ew people with old stories are sitting on the benches in Nahariya, the beach town in northern Israel where my parents live. One woman sits in a park near the Jewish Agency’s immigrant absorption center, holding her smartphone and crying as another woman’s voice says on the speaker from Ukraine, “There are fatalities in Kharkiv.” A crew from the TV news is there to interview these first arrivals, and for an Israeli watching, it seems like headlines and history at once. Kyiv, Lviv, Moscow, the Jewish Agency. Is it the 1990s, or the 1930s? Another woman, Tatyana, embraces two of her three children, fresh from the airport. Her eldest son stayed behind to fight near Dnipro. “It’s a miracle we made it here,” she says.

Israelis are as glued to the war in Ukraine as the rest of the Western world, so involved in the extraordinary course of events that most of us haven’t yet considered the most immediate way this is going to manifest itself here: in a new wave of aliyah, “ascent,” the word we like to use for immigration. On Sunday three planes landed with 300 people, and it’s only beginning. Some estimates say 10,000 are coming, some say 10 times that; some, like the Interior Minister, say it could be hundreds of thousands and won’t be limited to people from Ukraine.

The old Zionist absorption machinery—ignored by nearly all Israelis nearly all of the time, though it’s more or less the reason the country exists and the reason we’re all here—is creaking back into motion. Israel will try to work its narrative magic, issuing the newcomers a story of strength that obscures their weakness, telling them they’re not homeless but home and that they’re not refugees but olim, “those who ascend,” masters of their own fate. This story is one of the secrets of the country’s success. A version of it is shared by everyone else in this town: the original Germans, the Moroccans and Tunisians, the Romanians, the earlier Russians and Ukrainians, the Ethiopians. The rooms at the absorption center probably still smell of injera. That’s why, although Elena and Tatyana may never have been here before, they somehow don’t seem out of place.

Roman Polonsky, the Jewish Agency’s man in charge of the countries of the former Soviet Union, was born 67 years ago outside Odesa, Ukraine—the target,
as I write these lines, of an approaching Russian naval force. When we spoke he was rushing from Israel to Budapest to help get people out of his former country. Growing up in the Soviet Union with a mix of Ukrainians, Russians, Moldovans, and Jews, he said, the idea of a Russia-Ukraine war would have seemed “far less likely than an alien invasion from Mars.” He moved to Israel in 1990, when he was 35, at the beginning of the great aliyah that brought more than a million people here as the Soviet world collapsed. (All the newcomers became known collectively as “Russians,” even through a third were from Ukraine and another third from the smaller Soviet republics; it will be interesting to see if the distinction between Russians and Ukrainians now catches on.)

There are 10 Jewish Agency emissaries at the different border crossings from Ukraine into Poland, Hungary, Romania, and Moldova, trying to get the buses through after their journeys from the burning cities. The agency has rented 2,100 hotel rooms in those four countries to put people up as they transit to the airport. Some of the cash is coming from evangelical Christians via the International Fellowship of Christians and Jews. Refugees are showing up at the border with almost nothing. Polonsky was in Ukraine in 2014 in the early stages of the creeping Russian takeover, when some Jews escaped Donbetsk for Israel. “But that was small,” he said. “What’s happening now is at a completely different scale.” More than a million Ukrainians have already fled. At the beginning of the war the agency opened an emergency hotline run out of the organization’s venerable Jerusalem headquarters, the building where crowds celebrated the founding of Israel in 1948, with Golda Meir wishing everyone “mazel tov” from the balcony. More than 6,000 people called the hotline from Ukraine in the first 72 hours. Most wanted to ask about immigration.

Adult men are subject to Ukraine’s draft and can’t leave, so most of the people reaching agency emissaries at the borders are women, children, and the elderly. Polonsky had 60 Ukrainian Jewish teenagers at a conference for camp counselors in Budapest when the fighting broke out and they realized they were stranded. They have no idea when they’ll ever go home, and are headed for Israel instead, with only the belongings they packed for a short trip. That’s just one crisis on his list for the next few days. There are about 200,000 people in Ukraine eligible for Israeli citizenship, a group that includes people married to Jews and anyone with a Jewish grandparent. He and his team have a list of 24,000 names of people who’ve participated in Jewish Agency programs like summer camps and Sunday schools, and they’re trying to figure out where everyone is. They’re also allocating funds for security in the Jewish communities that are staying put—Ukraine’s streets are now flooded with weapons, and robbery will grow with the shortages and the breakdown of order. Things aren’t yet as bad as they’re going to get. “So we’re not sleeping,” he said.

It’s not just Ukraine. The same hotline has fielded several thousand immigration inquiries from people in Russia proper, and in the Russian satellite of Belarus. Russia’s economy could sink. People understand that the decade or two of relative quiet in the Russian “sphere of influence,” a time in which Jewish life stabilized and even flowered in small ways, may be ending.

Alex Rif was born in Chernivtsi, Ukraine, in 1986. She has a brother in Kazan, Russia. She came to Israel as a child, an experience she documented in a book of piercing and often angry Hebrew poems called Silly Girl of the Regime, and is one of the brains behind the One Million Lobby, which aims to look out for the interests of Israel’s “Russians.”

Rif lives in Tel Aviv. Back in Chernivtsi, refugees are flooding the city, and goods are running out in the stores. Across the border in Russia, her brother can no longer withdraw money from the bank. He’s not ready to leave, but it’s getting harder to find flights out as foreign companies cut their ties. Russians are worried, she said, not only about external isolation, but that a new Iron Curtain is about to be imposed internally by the Putin regime. She thinks a lot about the ancient Jewish question: When is it time to go? New events that feel old: If you’re looking for a possible summary of Jewish life, that’s one.

Rif believes it’s easy to see what’s coming: “We’re looking at a huge wave of immigration to Israel.” No one thought a million people would come in the 1990s, she pointed out, but they did—proportionally, it was as if the United States absorbed the populations of both Holland and France. She and her colleagues are pushing the government to plan for the long term, beyond housing the new arrivals for a few weeks. But the long term has never been Israel’s strong suit. The Knesset’s Absorption Committee, which could be coordinat-
Ten Questions for Natan Sharansky

The legendary Soviet political prisoner and Israeli government minister on the war in Ukraine, the two Vladimirs, and the implications for the Middle East

BY TABLET NEWS DESK

Born in Donetsk, then called Stalino, in the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic in 1948, Natan Sharansky remains the world’s leading anti-Soviet, dissident Zionist, and pro-democracy voice. A chess prodigy, mathematician, refusenik, political prisoner, human rights activist, and Israeli statesman, Sharansky is a living monument to 20th-century Jewish heroism, and is uniquely positioned to analyze the significance of breakdowns in freedom, democracy, and world order in the 21st. On Sunday, he sat down with Tablet to discuss Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, the two Vladimirs, the dilemmas of Israeli diplomacy, and the wisdom of BDS for Russia.

Tablet: How do you feel about the Russian invasion of Ukraine, a state where you grew up in a Jewish family under the former USSR, and which is led today by a proudly Jewish president?

Natan Sharansky: I have to say that it is very difficult for Jews to believe, but the Jewish question has nothing to do with this conflict. The fact that Zelensky is a devoted Jew is an absolutely outstanding fact of Ukrainian history, as well as the fact that even Putin, with all the awful things he is doing, is unique in Russian history for his positive attitude toward Jews and Israel. There are no anti-Jewish pogroms at this stage, neither in Ukraine nor in Russia, and it’s not the case that Jews are at the center of this.

When I was growing up in Donetsk, “Jew” was the worst thing you could have in your papers. It was like being born with a disease, and many parents dreamed of how to bribe officers to write in anything else for their children. Today, when refugees move to the border, the best thing they can have in their ID is the word “Jew,” because the only country that sends official representatives there to get people and give them citizenship is Israel. So, a lot can be said about it—but again, if you want to understand the roots of this awful, barbaric Russian aggression, it’s not the point from which we have to start.

OK, let’s start here: When I was born in Donetsk, it was then called Stalino.

When Stalin died I was 5 years old, and I remember my father explained to me that it was a great day for us, for Jews, but not to tell that to anybody. And then I remember the other big event of my childhood, in 1954, after the death of Stalin, was the celebration of 300 years of the voluntary unification of Russia and Ukraine. In 1654, when Bohdan Khmelnytsky won a war, it made Ukraine independent from Poland. So we had a huge celebration about the brotherhood of Ukrainians and Russians.

Later, when I became a dissident, I got to know Ukrainian nationalists and found out that it was in fact more like a Russian enslavement of Ukraine. But by then it didn’t matter in the same way, because in fact Donetsk was a very international city, it had many nations. It was an industrial center, so for 100 years people had been coming there to look for work from different parts of the Russian empire. There were Ukrainians and Russians in Donetsk, of course, but also Kazakhs and Armenians and Georgians and Tatars. So none of that really mattered. What really mattered was: Are you Jewish or not?

Tablet: Everyone could agree on that.

NS: Jews were the only people who were really discriminated against. There were jokes about every nation, but the real prejudices and the official discrimination were against Jews. Now, I studied in a Russian school where the second language was Ukrainian, and there were many Ukrainian schools where the second language was Russian. As a Jew, I tried to be the best in everything, so I tried to also be the best in Ukrainian literature. And that
Putin views himself as filling the shoes of Peter the Great, Ekaterina [Catherine the Great], and Stalin. These are three of his big heroes, who brought historical “Russian” lands under one rule.”

interested. And now he is leading the Ukrainian people, to the big surprise of Putin, in showing such a passionate devotion to Ukrainian national identity, and to their freedom. The fact that they are now an example for people all over the world, and that the one who is leading them and inspiring them and the man who is the most important president in their history is openly Jewish and proud of his Jewish roots and his connection to Israel—that is just really something. I don’t know whether to call it ironic or symbolic or meaningful. But it is really something.

