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Survivors in the Catskills
A recent gathering of 56 survivors in the Hudson Valley was a painful and uncomfortable reminder that living memory of the Holocaust has nearly run out forever.

BY ARMIN ROSEN

The Hudson Valley Resort and Spa rests on a gentle slope facing the near-distant curtain of mountain where the wilderness finally begins. Only the softest pinch of loss intrudes into the landscape’s tranquil domes of spotlit green and emerald shadow. “We’re gonna dedicate rooms to the old hotels that closed down,” exclaimed Yossi Zablocki, newly the proprietor of what he says is the only kosher resort left in the entire Catskills. “There were hundreds of them!”

Before he purchased the former Granit Hotel in Kerhonkson from a Chinese company that planned on tearing down the squat concrete blocks containing its guest rooms, leveling its two dusty theaters and bulldozing a spa and a piano lounge that could one day be transformed into hammams and hookah bars for New York’s vacationing from community, Zablocki had been the final manager and operator of Kutsher’s, the longest-surviving of the legendary old borscht belt getaways. The family-owned resort was sold in 2013 when the construction of a nearby casino boosted the value of the property, a transaction that marked the final point where present-day cynicism and desperation engulfed whatever was left of the long-ago blend of social aspiration, good taste, and Jewish American particularity that made the Catskills possible.

Or maybe not so final: The phone number that called Kutsher’s for nearly a century now reaches Zablocki’s secretary, he said. As we spoke, a work crew was installing white marble flooring in a lobby that still felt far too large, even with its newly arrived wooden sculptures of local predatory wildlife. A volume of Talmud sat invitingly on a table in the inhabited center region of the cavernous entrance lounge. Peyos’ed children walked by in Crocs and swimming goggles.

For the previous week, in mid-July, it had been Zablocki’s profound responsibility to host 56 New York City Holocaust survivors for a summer program sponsored by The Blue Card, a New York-based organization that has been assisting Jews persecuted by Nazi Germany since 1934. The participants, nearing the end of a full week of entertainment, relaxation, and exercise, were now making challah in one of the ballrooms. At a long table near the center...
of the faded and windowless hall, the last Jews of prewar Poland and Hungary, most of them women whose sheitels and head-wraps made them look reassuringly younger than they actually were, threaded long tubes of dough and kibbitzed in Yiddish with English undertones. Three of the people here had numbers tattooed on their arms, noted Ruchy Cisner, a young case worker with Nachas Health and Family Network, a Borough Park health care nonprofit focused on the area’s survivors and co-organizer of the retreat.

The Blue Card had organized a media day where it would be possible to see how New York’s last living connections to the Holocaust and to Jewish Europe were being cared for. Each of the 56 survivors present was an education in the nightmares that had shaped every Jew on Earth, but which the triumphalism of modern, multicultural America had been almost designed to obscure. So complete was the post-historical American cocoon of wealth and safety, and so total was postwar society’s break with the legacy of the old country, that it became possible to forget that arrival in America is not a literal rebirth, and that for millions of Jews across hundreds of years, firsthand experience of dispossession, persecution, and murder had been the inescapable context of their lives in the United States.

Ahuvia Jakober’s family fled east as the Nazis advanced across Poland, and was lucky enough to make it into the Soviet Union. Luck, in this case, meant getting sent to a forced labor camp in Siberia, and then to Kazakhstan, where there were enough deported Jews to sustain a Polish-language school. She made it back to Poland in 1946, but “they were beating Jews and we didn’t stay.” Next came a displaced persons camp, then a stint in Israel, then most of a lifetime in Brooklyn, where the Polish accent and Yiddish cadences never disappeared.

“That’s it. That’s our life,” the rasping old woman said, summing up this schematic version of the ordeal the Germans, Russians, and Poles had inflicted on her over 70 years ago. “You will be busy—you have what to write.”

That’s it—it’s a straightforward series of events, familiar enough by now. You will be busy—and unless you were there, the true content of such a life can’t possibly be known. And soon enough, no one will know it.

With no sentimentality or possibility of appeal, the extinguished Jewish worlds of Warsaw and Budapest, as well as the campaign of extermination that destroyed them, will soon lose their final living witnesses to an oblivion that is optimistically referred to as “history.” At that point, which gets closer with every passing second, the memory and reality of the Holocaust will be the sole responsibility of people who weren’t there.

