's port was the destination for thousands of the Jewish refugees helped by Sugihara, who arrived in Tsuruga because it connected Japan to the Trans-Siberian Railroad. The museum showcased stories from locals about the refugees, both Jewish and non-Jewish, who passed through the town. After getting context from the museum, we met with the mayor of Tsuruga, Takanobu Fuchikami, who described his city as a historically welcoming place for outsiders.

Perhaps the most meaningful moment of the trip came after we left Tsuruga for Kanazawa, one of the only large Japanese cities with traditional architecture that was not destroyed during World War II. Our time in Kanazawa included the only Shabbat of our trip. In the absence of a local Jewish community, we created our own Shabbat dinner in a private room at a

restaurant. The women on the trip said the blessing over candles together, and we used the dinner to reflect on our trip thus far. Creating a meaningful Shabbat experience in a place with no other Jews was something that most people on the trip had never done, and it drew us together as a group.

After our excursions to smaller towns and cities, we returned to Tokyo for the final leg of the trip. Our last official meeting was with Kentaro Sonoura, special advisor to the prime minister, at the prime minister's residence. Sonoura talked with us about Japan's relationships with Israel and the U.S., as well as Japan's energy use and its national security implications. Our group, especially a member of the delegation who works on energy policy professionally, relished the chance to ask questions.

Visiting Japan was an unforgettable travel experience, but more than that, it was a chance to represent B'nai B'rith abroad. B'nai B'rith International sends delegations all over the world to stand up for human rights, represent the Jewish people and engage in pro-Israel advocacy, and this was the first time I got to make a difference firsthand on one of our missions. I am grateful to the Kakehashi Project and our

guides for giving us this opportunity and creating an incredible itinerary, and I am sure that everyone who participated in this trip will continue to build bridges between the American Jewish community and Japan.



The port of Tsuruga connected the Trans-Siberian Railroad to Japan. It served as the landing point for European Jewish refugees from World War II. Left to right: Tyler Baram, Gidon Feen, Leyla Eraybar, Ali Cohen, Logan Tessler.



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## About Seniors

# And Now for Something Completely Different

By Mark D. Olshan

Associate Executive Vice President, B'nai B'rith International

**F**ans of Monty Python's Flying Circus of the early 1970s may be familiar with the refrain, "And Now for Something Completely Different." It referred to moving from one silly scene to another, completely unrelated to the last. The notion seems relevant today.

The past two years have been a trying time for the B'nai B'rith seniors agenda. The attempts by Congress to repeal and replace the Affordable Care Act (ACA), trying to reduce, or at least restrict, Medicaid expansion and proposing increased contributions from older persons currently living in HUD-assisted housing have been enormously frustrating. Trying to balance the budget by reducing entitlements, while weeks earlier busting the budget with the single largest tax "reform" package in our history, simply made no sense.

Opposition to proposals from the Obama administration was easy. There were members of Congress who defined themselves by how many times they said no to the White House. From President Obama's first day in office, the opposing party boasted it would vote against any policy his administration endorsed.

And, for the most part, it worked. Very little substantive legislation was achieved under a truly bipartisan approach.

I've said it before, and I'll say it again: Blatant partisanship for the sake of "winning" is not governing. It is generally shortsighted and usually does more harm than good. It is simply not a productive approach to solving the real problems that most citizens want addressed.

Now, while I openly admit that I am hopeful that the results of the mid-term



Residents of St. Mary's Court, in Washington, D.C., and B'nai B'rith Homecrest House in Silver Spring, Maryland, took part in a Capitol Hill congressional briefing focusing on federal funding and aging issues in March 2014.

elections will make it more difficult to continue the full-scale erosion of the programs noted above, I am not naïve enough to think that the Congress will pivot a full 180 degrees and move to a "kinder and gentler" approach for an ever-aging and graying American population.

Yet, I will remain hopeful

The new House of Representatives has to demonstrate that there is a way to govern. So, where do we start?

First, let's once and for all admit demographic reality. Every day, 10,000 baby boomers turn 65. By 2030, nearly 75 million people in the United States — 20 percent of the country — will be 65 or older. As America ages, the need for services provided under programs like Social Security, Supplemental Security Income (better known as SSI), Medicare, Medicaid and the Older Americans Act also increases.

Addressing these demands in a fiscally responsible, bipartisan manner deserves greater attention, understanding and public engagement. Let's find ways to address this challenge head on.

During the Obama administration, the House repeatedly passed bills, ostensibly to "repeal and replace" the ACA, knowing full well that none of these attempts would ever be signed into law. But lawmakers were making a statement: They would never accept the concept that affordable, comprehensive health care should be available to every American.