Tablet: Do you understand the invasion of Ukraine as a border dispute, or as a chapter in a larger, more global Russian or Russo-Chinese assault on the democratic order? What endgame do you think Putin has in mind for this conflict?

NS: Putin, whom I met 15, 20 years ago, in the first years of his presidency, is a very different person than he was then. He has always of course been the same KGB officer with the same approach and view of the world, but back then he was urgently looking for recognition by the leaders of the world—by George W. Bush, by Angela Merkel—and he tried very hard to find ways to convince them that he was a new type of Russian leader. I think what happened with him is that after 20 or more years in power, he saw all these leaders—Bushes and Merkels and Obamas and Bidens and Macrons and all the others—as pawns, they just come and they go, and they’re exchanged, they’re replaced. He is the only one who is never replaced.

He is the one, real, strong leader, and he is the only real historical figure—as he sees himself—and he has a historical mission. He has said over many years that the biggest tragedy of the 20th century was the destruction of the Soviet Union. So his mission is to bring back that unique Russian superpower. He doesn’t want to bring back communist ideology, which he is not interested in. Putin views himself as filling the shoes of Peter the Great, Ekaterina [Catherine the Great], and Stalin. These are three of his big heroes, who brought historical “Russian” lands under one rule.

So whether it is Poland, or whether it is Kazakhstan, he sees these all like a czar—all Russian lands—and he sees bringing them back as his historical charge. For this he has worked already for many years. Belarus is practically part of Russia now. He tried Georgia in 2008, and he got Abkhazia and South Ossetia, which are now in fact Russia. Chechnya too, of course, though with a lot of blood, but now it’s his. And he is active all the time in Kazakhstan and the other Stans.

But of course the key here was always Ukraine. Even in our dissidents’ prisons, when we all saw that the Soviet Union would be falling apart, because it was too weak from inside, the critical piece we saw then was Ukraine. In our dreams Ukraine was becoming an independent country, like France or something, not only because of the large population but because it had the wheat and coal and metallurgy and missiles and everything.

It didn’t happen exactly so. Because of corruption and other things, Ukraine went through a difficult period. But nevertheless, a democratic Ukraine was
The free world is taking steps to take away billions of dollars from Putin, and at the same time, it is making sure Iran will receive billions of dollars.”

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Does not have much time—but the time he does have, he has to use it effectively, using the threat of nuclear war in order to invade, to destroy, to occupy, and then if the world is scared, to continue testing the limits.

Tablet: Is Israel’s relative quiet in the face of Putin’s assault a sane recognition of the reality of Russian military strength in Syria, or does it unwisely lend strength to forces of dictatorship and illiberalism? And what role does America’s revived nuclear deal with Iran, which is how Russia got into Syria in the first place, play in this?

NS: I can tell you my position, but unfortunately I am in the minority. From the very first day of the invasion I said that this is not simply a historical struggle between Russia and Ukraine. It’s not simply between a vicious dictator and a sympathetic, democratic leader. It’s an effort to change all the basic principles on which the free world has stood since the Second World War. The whole free world is in danger, and Israel is a part of that.

Israel cannot survive simply by playing itself off between dictators. We should be the first to understand that. So for us morally, and for the world publicly, and for the survival of the free world, we have to be clearly on one side. Strategically, we should not be hesitant to speak very clearly and publicly about it.

People here tell me I don’t understand that the most important moral obligation of Israel is to the security of Israeli citizens, and that to protect that security we must have the freedom to operate in Syria. Now, on the tactical level, there is no doubt that we are dependent on an agreement with Putin when we attack Iranian bases in Syria. From 2013 onward, there was such weakness with the Obama administration in Syria, where they weren’t going to challenge this new Russian military presence, and then in 2015, there was an additional agreement with Iran, under which America sent billions and billions of dollars to Tehran, some of it in cash. And with Hezbollah turning into a real army and building new bases together with Iran and Syria

Tablet: How does Russia imagine it will reincorporate Ukraine into a reborn imperial Russian state?

NS: Russia is not the strongest country and Putin is not the strongest leader in the world. In fact, Russia today is something like 3% of the world economy and NATO represents something closer to 50%. And here it is very important to understand Putin’s psychology. From my time among criminals in prison, I know very well that the one who’s the ringleader in the cell is not the one who is physically strongest, but the one who is ready to use his knife. Everybody has a knife, but not everybody is prepared to use it. Putin believes that he is willing to use his knife and the West isn’t, that the West can only talk, even if it is physically stronger.

I have to remind you that the first step in this Ukraine process was Crimea. It started after President Obama drew a red line in Syria about chemical weapons, and then when it was crossed he did nothing. That was an awful sign. The immediate results were that Putin brought his armies to Syria and established a base there—in fact, he got the keys to Syria’s airspace—and then he went into Crimea. He checked whether the West would react, and when it didn’t he not only took Crimea but he also started this separatist movement in the Donbas, saying that it was historical Russia. So that was the beginning.

Now, he’s in the second stage, and he is especially feeling the weakness of America. I think—I don’t know for sure, but I think—that the withdrawal from Afghanistan showed him that it would be very difficult for this American government to mobilize for military action. And so he can threaten nuclear weapons. He says, “Ukraine is not a country, we’re going to bring it back to Russia, and those who stand in our way will suffer such damage they’ve never known in their history.” So all his means of deterrence are prepared.

And America’s answer is to cancel training of their nuclear forces which had been planned for a year. The Pentagon cancels it and says, “It’s because we don’t want to be responsible for bringing danger to the United States.” So Putin couldn’t get a better sign that his deterrence works. So now he really believes he is the strongest leader in the world, not only because he is prominent, and not only because he doesn’t have to worry about things like these silly Western elections, but also because he is ready to threaten nuclear war and his enemies are not. He is willing to use his knife.

Tablet: Was he right?

NS: Of course, there have been some surprises for him.

First, he’s rather isolated from the real world, so he convinced himself that Ukrainians agree that they are not a people and that they therefore would not put up any serious resistance.

Second, he was right that the West would not be ready to meet his military threat, but the West is mobilized by sanctions. So now, the sanctions are a very dangerous weapon against him, and they will have an effect for a long time. So he understands now that he

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I think as part of the struggle of the free world against Putin, it also has to help Israel fight against its dependence on him in Syria. Because in general, the interests of Jewish people and the interests of Israel, of course, are that Putin's aggression should be stopped.

Today, we see that even with all the love and compassion and sympathy which the world has directed to Zelensky and the Ukrainians, in fact the free world has already decided that they will be the victims. So we have to always be capable of defending ourselves.

Tablet: Are boycotts and sanctions against Russia, and especially targeting individual Russians, a good way to affect Russian policy? If so, why aren't they also a good way to express disapproval of Israeli policies that some people don't like?

NS: It has absolutely nothing to do with the BDS [Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions] of Israel, and I’ll explain why. First of all, BDS of Israel was invented not to influence Israeli policy but to help lead to the destruction of Israel. Israel should not exist, but we cannot destroy it militarily, therefore we have to destroy it by encouraging all the world to boycott it economically. And second, it’s based on an obvious double standard. Meaning, OK, you decide that those who violate human rights should be boycotted, you define what is a human rights violation, and then you choose not to uphold the definition or enforce the boycott anywhere in the world—in Xinjiang, etc.—except in Israel.

Now, with Russia, if the world was ready to challenge Putin militarily, like to send its airplanes and troops, there would be no need of sanctions. But because the free world is not ready to do this, and we are looking for ways to do something without having to fight in Ukraine, the idea is to make people inside Russia feel bad about what Putin is doing and to make him change the policy. So it’s very different from trying to isolate Russia in order to destroy it; it’s trying to just put a stop to this awful aggression. I’d prefer that we stop the aggression by sending in the airplanes. But I understand that this is difficult. And Putin didn’t expect that there would be such strong sanctions. So I do think they are justified.

Tablet: What effect will placing personal sanctions on the so-called Navalny list of Putin-linked oligarchs including Mikhail Fridman and others have on Jewish life, both in Israel and in the diaspora? Are these sanctions on individuals a good idea as public policy? Are they good for the Jews?

NS: Some of these people do very good things for Israel and the Jewish people, like Mikhail Fridman, who give to the defense of Jewish communities all over the world, and bring not only their pride in being Jewish and their financial generosity but also new ideas, like the Genesis Prize and of course the Babyn Yar memorial. But I have to say that when the Americans and Europeans are deciding about sanctions, these things should not be considered. The criteria should be if their money is being used to help Putin fight democracy and freedom and the opposition and so on, or if the money and tools of these people can be used to undermine sanctions.

I hope very sincerely that those who are helpful to the Jewish people are not involved in this. But that’s of course up to the appropriate bodies in America and in Europe to decide. And I propose not to mix these two things.

We should always be very grateful to those who are doing good things for Israel. But we also have to understand the importance of these sanctions, and I hope that they will be employed with real criteria and with real action, and not simply to contribute to this atmosphere of hating all these rich Russians.