It is far from obvious that we are up to the challenge. Soon, Jews and the broader human race will have no living reminders and no living accusers. Instead, we will have to remind and accuse ourselves and each other, an unpleasant activity that most people, and indeed most Jews, might decide they’re better off without.

In the unlikely case that Jewish Europe and the Holocaust aren’t generally remembered in ways that are disturbing and self-aggrandizing, they will still be in danger of being conveniently reduced to rhetorical devices or metaphysical thought experiments or a series of trivializing political catchphrases tailored to the latest partisan political ends. This is already happening, with the pace of the vulgarity increasing almost by the week. Anne Frank trends on Twitter with revolting frequency—last week it was because of a Rhode Island sports bar attempting a tasteless joke. The joke was perhaps less appalling than the U.K.’s Anne Frank Trust, which uses the name of a murdered Jewish child to legitimate their blandly universalist women’s empowerment platitudes, which highlights antisemites like Virginia Woolf and Alice Walker as role models for today’s youth.

The grossness of the ideologues who exploit Anne Frank’s name and image is in turn exceeded by that of the New York-based Olga Lengyel Institute for Holocaust Studies and Human Rights, which endeavors to “educate teachers...about human rights and social justice through the lens of the Holocaust”—a mission it carries out by appropriating the moral capital of Holocaust memory in order to bless newfangled and still-controversial “equity initiatives” introduced in U.S. public schools after the supposed American racial reckoning of 2020, which have a funny tendency to marginalize and exclude living Jews. The institute’s online “About” page and video only very obliquely mention the Jewish identity of the vast majority of the Nazis’ victims.

As long as there are living Jews who experienced the attempted destruction of their people as not just a national but a personal violation—an act of violence that real and identifiable perpetrators inflicted on them and on their societies and on their loved ones—it is still possible to know what the Holocaust really was, and what it destroyed. And it is still possible, within this desperately narrowing span of time, to grasp the full burden of the task we will inherit once the last of the survivors are gone.

Fifty-six survivors in a single room—where to even begin? I mentioned to Cisner, the Nachas case worker, that I had recently been in Krakow, in eastern Poland. Perhaps there was someone in this ballroom who remembered what Kazimierz, the cobblestoned hipster precinct that is now a moving yet slightly ghoulish open-air Jewish heritage museum, had been like before the world ended. “Mrs. Mikel come here,” Cisner beckoned. “He was just in Krakow!”

A formidable older woman in heavy makeup and a burnt-blond sheitel, streaked with tastefully understated ribbons of gray, appeared to float toward us. Erna Mikel had spent six years in various camps and ghettos after the Germans occupied Poland in 1939. First had been the Krakow ghetto, where she was locked inside walls built to look like giant Jewish tombstones,
a cruelty followed by the Plaszow and Ravensbruck concentration camps, along with other loci of the German campaign to murder every Jew on Earth. She escaped a death march when a small group of prisoners pretended to relieve themselves by the side of the road and ran off into the forest. Today she has children in Los Angeles, Toronto, and Monsey, New York. One of her daughters is a lawyer. One of her sons she forbade from ever visiting Poland. “And they’re very good children,” she said. “They call me every day.”

Jewish Krakow was her home. Her father was a shoe salesman, a follower of the Belz Hasidic movement who wore a shtrielim on Shabbat. She lived in a house “where I had everything,” including a nanny. “My grandfather lived across the street from the cemetery,” Mikel remembered, clenching Cisner by the wrist and craning her head upward. The centuries-old burial ground in the center of Kazimierz is still the site of several major rabbinic tombs, and its walls now face a row of “traditional Jewish” restaurants and boutique hotels. “They were terrible apartments,” she said. “Only the most honest people lived on this street … they gave their lives away for Yiddishkeit.”

“Nobody can understand—nobody,” Mikel said of what came after. “Because nobody went through what we went through.” I sensed she was not talking about the entire Jewish people but about the survivors themselves—and maybe not about every survivor, either. Maybe just the Polish Jews knew what “we” had been through. Because the Holocaust began in 1939 in Poland, earlier than it did in France or the Netherlands or Hungary, there are very few alive now who can talk about it firsthand. Mikel recalled hearing mass executions at Plaszow. She remembered hiding in a trench her father had dug in the family’s basement. He later died in Mauthausen.

“I want to tell you everything,” she said, “but it would take a few days.”