During the past two years, there appeared to be a bit more willingness in the Senate for bipartisan compromises on health care. But when the House finally passed the American Health Care Act, which would have effectively achieved the goals of the earlier attempts, the late U.S. Sen. John

## And Now for Something Completely Different

McCain delivered his dramatic thumbs down vote to send the measure to defeat.

We need to come to some fundamental agreement that, regardless of critics' previous statements, the goals of the ACA make sense, and while certainly it is not perfect, there are ways to build on the law's foundation without simply tearing it down and starting over. Previously, there seemed to be compromise in providing reimbursement to insurance companies for some of the high costs tied to more expensive enrollees. Additionally, there seemed to be agreement to fund some of the cost-sharing subsidies that the White House had stopped. This is a good first step in moving the process forward to address the fundamental issues without constant partisan bickering.

Second, we formerly had a National Housing policy. Let's find ways to expand the tried and true Section 202 capital advance program. This had been the major funding source for the construction of safe, secure, quality apartments for older persons of low income so they could remain healthier and more independent, precluding a premature move to a more institutional and unnecessary medical setting. And obviously, it is far less costly to society, overall, to have older people living in subsidized senior housing than in more medical facilities.

Unfortunately, from 2011 to 2017, there was no meaningful funding for new Section 202 apartments. Therefore, the attention has turned to trying to simply preserve those projects for low-income elderly residents currently in the inventory. The lack of continued new production is a serious problem.

As the country rapidly ages, the simple creation of more affordable housing for low- and very low-income persons is an absolute necessity.

So, let me propose this:

The Trump administration has said it favors infrastructure legislation. This could be fertile ground for a real compromise. In 2017, HUD Secretary Ben Carson said that "housing is a significant part of the infrastructure of this country" and any proposed bill "has to" include housing. So, why not include affordable "seniors" housing in any infrastructure legislation, in addition to fully funding existing programs?

Third, there is already strong bipartisan support for legislation to strengthen the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) pro-



Residents of B'nai B'rith Apartments in Allentown took the opportunity to voice their concerns on aging issues, with then-U.S. Rep. Charlie Dent of Pennsylvania during his visit.



Senior advocate and Homecrest House resident Trudy Addison spoke at the congressional briefing during an afternoon session devoted to long-term care and affordable housing for the elderly.

## And Now for Something Completely Different

gram, as it can be used to create affordable housing throughout the country. While this program focuses more on “workforce” housing than for very low-income persons, it does provide resources for a vastly underserved population. The brainchild of a Republican president and a Democratic speaker of the House in the mid-1980s, the program has successfully funded a vast amount of housing since its inception. With the change in the House leadership, the tax credit should be permanently exempt from partisan politics.

Fourth, let's try to pass legislation to solidify Social Security. In 2019, wages above \$132,900 aren't subject to Social Security taxes. Maybe it's time for persons who make significantly more to continue to contribute into the system. Does having the extra few dollars in those paychecks at the end of the year mean that much? I would argue not. We've seen proposals that attempt to create a “donut” hole so that money is not taxed until the wage earner reaches \$250,000 or even \$300,000 per year. At this level, one can't argue that it's a “tax on the middle class,” and it fixes the “problem” of funding Social Security for many more years into the future.

Finally, it is time to re-think and re-establish the House Select Committee on Aging. Operating from 1974 to 1992, this panel served as a unique venue that allowed open, bipartisan debate from various ideological and philosophical perspectives to promote consensus. Like its still-operating Senate counterpart, this body had no specific legislative authority but supported and reinforced the work of other committees. It could return us to a time when the Congress cared about people getting older and could explore the range of issues that cross jurisdictional lines, while holding field hearings, engaging communities and promoting understanding and dialogue.

Other items that we need to spend more time discussing include elder fraud and abuse, Alzheimer's disease, problems facing older



At B'nai B'rith Homecrest House Apartments in Silver Spring, Maryland, residents discussed pressing issues with Maryland Rep. Jamie Raskin.

women and older workers, concerns of grandparents raising grandchildren, effects of opioids on older Americans and their families and costs associated with isolation and loneliness.

So, where do we stand? We have a House of Representatives majority that differs in philosophy with a majority of senators and with the White House. The House is more than capable of working on bold progressive legislation on one hand and, hopefully, putting enough out there that will interest some senators in the other party.

And so, harkening back to Monty Python: And Now for Something Completely Different!

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## What will your *Legacy* be?

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