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No Quiet Place Left on Earth

President Zelensky’s soaring optimism has given way to the reality that America isn’t coming to help, Ukraine is on its own, and Vladimir Putin is only getting started

BY VLADISLAV DAVIDZON

Yesterday afternoon, I called up Oleksiy Goncharenko, an exceedingly colorful and charismatic member of the Ukrainian Parliament with whom I have been friendly over the years. I required good intelligence. My concern was with the Russian army’s impending assault on my—and Goncharenko’s—beloved Odessa, from which my stubborn relatives have refused to evacuate despite all entreaties to the demands of logic and self-preservation. I needed to figure out if I should brave the train ride to Odessa from Western Ukraine before the Russian forces cut off all access to the region. Or perhaps it would be better to take a car through the Romanian and Moldovan borders. Making the decision required knowledge of how the Ukrainian armed forces were faring in their defense of the ship-building town of Mykolayiv.

The Ukrainian navy had just scuttled its flagship frigate, the Hetman Sahaidachny, berthed in the Mykolayiv port ahead of the Russian advance. The Russian army needs to take the town in order to flank Odessa from the east, while a small fleet of Russian frigates and destroyers packed with missiles, tanks, and Marines targets its cruise missiles on the gorgeous Russophonic city founded by Catherine the Great. “Our guys are fighting really well on that front,” Goncharenko replied to me affably, “but the Russians keep swamping the sector with huge numbers.” My attempt to follow up with queries about the possible timing of the Russian assault on the mined beaches elicited a typical Odessan wisecrack from the parliamentarian: “What am I, a member of the Russian general staff? Go ask those guys. How the hell am I supposed to know when they’re going to invade our city? At this moment, I’m just an ordinary member of the Kyiv territorial defense militia.” He proceeded to wish me a happy birthday and sent me a big hug, put down the phone, and returned to patrolling the streets of Kyiv with an American-made machine gun strapped to his back.

The Ukrainian army continues to hold its own with remarkable discipline and sangfroid despite the numerical and technological superiority of the forces arrayed against it. It has also managed to inflict huge losses on the Russian army—though the actual casualty numbers it claims are disputed—whose advances have mostly halted outside of the south of Ukraine. Two weeks into a war that American intelligence had confidently predicted would conclude with the sacking of the capital in three days, the Russians have been unable to break the defenses of either Kyiv or Kharkiv. In fact, the Ukrainian army claims to have gone on a counterattack against Russian units outside of Kharkov over the weekend. Though the Russian offensive has been unable to capture Kyiv, it is quietly making serious headway in its occupation of the city’s surrounding commuter satellite towns that it needs to hold in order to lay siege to the city.

The Russian and Ukrainian diplomatic delegations came to no agreement as Foreign Ministers Sergei Lavrov and Dmytro Kuleba negotiated directly in the Turkish city of Antalya on Thursday. On the one hand, the Russians continue to play for time; on the other, they are negotiating directly, which might indicate that they are interested in an eventual drawdown from a fundamentally unwinnable war. But the Russian negotiating position in Turkey was essentially an inflexible demand for total Ukrainian capitulation.

The supplies of American and European-made anti-tank and anti-aircraft missiles—which are reported to have totaled up to 17,000 over the past few days—have done their work against Russian wings and armor. Ukrainian social media and Telegram channels have filled up with videos of charred columns of Russian tanks and infantry fighting vehicles, as well as the burnt-out husks of buses that had been filled with Russian anti-riot police who were supposed to pacify the populations of Ukrainian towns and cities after they had been captured. The bodies of those young men—who, according to Russian law, should have never been deployed outside of the country—lay contorted and half-submerged in the snow. The Ukrainian army has also taken to posting videos of interrogations of captured Russian POWs; it has become quite obvious that most of them had never been told where they were going or what their objectives would be. The lack of
psychological preparation among the rank and file for the invasion mirrors the more general hubris that the Russian military had shown in not having provided its troops with enough rations, fuel, or supplies for a prolonged military engagement.

Still, the rage of the Ukrainian population continues to build as the Russians have made only limited progress in their mechanized and infantry assaults. Multiple Russian attacks on Kyiv, including by elitedetachments of the Russian MVD forces, have been repelled. That the Russians have had to resort to bombing a populated maternity hospital, which they did in Mariupol on Wednesday, seems to convey a certain level of desperation.

The Russian army is also clearly strapped for reserves—we hear rumors of young Russian men being pressed into the streets of provincial Russian cities. The Wall Street Journal has reported that the Russians may have to resort to importing Syrian mercenaries as well, who have the experience of urban warfare needed to subjugate Kyiv. The worse that the Russian army performs on the ground, the more it will resort to classic Russian military doctrine: massive, indiscriminate bombing of civilian populations and infrastructure from the air. (Incidentally, with the exception of the more nuanced case of Kyiv, most of the Russian aggression so far has been concentrated on Russian-speaking cities in eastern Ukraine.)

"If you will not give us the aircraft that we need to be able to protect ourselves, there can be only one conclusion: You want us to be slowly killed."

The Ukrainian news has long been referring to the “Russian occupation forces,” the “aggressor state,” and the “terrorist nation.” Yet over the last few days, evening newscasters on the television marathon that all Ukrainians continue to watch together (the major stations have melded their coverage into a single, jointly produced feed) have rather brazenly begun referring to the Russians as “Orcs,” “barbarians,” and the “horde.” The fury of the Ukrainians has also hardened as it becomes clear that the West has categorically ruled out the no-fly zone for which President Volodymyr Zelensky has been pleading. The West has decided that the escalatory danger of direct confrontations between Russian and NATO planes in Ukrainian skies is simply too great. A deal to swap old Polish MiG-29s (which Ukrainian pilots have been trained to fly) for a fresh American donation of F-16s has been scuppered by Washington.

As for Zelensky, his rhetoric has become noticeably more intense and much more bitter over the last week. In the opening days of the war, he had taken pains to appear positive and was very careful to speak of “the enemy” without personally attacking the Russians. He is now no longer pulling his punches or employing euphemisms. Zelensky has already twice accused the West of abandonment in the most furious register possible: “If you will not give us the aircraft that we need to be able to protect ourselves, there can be only one conclusion: You want us to be slowly killed. That is also the responsibility of the world’s politicians, and of Western leaders. Today and forever.” The humble, generous, and unifying tenor that had marked his speeches during the opening hours and days of the war have fallen away after two weeks of sleep deprivation, mass murder of civilians, destruction of cities, and reports of assassination attempts against him. “We will not forgive, we will not forget, we will punish everyone who committed atrocities in this war on our land,” Zelensky added. “We will find every bastard who shot at our cities, our people, who bombed our land, who launched rockets. There will be no quiet place on this earth for you. Except for the grave.”

Whether the Russian occupation forces will indeed have “no quiet place on this earth” is a question I put to Michael Kofman, Director of Russia Studies at CNA, and one of the very few analysts who predicted both the Russian invasion and its shambolic opening phase with almost uncanny precision. Kofman was one of the few who pointed out the inevitability of the invasion and its scale based on the amount of military resources that were being assembled on the Ukrainian border starting in December, at a time when almost all other Western observers believed that Vladimir Putin was only making empty threats.

But why were Russian assumptions about the war, and about how quickly the Ukrainians would surrender and disperse, so delusional? “The entire war is premised on nonsensical views of Ukraine as well as flawed assumptions about what force could achieve,” Kofman explained. “Nothing was organized, and [the Russians] lied to their troops about what they were going to be doing when they pushed them into the country and sent them down hostile roads, driving as if they were still in their own country.” The resulting lack of morale on the Russian side led to a
is to go all in, even if it means carpet bombing Russian-speaking cities into ruin in order to save the Russian-speaking world from the specter of fascism. Because the Ukrainians have already won the information war, with Twitter full of Russian defeat porn and very little of its opposite, we don't have a very clear understanding of the actual state of the Ukrainian army, or the state of its reserves or their battle readiness, despite popular and charming videos of Ukrainian farmers stealing Russian T-72 battle tanks using their tractors. As Kofman explains, the Russians will likely reorganize and rearm before attempting to envelop the major Ukrainian cities and using their superior firepower to pound them into submission. More maternity wards are likely to be decimated from the sky.

“War is very contingent and it is hard,” said Kofman. “The Russians will find themselves combat ineffective in the course of a few weeks, so we are likely to see a pause as both sides become combat ineffective. The Russian political leadership had unrealistic expectations, but are they are doing alright in the south. The war is starting to get ugly. It’s giving off bad Grozny vibes.”

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COMMUNITY

Afghans in Asheville

In North Carolina’s Blue Ridge Mountains, Muslim refugees from Afghanistan find a place to feel safe—and to pray

BY MAGGIE PHILLIPS

The small congregation at the Islamic Center of Asheville has nearly doubled in size in the past several months. The newcomers are Afghan refugees who’ve been welcomed since the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan in August 2021. The federal government, various towns and cities, faith communities, and nonprofits have scrambled to provide for the new arrivals, and they’ve also been helped by an interfaith network of social and caseworkers and volunteers, with schools and businesses doing their best to accommodate them. However, practical concerns on the ground make day-to-day life in their new country challenging for the refugees, and an ambiguous future looms before them.

Located in North Carolina’s Blue Ridge Mountains, Asheville is a progressive island surrounded by bright red, Trump-voting counties. It may not seem like an intuitive place to send Afghan refugees, and yet there they are—42 of them, according to Catholic Charities Diocese of Charlotte program director Sandy Buck. They arrive with a one-time stipend of $1,225 each from the federal government (“all they get for the rest of their life,” she said), which is typically put toward rent, and then supplemented by donations from community and faith organizations.

Buck said that to do resettlement work, the American government partners with nine nongovernmental agencies, which left them with a short list of places to send the refugees and evacuees who arrived in the U.S. from Afghanistan last summer. Among those agencies is the U.S. Council of Catholic Bishops, which since 1975 has held various agreements with the federal government to assist with refugee resettlement. As an affiliate of the U.S. Council of Catholic Bishops, Catholic Charities offices around the country carry out resettlement work. Buck said that although refugee resettlement is usually done with an eye toward placing clients somewhere with a community that shares their cultural background, with the Afghanistan withdrawal, the priority was simply to find any affiliate that would accept them. “They needed to go somewhere,” Buck said. “They just had to get them off these military bases and safe.”