A petite woman with shocks of light orange hair—her natural hair, it would turn out—approached us and pulled up one sleeve, revealing a tattoo on her forearm. Upon her arrival at Auschwitz, Alice Rosenberg, the daughter of a grocer who grew up in a Hungarian-speaking family in present-day Slovakia, was grouped into the camp’s notorious children’s housing, where twins and other potential subjects of medical experimentation were sent. Her jailor was Josef Mengele, a monster of history whom she saw with her own eyes. “I was so little—I don’t take it seriously, the situation,” she said. The dress she wore in the camp was too long for her. “They gave me a big shoe, like a man’s shoe.” She had no underwear. Her head was shaved at Auschwitz, though this did not trouble her. “I never liked my hair, because it was red.” No one else from her family survived the war.

For a surreal moment—I am privileged to be able to call it surreal—Mikel and Rosenberg compared their experiences in the German network of death camps, speaking with increasing speed and animation as each one prodded deeper into the other’s memory, as if they were swapping recollections of their old neighborhoods, or at least of something less sinister than what was actually being discussed. Both remembered that upon arrival at a new camp prisoners were forced to give up everything but their shoes. Potato peels were a known vector of typhus and were only eaten as a last resort. Taking clothing discarded by dead inmates could get you shot, but sometimes you had no other choice. At any moment you could be killed.

“I got married 10 years after the war,” Rosenberg said. “You build a family ... but it hurts you. It never heals ... We tried our best.”

“We don’t even like to think about it, because we have to live through it,” added Mikel. “We have to have our lives. We have children.”

“See these two ladies?” one of the volunteers asked as she walked by. “They’re our best card players.”

I was suddenly part of a circle of a half-dozen old women. Mikel, the dominant personality of the group, seemed to imply that at six years under the Nazis, she’d had it harder than some of the Hungarians, who only fell under total German control in 1944 and for whom the Holocaust had been brutal and deadly but also comparatively brief. The Hungarians, she remembered, had arrived at the camps with furs, hats, and fancy luggage, “dressed to kill.”

It was a fellow Polish Jew who eventually overtook Mikel in the conversation. Toby Goldberg’s late husband had been on Schindler’s list, and survived the genocide because of the German industrialist. The Nazis had tattooed her husband’s arm, a number with a “KL” prefix, standing for “Konzentrationslager” or concentration camp. “When he wore short sleeves people asked if it was his girlfriend’s name,” she said of those first years in America after the war. Later, an employer offered to pay for its removal. “He said, ‘Oh no, I suffered too much for it. I’m leaving it where it is.’”

The survivors had all lived in the United States for the majority of their lives. Most of them wound up in Borough Park in Brooklyn, one of America’s strongholds of Orthodox Judaism. The sharp edges of their speech, the exclamations and interruptions, the scattered musings on life, the short aphoristic phrases, the serious humor, the humorous seriousness—all of it belongs to the murdered Old World. They spoke the last of the living Yiddish of 20th-century prewar Central Europe, transposed onto American speech with both musical clarity and a poignant note of dissonance, as if the mixture never should have been necessary.

“Before the war, you can call it normal. We went to cheder. There was antisemitism. But it wasn’t that bad,” recalled Ben Kraus, born near Budapest, almost singing each sentence and each clause from the back of his throat, his quiet voice rising and falling to set up the concluding emphasis on each phrase. He wore a black vest and a head-sized kippah. Like many of the other survivors he had piercing and active eyes that somehow looked
decades younger than the person to whom they belonged.

Word of the German arrival came hours before Shavuot in 1944, “while my mother prepared for the yontif.” The family fled to an aunt’s apartment while their stove was still burning. Kraus eventually sought refuge in the Glass House, a factory that the Germans recognized as sovereign Swiss territory where over 2,000 people hid for the remainder of the war in conditions of unconscionable squalor and fear.

After the war Kraus arrived in the Williamsburg section of Brooklyn, along with his rebbe and hundreds of other Satmar Hasids who had lived through the European slaughter. There were roughly 20 other young men in his yeshiva class—“survivors, all of them.” After yeshiva Kraus got married and went into the manufacture of women’s belts.

“That was the style then,” added his wife, an energetic woman who was born in Romania and who spoke up to prod her softer-spoken husband throughout the conversation. “Every dress had a belt.”

Lunch was served in the neighboring ballroom—Caesar salad and eggplant Parmesan, with bottles of kosher seltzer water. In the ride up from the city the journalists had been joined by Kosha Dillz, an Israeli American battle rapper and a cast member on MTV’s Wild ’N Out. He had made Holocaust commemoration part of his creative mission, performing regularly in Poland and, at one concert I’d attended, introducing a Holocaust survivor to the son of the late Ol’ Dirty Bastard, from the Wu-Tang Clan.