CCDOC refugee resettlement case coordinator Noele Aabye, who works with Afghan evacuees in Asheville, said it was a Catholic Charities volunteer—a Muslim from Pakistan—who initially helped connect her agency with the Islamic Center of Asheville. He “had that lived experience of coming to the U.S. and having to learn a whole new way of life, and so had a lot of empathy for people coming in,” Aabye said. Once they figured out when the Islamic Center held Friday prayers, she said, her agency was able to “put together a crew of volunteers with CCDOC to coordinate picking up everyone and getting them to Friday prayers and back.” She said the Islamic Center has served as a bridge, linking CCDOC with volunteers and providing emotional and material support to the evacuees.

Now, a few months later, a variety of community organizations and churches from other denominations assist with Afghan refugees. Aabye said help from churches includes assistance with groceries, medical appointments, and laundry, as well as church vans providing transportation, which is crucial since Asheville lacks robust public transportation. She said community support ranges from schools providing halal foods and prayer space, to a landlord who made sure the house where some Afghans are staying indicates the direction of Mecca.

One Friday in late February before prayers, I met with a large extended family of Dari-speaking Afghan refugees over tea and Oreos. Members included two parents, their five children, and a few nephews whose parents are still in Afghanistan. Aabye said they are the only intact family to arrive in Asheville. We waited as Aabye worked through a service to get through on her personal phone to a translator, whom she would put on speaker. The translator could be coming in from anywhere, Aabye said: London, Texas, Canada. She said many remote interpreters work from home, so occasionally during our conversation there was indistinct silence, noise, or conversation on the other end of the phone while we waited for the interpreter to provide translation.

The family patriarch, whose name is being withheld out of concerns for the safety of family that remains in Afghanistan, spoke of two culture shocks: the change that occurred upon leaving Afghanistan for the U.S., followed by the changes from leaving the military camp and beginning life outside the gates. When I asked about the spiritual support he and his family receive from attending Friday prayers at the Islamic Center, he told me that even though they cannot understand the English parts of the service, the prayers are the same everywhere. As to whether his children will maintain the Muslim faith they brought over from Afghanistan, he said as far as he is concerned, it is their choice now. “They are in freedom,” he said. “They do the way they want to live. But in Afghanistan, no, it is not. This is up to them. They can choose, they can do anything. They are Muslim at the moment, and they are following their religion, but it is their decision and their life, and they’ve got this freedom to do whatever they want to do.”

Through the translator, he expressed confidence that they will stay with their religion, but noted that in the end,
they will decide for themselves. They are Muslim, he said, and under American law, they are free to follow their religion here without outside pressure. In America, his children are free to choose Islam.

Soon, a van from a local Episcopal church arrived to take the family to Friday prayers. The Islamic Center of Asheville is a small, unadorned building at the top of a hill. Off to the side, a cheerful, wooden playground looks out at the city of Asheville and its tree-covered mountains. On this warm, bright, late-winter day, the sun was shining overhead with a welcome promise of spring.

Timothy Garrett, the khateeb (pastor) at the Islamic Center of Asheville, said the congregation already included over 100 families, and since the arrival of the Afghans, they have added an additional 60, which “pretty much double[s] us.” (Buck said there is another agency doing resettlement in Asheville in addition to CCDOC.) He described the Afghans as “collecting in small pockets,” which he said doesn’t trouble him, since in his view, “it helps them integrate a lot easier when they can do it together.”

Friday prayers provide a crucial life-line, spiritually and literally. “There are so many families stuck in so many different places, it’s really hard,” said Garrett. “So it’s really awesome that [community volunteers] are bringing them here on Fridays so we can see the same faces and shake the same hands.” Friday prayer attendance, he said, helps the Islamic Center “gauge who’s here, who’s not, so we can selectively say, ‘Let’s go visit these people, we haven’t seen them in two weeks.’ If you see people who are absent, you go and make sure that they’re OK.”

A new leader for the Islamic Center is arriving from Jordan soon, who will establish regular evening classes of Quran study, something Garrett said is typical in Muslim communities, with focused classes on things like character, child rearing, and family life. Garrett said he hopes the Islamic Center will see even more of the refugees as their English improves, and in time he hopes that the Afghans who speak English will help out as translators so that other refugees can take part. In the meantime, the Afghan family I met with said that while they can understand the prayers, the Islamic Center is not much of a social outlet, since the Afghans and the other congregants cannot understand each other.

This language barrier is particularly difficult, Garrett said, given that there are many different languages and dialects in Afghanistan. But the refugees’ situation may change soon. Buck said community colleges and volunteers have been helping with English language instruction. Aabye said English classes are held Monday through Thursday, with Fridays being a day off.

For all the accommodations, meals, and calls from local businesses with employment offers described to me by Charlotte diocese staff, uncertainty still plagues the Afghans who arrived in Asheville are predominantly evacuees, which means they are in the country under humanitarian parole status, and CCDOC staff are working to help them to apply for asylum. In the meantime, Garrett said, “they don’t know how long they’re going to have their home.”

Garrett is not a pessimist, though. “If people practice Islam properly, the good will start to overpower the evil,” he said. When asked what he would like Americans to know about the Afghans he serves at the Islamic Center of Asheville, he said, “Wherever we come from, we’re people, and people have a right to be loved and to be supported wherever they come from. We didn’t choose where we were born, we didn’t choose who our parents were, most of us didn’t get to choose what our religion was. So you have to look at people and find the person in it, and learn to love the person for who they are and spiritually, what we try to do is just present them with an opportunity to better themselves. The beautiful thing about the Prophet Muhammad, may Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him, is he didn’t care where you were when he met you, he just said, ‘Come on let’s go here, let’s get better. Not calling you bad, but whatever you are, let’s get better.’ And that’s the way of a true believing person. No matter who comes at them or why they came at them, you say hey, let’s see what we can do. Let’s find the truth, and follow it.”

“We are safe, we have got bread, food, clothes, and that is actually very difficult for us, to see that we have got everything, and they haven’t got anything.’”

This article was originally published on March 10, 2022.
THE REST

With Russian forces still unable to capture any of Ukraine’s key cities, attacks on civilian centers continued Wednesday, the 14th day of the war that began when Russia invaded Ukraine. A Russian airstrike hit a maternity hospital in the southern port city of Mariupol, according to multiple Ukrainian officials and video footage from the area showing wounded people being evacuated from a hospital complex. There are conflicting accounts of casualties from the strike, but the BBC cites one Ukrainian official saying that 14 people at the hospital were injured in the attack, including staff and patients.

The beginning of the historic period that is often called the “American-led postwar liberal order” perfectly coincides with the elevation of the U.S. dollar to global reserve currency at the 1944 Bretton Woods conference. Now another war may spell the end of that system as it brings the world’s great powers into a global financial conflict. The war in Ukraine is pushing Russia into an even closer partnership with China and Iran while further diminishing the United States’ global leadership. The net effect, according to the economist Nouriel Roubini, is “a geopolitical depression” that will “have massive economic and financial consequences well beyond Ukraine.”

In an interview with The Scroll, Ari Redbord—who used to work in the Terrorism and Financial Intelligence department at the United States Treasury—described the sanctions imposed against Russia over the past week as “unprecedented in their size and scale.” According to Redbord, “prior sanctions regimes took years to get to the place that we got to in just a few days.”

Investors at hedge funds and wealth management firms involved in loan deals for private jets and luxury yachts were asked by Credit Suisse to destroy any documentation about the deals, reports the Financial Times, just as new sanctions from several Western and European nations hit Russia and a roster of Russian oligarchs. The request to permanently erase all confidential information about the loans comes after a recent leak of the “Suisse Secret” papers, a trove of data about 30,000 Credit Suisse clients that showed extensive links between the Swiss bank and known drug smugglers and several oligarchs.

Several new studies show staggering educational losses among the United States’ schoolchildren during the course of the coronavirus pandemic. Roughly a third of children in kindergarten, first grade, and second grade have fallen “far behind” in reading—a 7% to 10% increase in the number measured at “far behind” compared to pre-pandemic levels. These losses have been especially dramatic among low-income children and children of color: 60% of students in some high-poverty schools in the Boston area are at high risk for reading problems, doubling the pre-pandemic percentage.

Johnson & Johnson and the three largest drug distributors in the United States finalized a $26 billion settlement with state and local governments, resolving the roughly 3,000 lawsuits contending that these companies helped drive the opioid epidemic. This is the largest settlement related to the opioid epidemic to date, and it comes amidst news that the Sackler family, owners of Purdue Pharma, have finalized a similar agreement, worth $6 billion.

FROM THE BACK PAGES

“We live as it is,” Volodymyr Zelensky said recently, seated on a folding chair that he brought himself to a press conference on March 3. “My life today is wonderful. I believe that I am needed. That’s the most important sense of life, that you are needed, that you are not just an emptiness that breathes and walks and eats something.”

If we were looking for an articulation of meaning and a model of heroism—and, I’d argue, we absolutely were—here it is. In Zelensky’s refusal to flee and his defiance in the face of near-certain death for the sake of a cause, people have been reminded of virtue and self-denial, and they are loving it.

It became common over the past few years in the United States to find think pieces appearing everywhere from Country Living to The New York Times about the wonders of hygge, the Danish concept evoking coziness, comfort, and consolation. But now the Danes are sending 2,700 anti-tank weapons to Ukraine and are allowing their countrymen to go fight there, a decision their prime minister says they have made “with open eyes and a straight back,” inspired by a “unique heroic effort by the Ukrainian people to fight back a superior power.” It would seem even the cozy Danes have decided there are more vital things than hygge when the chips are down.

—Maggie Phillips

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Diva D, the Godmother of Jerusalem Drag, Can’t Leave the Holy City Alone

For one of the founding practitioners of Israel's cross-dressing performance art—chased out to Tel Aviv by ultra-Orthodox antipathy—Purim is just another day to do battle for her right to be her

BY JACOB NEWBERRY

On stage, Diva D looked tiny. She weighed maybe a hundred pounds, mostly bone and made-up skin in a strapless black cocktail dress. But like most drag queens under a spotlight, she was loud. And mean. She also speaks four languages and performed weekly in what was then Jerusalem’s only gay club, the Mikveh.

“Who here’s from America?” she called out on a recent night there. “Who’s new?”

A group of thirtysomething guys in the back started laughing and pushing one among them to the front. The lucky one stepped onstage, his hair a little disheveled, a bit embarrassed to be up there. “Don’t stand so far away,” she said, pulling him by the hand toward her. “I’m not fucking Hitler.” We all laughed in the crowd. “Not that I would have fucked Hitler, mind you. That mustache!” The guy, apparently from the United States, looked toward his friends for help.

“Speaking of hair,” Diva D said, interrupting the reverie, “what’s going on with yours?” Everybody looked at his greasy shag, a little shiny under the lights. “You look like you just got off the train to Treblinka.” The guy started combing down fly-aways while I guffawed in shock. Diva D threw up her hands in mock disgust; the crowd descended into mutinous chatter. I actually heard someone behind me exclaim Oy gevalt while the Diva tried to quiet us. “I’m kidding!” she said, turning toward us with her shoulders raised and her hands turned out. “He’s not nearly thin enough.”

At this point I turned to the Israeli friend I came with, who seemed unimpressed. “I can’t believe she said that,” I said. He shrugged his shoulders. “This is nothing,” he said, taking a sip through his pink straw. “You should hear what she says in Hebrew.”

Diva D is 44 and a legend in the Israeli drag community. When I met Gallina Port des Bras—one of Israel’s most famous drag queens—she insisted that I speak with the Diva. “Diva D is the godmother of Jerusalem drag,” she said, referencing the foundational role she played in the 1990s. Diva D was also Gallina’s “drag mother,” a complex mix of professional and personal mentorship. “But she doesn’t give interviews anymore,” Gallina told me. Gallina and I have had a good experience working together, so she offered to intercede. “If I ask for you,” she said with a wink, “she’ll talk.”

Diva D, out of drag, is Dany Yair. When I arrived for the interview at the surprisingly spacious Tel Aviv apartment he shared with another performer, his immediate concern was with his dog. He opened the door, which let anybody touch her.”

Off stage, Dany seemed even tinier than Diva D. He walked quietly—nearly on his toes, almost as though he were wearing heels—to the kitchen while I sank into a couch with a fine covering of dog hair. I noticed the scratching post toward us with her shoulders raised and her hands turned out. “He’s not nearly thin enough.”

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Diva D, out of drag, is Dany Yair. When I arrived for the interview at the surprisingly spacious Tel Aviv apartment he shared with another performer, his immediate concern was with his dog. He opened the door, which let onto a small foyer and a very large living room. Before I said hello, his terrier started barking at me in outrage. “Don’t worry,” Dany said, petting and cooing. “He won’t hurt you.” I was unclear who he was addressing, but I decided it probably wasn’t me. This went on for at least 20 seconds, at which point I asked if I could come in. “Of course,” he said, standing abruptly. “But I don’t think he likes you.”

Israel’s gay scene today is almost exclusive to Tel Aviv. It hosts the world’s second-largest annual pride parade, and it has countless bars and clubs that cater to the community. Gay tourism to Tel Aviv grows every year, and the Israeli government has even taken to promoting the city’s gay-friendly vibe. The origins of Israel’s gay-rights movement are less clear-cut than those of the United States, where the Stonewall riots in 1969 precipitated the decades-long fight for equality that is still ongoing. While some people credit the influx of American immigrants to Israel in the post-Stonewall years for the beginnings of the country’s equality movement, it’s not at all clear that this was the case. What’s more probable is that the stories and images of the American queer revolution ignited the passions of the similarly marginalized Israeli queer community. And while the developments in legal and social progress were slow to begin—homosexuality was only decriminalized in 1988—they quickly accelerated, surpassing the United States in the 1990s, at least in terms of legal rights.

One of the pivotal organizations in the equality march has been Aguda,
Israel's first gay and lesbian organization, which was founded in 1975. Lee Walzer, in his book Between Sodom and Eden, describes how Aguda’s allies in the Knesset—the Israeli parliament—secured a number of late-night votes in favor of gay rights, waiting for the equality movement’s opponents to go home before introducing and passing those bills into law. This, according to Liora Moriel, Aguda’s former chair, is how the law decriminalizing homosexuality was passed in 1988. This was also the tactic used in 1992, when the Knesset passed a law forbidding workplace discrimination based on sexual orientation. Other milestones of progress—including equal inheritance and immigration benefits for same-sex partners—have come at the direction of Israel’s courts.

Yet the liberalism that flowers in Tel Aviv is not necessarily characteristic of the rest of the country. The politically influential ultra-Orthodox community has, in many respects, ceded Tel Aviv to the more liberal elements of society. While there are still protests of Tel Aviv’s pride parade, the general view is “They have Tel Aviv, so let us keep Jerusalem.” The virulence of ultra-Orthodox protests against Jerusalem’s parade has led to violence and even the throwing of donkey feces—a symbol, some argue, of the “bestial” nature of homosexuality. Rabbi Ephraim Holtzberg, quoted in the Jerusalem Post while protesting in 2011, described his view of the special nature of the city: “This is not San Francisco, the capital for homosexuals. This is the Holy City, and the event is a provocation against the entire world.” Many gays and lesbians are leaving Jerusalem for Tel Aviv, quickening the pace of the Holy City’s regression. Though Dany loves his hometown immensely, he, too, has had to leave.

To begin the interview, I asked Dany about the political changes in Jerusalem in his lifetime. The question rendered him visibly agitated. It’s a subject that had preoccupied him for years, but particularly since he relocated to Tel Aviv in 2010, a move he regarded as tantamount to a military defeat. “Burgas will be in fashion next year,” he said bitterly, lighting a cigarette. “The battle for Jerusalem is on its last legs.”

One of the reasons for Dany’s continued centrality to the Jerusalem scene—aside from the Diva’s artistry—is this lexicon of militarism. For Dany, though, his role as a performer also borders on the evangelical. “Every performance I give is a political act,” he told me. “I do this for every kid out there who’s different.”

He didn’t begin his career with this intention, though. He started as one of those “different” kids, dressing up from an early age, wanting only to perform. His professional debut, as he sees it, was in 1990, when he performed on stage to the Rocky Horror Picture Show on his 19th birthday.

“I’m a classically trained singer,” he said. “At first, that’s all I knew about performing.” He stamped out the last of his cigarette with his right hand while simultaneously opening the pack for another with his left. “But that bitch choir director kicked me out.”

I asked why, given his training. “She said I sang too loud!” he shouted. “She’d put me in the back, but I was still making too much goddamn noise,” he said, laughing.

Once he discovered drag, though, he was hooked. “At some point,” he said, motioning to a picture on the bookshelf of his early performing days, “I decided to own it. I said to myself, ‘If you’re gonna do this, you’re gonna be the freakiest bitch out there. You’re gonna be a superstar.’”

This tendency toward flash had always been a cause for conflict, particularly with his family. Although his mother was initially skeptical, she eventually came to accept and even enjoy his performances. As one always does in this country, I asked if she’s religious. “My mother?” he said, eyebrows raised. “I’ll tell you about her. She called me the other day, because a friend of hers that’d never been to her apartment before came over.” He took a sip of his coffee, smiling already. “The woman walks into the kitchen and sees two sinks, then turns in shock to my mother. ‘Are you keeping kosher?’ she asks.” He threw one hand down on the table, laughing. “And she says, ‘Yeah, the left sink’s for the pork and the right one’s for the shrimp!’”

Dany clearly loves to entertain, and it seems to be genetic. But he slipped quickly back to a serious tone as he returned to the topic of his beginnings as a drag queen. His early performances in Jerusalem, he conceded, were political, though not intentionally so. “Standing in a bar in a dress,” he said, “just down the road from the Kotel”—the Hebrew term for the Western Wall—“well, that’s a political statement.”

“But,” he added, “I was really in it for the shock value.”

That mix of ambition and provocation is still a mainstay of the Diva’s performances. Nowhere is this more evident than in her penchant to use Auschwitz in a joke at least once a night. Dany insisted this is an effective means of revitalizing a tragic but familiar narrative of orchestrated murder. But it’s also a tendency that’s native to the grieving process. “You reach a point,” he said, “where laughter feels all right. That means that you’ve come pretty far.”

What began for Dany as a hobby quickly turned into a successful career. The drag scene in Jerusalem was basically nonexistent in the early 1990s, and so Dany had no “drag mother” from whom he could learn the ropes. He turned to books and films, he said, to learn the culture and history of the genre. Torch Song Trilogy, in particular, was key. “I learned when I watched that movie,” he said, “that I was part of a larger tradition. It had a major impact on me.”

‘Every performance I give is a political act. I do this for every kid out there who’s different.’

While still a teenager, he took to living in drag full-time in the Holy City, a practice he no longer observes. I assumed this was because of harassment or violence, but he corrects me. The problem was logistical. “It was exhausting to live like that,” he said. “I’d take 45 minutes to get ready, just so I could take out the trash.”

It’s not that he wasn’t heckled in public, though. “The Haredi would shout horrible things at me,” he said, using the Hebrew term for the ultra-Orthodox. “I’d give them the finger and keep walking.” Even considering this harassment, though, he looked to the 1990s with nostalgia.
“That was the golden age for Jerusalem,” he said. “We had a bigger scene than Tel Aviv.”

Living in Jerusalem today, I am having a hard time imagining there ever having been a “golden age” of drag here, let alone one so recent. Jerusalem’s gay community today is both embattled and marginalized. The Mikveh, where Diva D performs her Monday night show—Israel’s longest-running such performance—is an important gathering place. But its owner acts with a secrecy that borders on paranoia. Performances, theme nights, drink specials—all are advertised primarily through Facebook or by word of mouth. The exception to this has been the kitschy—and cryptic—figure of the “Unibra,” a portmanteau combining the words “unicorn” and “zebra.”

The design—a pink zebra head with a horn—is spray-painted on walls in some of Jerusalem’s more liberal neighborhoods with only an upcoming date below it. The curious passerby will be encouraged, the marketing theory goes, to search online for an explanation. Ultimately, this will lead to the Mikveh’s Facebook page.

This level of secrecy and vigilance extends, importantly, to the building itself. The Mikveh is located on a quiet, industrial street downtown. It’s surprisingly small. When there’s a big crowd, the effect inside can be almost claustrophobic. Outside, the bar’s entrance is remarkable only for how well it blends in: There is no sign indicating its name and no rainbow flag out front, as is the custom for most gay businesses in Tel Aviv and around the world. The club’s dilapidated appearance is indistinguishable from the surrounding storefronts, where small shops sell furniture and carpeting. The full effect is that of almost complete invisibility. This is by design.

Many businesses throughout Israel have security stationed at their entrances, but the need for further protection was highlighted by the murder of two people in 2009 at a Tel Aviv LGBT youth center. The attacker was never found, but it’s widely presumed to have been an ultra-Orthodox extremist. That the crime happened in Tel Aviv—where being openly gay is much more common—added to the sense of peril in the community. Jerusalem is a much less tolerant city, and the dance floor of the Mikveh is very compact. Secrecy is, in many ways, the only option left.

Dany sat on a couch next to mine, legs crossed and chain smoking. He was eager to talk about his life, about his role in establishing Israel’s drag scene, about his views on queer politics writ large. But he did so with an air of elegy. “I’ve fought my battles,” he said, looking out the window to the poplars shaking in the breeze. “Jerusalem is basically lost.”

Dany’s narrative of the city’s decline was unrelentingly pessimistic. Since I was living in Jerusalem, I pressed repeatedly for a ray of hope, some positive development to look to in the city’s future. He shot me down each time. “Look,” he said. “Anyone who’s even a little bit liberal is leaving.”

The primary culprit for the city’s increasing conservatism is, in his mind, the rise of the ultra-Orthodox community. The Haredi population in Jerusalem has risen dramatically over the past 20 years, driven in large part by a birth rate (6 percent annually) that is much higher than that of non-Orthodox Israeli women. This population explosion has come in tandem with an increasingly active—and often hostile—movement to pressure the city at large to conform to Haredi standards of decency. The community’s protests and vandalism have rendered billboards with pictures of women largely absent from the city. (They are common elsewhere in Israel.) The increasing frequent practice of segregating sidewalks by gender in Haredi neighborhoods has drawn a great deal of attention in secular Israeli circles lately, as has the ultra-Orthodox push to similarly segregate public buses by gender.

The real turning point for Dany, though, came in 2005, when an ultra-Orthodox man stabbed three people during Jerusalem’s annual pride parade. The man was one of a large group of Haredi protesters. The attempted murders—along with the man’s proclamation that he had come “to kill in the name of God”—revealed the true nature of the gay community’s peril in the city. Though he kept living there for several years more, the stabbings hastened Dany’s decision to move to Tel Aviv. “That’s when we said to ourselves, ‘The zealots are getting stronger,’” he said.

The stabbings were, in Dany’s mind, the tragic but predictable culmination of forces that had been brewing for years. Jerusalem’s first pride parade took place in 2002, and Dany, performing as Diva D, was its inaugural emcee. He played the same role the following year, at which point the ultra-Orthodox mounted a violent protest. In response, the Jerusalem Open House for Pride and Tolerance, the group that had organized the parade, changed both the route and the time for the following year. Instead of taking place at the highly visible hour of Friday at noon—just before the beginning of the Jewish Sabbath, when most people would be heading home from work—the parade was changed to take place on a Thursday night. This decision, billed as a consideration of Haredi “sensitivity” over the holiness of the Sabbath, struck Dany as an unacceptable concession. He chose to boycott the parade in protest. “It minimized the visibility,” he said, “and thus the impact.”

The cat was now asleep on my lap. I spoke quietly, hoping to avoid waking it. I asked Dany if he had any sympathy for the desire among the parade’s organizers to appease the Haredi.

“I’m much more militant than them,”
he said, almost spitting in contempt. “If you’re going to piss people off, you might as well do it in broad daylight.”

As a result of the violence, each year’s parade has been subject to tremendous international coverage. The gay community, and the organizers of the parade in particular, have responded in the way they know best: by enduring. Indeed, the parade has continued every year, and the number of participants has grown. Even Dany expects the number to keep rising each year. I asked if the increased numbers can be seen in any way as an indicator of hope.

“Definitely not,” he said, without hesitation. “They changed the time, they changed the route, they gave in to almost everything.” In response to the violence, the parade’s organizers made more drastic concessions. The 2006 parade was changed to a stadium rally, eliminating the parade portion of the event altogether. This meant no visibility in Jerusalem’s streets, a consequence that Dany viewed as a kind of further death. Only in 2012 was the original course resumed, but Dany’s sense of betrayal has been impossible to overcome.

He stood abruptly and walked to the kitchen. “I need a drink,” he said. “Do you want one?” I declined, and when he came back, I saw why he had quit giving interviews. The discussion was visibly upsetting him, not least of all because he still saw Jerusalem as his home and his life in Tel Aviv as a kind of exile. “The whole city’s been run over by them,” he said, referring to the ultra-Orthodox. “It’s an invasion. And they’re winning.”

For all the marketing of Israel as a gay Mecca, and for all its self-congratulation as the only country in the Middle East that hosts a pride parade, the true nature of daily life in Jerusalem is very different than it is in Tel Aviv. I came expecting a conservative city, no doubt, but the degree of open hostility I’ve experienced has been demoralizing and unexpected. This is not to say that I’ve experienced violence, or even explicit threats of it. But the openness of Haredi contempt is singular and afflicting, and I encounter it nearly everywhere I go in the city. It’s unlike anything I’ve experienced in my life, from small-town Mississippi, where I’m from, to large cities like Paris or London, where I’ve lived and visited. I’ve had Haredi men hiss at me as I step on the bus, while mothers pull their children toward us as I walk past in the aisle. A man once followed me for nearly 20 minutes, his face growing angrier each time I turned around. He only disappeared when I finally walked into the lobby of a police station.

Much of that scorn, I know, is tied up with my appearance. I have very long hair and rather feminine features, and this combination appears to be a bridge too far for many of the Holy City’s residents. I mention this in part to ratify Dany’s assessment of the dolorous state of affairs in Israel’s capital, for the LGBT population in general, but for the gender variant crowd in particular. But I also say this to emphasize the incomprehensibility of that “golden age,” particularly for someone who never experienced it. The main gay club of the 1990s, Dany told me, was located on one of the floors of a building at Zion Square, which is at the center of Jerusalem’s downtown. The rainbow flag flew out front, he said, visible to everyone who walked along the city’s busiest pedestrian thoroughfare, Jaffa Street. The idea of walking that street today as Dany did, in heels and a wig, seems about as wise as doing the same down a sidewalk in Biloxi.

Dany moved to a seat by the window now, calling his dog to sit on his lap. He sipped a glass of Merlot while the late-afternoon sun settled across the room. The air was thick with smoke; he hadn’t once gone more than a minute without a cigarette during the hour of our interview. He had about him the air of a banished monarch, albeit one who returned weekly to an ever-shrinking band of loyalists. In Tel Aviv he was only one member of the royal family; in Jerusalem, he was the Queen.

“Why do you keep going back to Jerusalem?” I asked.

His shoulders slumped as he dipped back into a now-familiar tone of elegy. “I can’t live there,” he said, inhaling with purpose, “but I can keep on performing.” He noted that his shows are more steeped in artistry in the Holy City than when he performs in Tel Aviv. He can expand his song choices, for example, beyond the American Top 40. He can plan more intricate choreography, too, since he knows the crowd will always be paying attention. He felt freer in Jerusalem to experiment, to keep growing as an artist, because the crowd is loyal, and he’s one of their own.

“I perform in Tel Aviv for the money,” Dany told me, “but my heart is in Jerusalem.”

I went to one more of Diva D’s performances after our interview. She was sharing the stage with Gallina, her one-time protégée who had become better known than the Diva herself. The set list was Disney songs, and the highlight an energetic duet from The Little Mermaid. The Diva, perhaps predictably, played the role of the evil squid queen, Ursula. In keeping with the international feel of the performance, the song switched at the halfway point to the Hebrew version, which I didn’t know existed. When the song ended, Gallina went backstage to change for the next number. Diva D ate up some time by moving on to her usual shtick: inviting a tourist to come onstage for some banter. The man who went up this time was less disheveled than the last, but this didn’t dampen the Diva’s in-character meanness.

“Are you Jewish?” she asked. The man smiled awkwardly and said something inaudible. “Speak into the microphone, honey,” she said, pushing it toward him. “Yes,” he said.

She looked him over slowly, as though appraising his claim. She turned to the audience and raised her eyebrows. “Just be grateful I won’t ask him to prove it,” she said. “Woof.”

“Is there a reason you came to Jerusalem?” she asked.

“I don’t know,” he said, shifting from one leg to the other. “To understand my roots better, I guess.”

“Sounds like you don’t know very much,” she said. She cut the interview short and sent him back to the crowd.

“What a bore!” she said, as he politely went down the stairs to the dance floor. She called to the bartender over the microphone. “Give him a drink, on me. He needs it.” The man shuffled back toward the bar.
“On second thought,” she said, pushing back her hair in an inadvertent Cher impression, “make him pay for it.” A man beside me booted good-naturedly. The Diva turned toward the dark bar. “Hey,” she said, pointing into the dark, where she assumed the man was standing. “There’s a reason some people get turned into soap.” She pulled the microphone cord alongside her and crossed the stage.

At this the crowd erupted into an almost insurrectionary chatter. “What?” she said, raising her shoulders. “Some people can just wash the fun right out of the room.”

I laughed—unwillingly—and tried to decipher why she was still haranguing this poor man, who had probably left by now. Gallina, as it turned out, was still getting dressed backstage for the next number, so Diva D was trying to stall.

“You know,” she said, raising her hands to quiet us. “I have to tell you something.” For a moment, it seemed that Dany was speaking, rather than the Diva. “I wasn’t born a bitch,” she said. “I was made a bitch.”

Someone in the audience whooped in approval. “You get hurt,” she said, raising one hand in the air, “and then one day you decide you don’t want to be hurt anymore.”

Suddenly the room felt like a tent revival, with hands raised in the crowd and hums of approval ringing through the darkness. “But I’m in charge,” Diva D said, to more cheers. “The D in my name stands for Director.”

At that we cheered, and then the lights went down. She put the microphone away and walked backstage without another word, her heels clicking loudly in the silence.

This article was originally published on March 23, 2016.

**HOLIDAYS**

**It’s Garry Shandling’s Shpiel**

What the late comedian can teach us about Purim

**BY DOVID BASHEVKIN**

Larry Shandling’s television debut on Johnny Carson’s *The Tonight Show* was four years before I was born. His first sitcom, *It’s Garry Shandling’s Show*, debuted when I was 1 year old. His magnum opus, *The Larry Sanders Show*, began in 1992 and ran for six years, so even if I had HBO (I didn’t), I undoubtedly would not have been allowed to watch it. During my prime years of comedic fandom, Shandling had already drifted into relative obscurity, spoken of mostly by the elder generation of comedy fans with veneration and longing, but if you weren’t paying close attention (I wasn’t) it’s possible you may have never even heard of him.

Shandling died five years ago, on March 24, 2016. I only discovered him two years later, with the release of Judd Apatow’s 2018 HBO documentary *The Zen Diaries of Garry Shandling*. I fell in love with his comedy, his self-deprecatory style that always made sure that instead of politicians and celebrities, he was the punchline for his jokes. I watched and rewatched the documentary, and I began to pay attention to his philosophy. I’m a rabbi and an educator, but I’ve always felt a certain kinship with the worldview of comedians—biting, authentic, scrambling against the assault from life’s misery and difficulties when all you’ve got to fight back with is a plastic spoon. And so I began to dig deeper into Shandling’s life. One thing I found quite striking is that Shandling’s yahrzeit was, on the Hebrew calendar, the 14th of Adar.

Garry Shandling, the philosopher’s comedian and the comedian’s philosopher, died on Purim 5776, the holiday celebrating Jewish laughter and absurdity. And it was through Purim that I developed a new appreciation for Shandling—and it was through Shandling that I saw Purim anew.

I had post-partum depression when I was born—isn’t it usually the mother? I looked up—I still remember this—and said, oh no! They’re Jews.

Shandling was born in 1949 in Chicago to a Jewish family and grew up in Tuscon, Arizona. His parents, Muriel and Irving, were Reform Jews—his grandfather Jacob Shandling was from Lithuania and remained Orthodox his entire life. His older brother, Barry, died when Garry was 10 years old, a tragedy that remained with him for the rest of his life. His relationship with his mother was complex; she was overbearing, and seemed to have a bit of a vicarious affection for Shandling’s life and career. “My mother is deeply conflicted,” Shandling mused. “She wants grandchildren, but I don’t think she wants me to have them with another woman.” Judaism was a recurring theme in Shandling’s comedy though most frequently the target of blame for his ever-present neuroses and self-criticism. When his gentile friends would...
ask if Jews go camping. Shandling joked earlier in his career, he’d respond, “We do, it’s just catered.”

Shandling, as Jewish as he was, was drawn to a Buddhist practice, particularly the thought of Thích Nhất Hạnh. As fellow Jewish comedian Sarah Silverman aptly explains in the documentary: “It’s not because he’s Zen—it’s because he was in desperate need of being Zen.” Like many Jews, and as considered in countless books and articles, Shandling was drawn to the spiritual surrender that Buddhism offers. There is an inner passivity and transcendence that attracts many Jews to Buddhism, a respite perhaps from what the ceaseless sociological ambitions of diasporic Jewry and the detailed Talmudic attention to everyday rituals they remember from their childhood. Shandling, like many Jews attracted to Buddhism, never renounced his Jewish identity. If anything, his impatience with Jewish practice might qualify as quintessentially Jewish. Yet, even as he clearly searched for spirituality in other avenues and addresses, there is a fatefulness in realizing that the very values he sought are the very values embodied on his yahrzeit, Purim.

On Purim we read Megillas Esther, the one book in the Jewish canon in which the name of God is entirely absent. Ibn Ezra has a rather mundane explanation: The Megillah was originally mailed as letters. So as to avoid any desecration, they omitted God’s name. It is interesting thinking of the Megillah as originally a letter; it is still read as such, rolled up like private correspondence intimately unfurled the moment it is received. Shandling’s inner life was transmitted in a similar way—diary notes that later served as the basis for the documentary, hence the name Zen Diaries. Other books of the Torah read sometimes like op-eds or perhaps a long-form essay, or even sometimes true crime narrative nonfiction. But the Megillah is different—there’s no explicit prophecy, no obvious miracles, no voices from heaven. God does not appear in the story of the Megillah because, much like our actual personal lives, God is discovered—so if you don’t search, He remains absent.

All my journey is to be authentically who I am. Not trying to be someone else under all circumstances. The whole world is confused because they are trying to be someone else. To be your true self takes enormous work. Then we can start to look at the problems of the world. Instead, ego drives it. Ego drives the world. Ego drives the problem. So you need to work in an egoless way. This egolessness which is the key to being authentic is a battle.

God’s apparent absence in the Purim story is a reflection of sorts on what it means to participate in a story. Normally, when we watch a story, we only pay attention to the characters depicted—actors, supporting actors, background. The Purim story, however, sensitizes the reader—through this most obvious absence—of the other roles involved in a story: writer, director, cinematographer. An effective movie director is never on the screen, but the entire performance is in essence a tribute to their presence. They remain obscured, however, behind the fourth wall of the production. What has become known as breaking the fourth wall is the acknowledgment that the entire story is, in fact, a product of someone else’s design. That’s part of the reason why it has become a common custom to wear costumes on Purim, a not-so-subtle reminder that we are always to some extent playing a role, and our real authenticity lies beneath. And breaking the fourth wall, recognizing the very revelation the story is by design concealing, is the recurring theme throughout Shandling’s work. His debut television show, It’s Garry Shandling’s Show, was built on this very premise, whereby the actors throughout acknowledge they’re on a television show, openly incorporating the audience’s presence into the performance. This continued in more subtle ways in his later work as well. The Larry Sanders Show is an elaborate unveiling of the behind-the-scenes drama and personalities that constitute the carefully curated world of talk shows. Even his later efforts, notably his interviews for the DVD extras for The Larry Sanders Show...
Show, seem desperate to capture the normalness and magic of everyday scriptless conversation within the confines of the camera. Whether it’s his famous interview with Ricky Gervais or his lesser known appearance as the first guest on Howard Stern’s short-lived talk show on E, Shandling simultaneously critiques the very performative medium he is a part of. “The only thing worse than being on TV every night,” Shandling deadpans, “is wanting to be on TV every night.” To watch Shandling is to watch someone wrestle with his own self-consciousness of his self-consciousness, grasping for the possibility, however futile, that we can act naturally even in the presence of a camera. Because the moment a believer—which Shandling very much was—stops seeing God as a fellow actor, we are only left with the foreboding awareness that we’ve been on His stage the entire time.

**SHANDLING:** That material and your material is purely a vehicle for you to express your spirit and your soul and your being. **JERRY SEINFELD:** It doesn’t have any value beyond that?

**SHANDLING:** It doesn’t have any value beyond you expressing yourself spiritually in a very soulful spiritual way. It is **why** you are on the planet. God!—open the sunroof, what year is this?

It’s hard to find a moment where the story of the Megillah turns. From the beginning of the story, King Ahasuerus and Vashti, the appointment of Queen Esther, the ascendency of Haman, the restless of the king and of Queen Esther, the ascendancy of suerus and Vashti, the appointment of his then-queen, the beginning of the story, King Ahasuerus became the fourth wall drops between the actor and the director, it also vanishes the clear presence of God, each moment is transformed into another aspect of God’s revelation or, better yet, the realization that He was never all that concealed. The intoxicating narrative of Purim allows us to sing “blessed is Haman and cursed is Mordechai” because once we realize that we are all vehicles in a larger story, the differences between hero and villain become moot—we’re all just playing a part. Shandling had many villains in his life. His manager manipulated him, he was phone-tapped by an unscrupulous private investigator, he was plagued by various health problems, some of which were only belatedly diagnosed, until his eventual passing. In his diary he wrote, “Let go. Forgive completely.” He stopped analyzing the script his life gave him and allowed himself to surrender to the moments in front of him. “Do your comedy not for the sake of fame and fortune,” he wrote to himself, “but because it is what God does through you. You are merely a vehicle.”

“Do your comedy not for the sake of fame and fortune,” he wrote to himself, ‘but because it is what God does through you. You are merely a vehicle.”

**HISTORY**

Tablet explores the past at tabletmag.com/sections/history

“And who knows,” Mordechai cautions Esther in one of the most pivotal scenes of the Megillah, “if you have ascended to royalty for this very moment.” God is never revealed in the Purim story, but his presence is found in the way people look toward the presence and potential of others. After facing the absurdity of a day of Jewish annihilation transformed into a day of Jewish celebration, realizing that we all along have been a part of God’s stage direction, we learn how to see godliness in others. This ultimately was the revelation within the final act of Shandling’s life. “Give more, give what you didn’t get, love more, drop the old story,” he writes in his diary. “Become old gracefully. Become a mentor gracefully.” As the curtains began to close, Shandling turned his critical, self-conscious gaze into an outward graciousness, reading his friends’ scripts, organizing basketball games, and serving as a parental figure for many comedians and writers. On Purim we send mishloach manos, celebratory food for friends, and matanos l’evyonim, gifts for the poor. Once the fourth wall drops between the actor and the director, it also vanishes between fellow actors.

Garry died without a wife and without children. It’s unclear if anyone ever said Kaddish for him, though his lifelong friend and first cousin Michael Shandling told me he lights a candle for him every year on March 24. I think Purim is the perfect tribute to Garry Shandling and a fitting yahrzeit for him every year on March 4. I think Purim is the perfect tribute to Garry Shandling and a fitting yahrzeit to remember his values. We say Kadish as a means of sanctifying God’s name even in the face of tragedy and difficulty. And as we eke through this impossible life, Shandling and Purim remind us that even in the face of difficulty, the possibility of authentic joy can still be found in the rubble of our imagined narratives. If only we stop critiquing the script and instead surrender to it and help others fall in love with it.

**Maybe your comedy is a natural gift to be given to others with joy to help them through this impossible life and you sharing it, with no desire of getting anything.**

This article was originally published on February 24, 2021.
Hiding Out on Purim

A childhood costume that once concealed what I wanted to hide now reveals what I want to hold tight

BY MERRI UKRAINCIK

One of my favorite childhood photographs, I’m dressed like Queen Esther on her wedding day, holding a nosegay of purple flowers. It was taken on Purim when I was a little girl, at an age when I normally eschewed frills and fuss. According to family lore, I liked to tear the ribbons off my dresses. Occasionally, I’d even disrobe, leaving the offending frocks in heaps on the ground.

My Purim costume was the exception. I loved it more than I did prune-filled hamantaschen right out of the oven.

So, I was delighted to see it again when a long-forgotten jumble of family pictures, loosely packed in a produce bag, came into my possession a few months ago, plucking the dress from the back of the closet of my memory.

As a child, I had only two dress-up options for Purim: Vashti and Queen Esther. I chose the latter, knowing the rules of the Purim story well enough and wanting by nature to be the “good” girl. Because my mother could sew, a store-bought costume would have been sacrilege. Instead, she stitched matching gowns for my sister and me from a bolt of white lace that wasn’t as itchy as it looked. The skirts swept the floor, Cinderella-like, and I was grateful for the length, which hid the unsightly orthopedic shoes I had to wear to train my feet not to point outward.

The dress made me feel all grown up—not a princess, but like a queen. What I treasured most, though, was that it allowed me to hide right out in the open. In it I could shroud not only my shoes, but the whole awkward rest of me, no small wonder for a discomfited child seeking hiding places wherever she could find them. I was too young then to understand the challenges that Esther faced in concealing her true identity from King Ahasuerus. Nor could I appreciate that the Book of Esther is among the most magnificent hiding places of all, for G-d—whose name does not appear in the text of the megillah—chose to secret Himself inside it. All I knew was that the feeling of hiddenness comforted me, and that I delighted in twirling in front of the mirror to admire how I looked.

The bolt of white lace was long, enabling me to dress as Queen Esther several years running as I grew, my head topped each Purim with a new paper crown. Then one year, with or without a grand pronouncement I cannot recall, I sloughed off my royal attire, placed it in a box that would later succumb to a flood in the basement, and set off to find new places to hide. By the time I was old enough to notice the absence of my childhood photographs, the memory of that beloved costume had long ago been left behind.

The Purim sparkle in my eyes faded, too, only to return in new clothes when I had my sons. I couldn’t wait to hand-make their costumes, and did for a while until they requested store-bought ones instead—a statement of their burgeoning independence, a tiny fissure in their tether with me. That first time, my husband did the kindness of taking them shopping, returning home with the uniforms of a Hatzolah medic and two policemen. The charming figures my young sons cut in them soothed my sore feelings, my heart skipping a beat to watch them act as mini-adults, my mind projecting forward to when this wouldn’t be child’s play anymore.

Purim is different now with three teenagers, and I miss the anticipation that once defined the lead-up to the holiday and the pageantry of the day itself. Last year, only my youngest dressed up, throwing together a costume of his own making minutes before we left for shul. It was the final vestige of an era. This year, he tells me, he won’t be bothered. I still dress up in part, though: In a nod to my erstwhile Queen Esther crown, I plan to wear the Princess Leia beanie I crocheted a few months ago for a Star Wars-themed Shabbos dinner with friends.

If I look closely, I can still see the Purim sparkle in my sons’ eyes, even as it dims with passing time and adolescent cool. One asks when I’m baking hamantaschen, shrugging to appear as if he doesn’t care at all. A second offers to wear his Yoda hat in solidarity with my Leia. A third sends pictures of the megillah he is learning to write, the one in which G-d’s name is nowhere to be found. Yet G-d is there, concealed between the lines and the letters, maneuvering us toward salvation in Persia thousands of years ago, while we carry on, alert to the Ha-mans of our own generation.

One day, when my boys conjure up their own childhood memories, I hope their blessings will not slip through their hands as easily as I let mine go. For it is what we remember and which stories we rescue from oblivion that entwine to teach us the most valuable lessons about how to live and how to love.

“It’s me! It’s me!” I shout, greeting the flood of stories from my childhood released by the arrival of those family photographs. I grab them, lest these blessing once hidden in plain sight rush past me again and disappear into the ether. And I marvel how it’s possible that I could have ever been a little girl looking to hide in a Queen Esther costume, because it was while I was hiding that I first blossomed into view.

This article was originally published on March 22, 2016.
## Joan Nathan’s Chosen Hamantaschen

**By Joan Nathan**

### INGREDIENTS

**FOR THE DOUGH**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ingredient</th>
<th>Quantity</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2 ½ sticks unsalted butter or coconut oil, softened</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>½ cup sugar</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1 large egg</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>½ teaspoon vanilla</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1 tablespoon orange juice</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2 ½–3 cups unbleached all-purpose flour</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1 teaspoon baking powder</td>
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<tr>
<td>½ teaspoon salt</td>
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**FOR THE FILLING**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ingredient</th>
<th>Quantity</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 cup toasted walnuts</td>
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<tr>
<td>½ cup sugar</td>
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<tr>
<td>½ teaspoon vanilla</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>½ lemon, quartered and seeded</td>
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<tr>
<td>½ orange, quartered and seeded</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 tablespoon Triple Sec or other orange-flavored liqueur</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 dried figs, roughly chopped</td>
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<tr>
<td>½ teaspoon ground cinnamon</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>½ cup orange marmalade</td>
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### PREPARATION

#### TO MAKE THE DOUGH

**Step 1**
Cream the butter or margarine with the sugar in a food processor or standing mixer.

**Step 2**
Add the egg, vanilla, and orange juice and continue to cream until smooth.

**Step 3**
Add 2 ½ cups of the flour, baking powder, and salt. Mix until the dough comes together, adding flour until the dough is pliable. It will be slightly sticky.

**Step 4**
Roll into a ball, using the remaining flour if needed, flatten, and wrap in plastic wrap.

**Step 5**
Refrigerate for at least 2 to 3 hours or overnight.

#### TO MAKE THE FILLING

**Step 1**
Place all of the filling ingredients in a food processor and process until chopped but not pureed. You should have approximately 2 cups.

**Step 2**
Set aside until the dough is chilled.

#### TO MAKE THE HAMATASCHEN

**Step 1**
Preheat the oven to 375 degrees and grease a cookie sheet.

**Step 2**
Fill a small bowl with water.

**Step 3**
Roll the dough out on a slightly floured board until it is ¼ inch thick. Cut into 3-inch circles.
Step 4
Place 1 teaspoon of filling in the center of each circle.

Step 5
To shape the hamantaschen, first brush water around the rim of the circle with your finger. Pull the edges of the dough up to form a triangle around the filling and pinch the 3 corners together, leaving a small opening in the center.

Step 6
Transfer to a cookie sheet and bake for 10 to 15 minutes or until the tops are golden.

Yield: Makes about 30 cookies