Dillz often carries a small amplifier, daily life in New York presenting infinite chances for an impromptu rap performance—including, apparently, this lunch. “I decided I’m gonna sing for the ladies in the front row!” Kosha announced over an appropriately unaggressive beat. “They say, Kosha where you feel the heart?” he crooned. “I met some ladies from Borough Park!” A few listeners in front cooperated when he asked them to put their hands in the air. He launched into a verse in Hebrew.

“You know, I still dream of Auschwitz ... I’m still not finished from there.”
and no one to guide him, just people who seemed eager to evade what he’d been through and what it might represent. For decades, no one asked Einhorn about the numbers on his arm, or seemed to care very much about them.

In New York, Einhorn worked at a kosher butcher shop on the Lower East side and raised a family. Most of a century later, the horrors of the Holocaust are still recent enough to be able to cause nightmares in the people who experienced them, Einhorn included. “You know, I still dream of Auschwitz,” he said. “My mind is still in Auschwitz... I’m still crying. I cry in the night, I cry in the day. I’m still not finished from there.”

It is indecent, not to mention inaccurate, to imply any neat ending to the survivors’ stories, as if living through the Holocaust were a fair price to pay for getting to spend the rest of one’s life in the United States making women’s belts or selling kosher meat. If one insists on extracting any hope from the experience of the war and the subsequent decades, it shouldn’t come from the inevitable need to salvage meaning from evil, or from the psychological impulse to vulgarize tragedy in order to make it comprehensible, but from forces beyond the merely human, far outside our meager range of understanding.

Throughout Einhorn’s story there were puzzling and terrible hints of a God, subtle in action, mystifying in intent, and undeniably there. In the mines, Einhorn said, a dynamite explosion once sent a chunk of rock careening toward his head, knocking him backward but leaving him miraculously unscathed. “The foreman asked, ‘how did you survive?’ I said, ‘It looks like an

There is good reason to be concerned that a totalitarian regime with hostage-taking and summary executions in its DNA will go through with killing Sharmahd. Though the Iran regime’s own national security council has said the 2008 terror attack in Shiraz, which left 14 dead and 200 injured, and for which Sharmahd is being held, was not the work of anyone in the regime’s opposition, the Islamic Republic is hardly bound by the rule of law or due process protections.

Sharmahd’s latest show trial hearing comes amidst yet another televised forced confession, this time of a brave, bold woman who defied the Islamist theocracy’s forced veiling, as well as a spate of new hostage taking to counter Sweden’s universal jurisdiction trial of a regime official responsible for killing thousands of political prisoners; the

Iran Is About to Murder Another Journalist

California Jamshid Sharmahd faces execution for a crime the regime itself has admitted he did not commit

BY MARIAM MEMARSADEGHI

As the Biden administration still chases after Iran’s regime for a deal to curb its nuclear program, a longtime resident of California and dissident journalist, Jamshid (Jimmy) Sharmahd, may be executed for a crime the regime itself has admitted he did not commit. According to his daughter Gazelle Sharmahd, the execution is imminent.

Sharmahd has broadcast into Iran for many years about the human rights violations of Iran’s regime and the people’s struggle for freedom. In July 2020, while he was on a layover in Dubai, he was kidnapped by agents of Iran’s regime and taken to Tehran, where he has since been imprisoned and brought out before cameras for seven show trial hearings, including his last on July 26. The regime’s propaganda videos show Sharmahd, who suffers from Parkinson’s disease, heart problems, and diabetes, looking gaunt, with sunken eyes and a blank, traumatized expression. During his 734 days of solitary confinement since his kidnapping, Sharmahd’s wife has spoken with him only twice. The family believes he is being tortured. He is missing all but two teeth.

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Sharmahd’s latest show trial hearing comes amidst yet another televised forced confession, this time of a brave, bold woman who defied the Islamist theocracy’s forced veiling, as well as a spate of new hostage taking to counter Sweden’s universal jurisdiction trial of a regime official responsible for killing thousands of political prisoners; the
arrest of mothers demanding justice for the killing of their children who dared protest the regime's repression and corruption; the intensified persecution of the Baha’i religious minority, and the ramping up of executions, particularly against minorities such as the Baluchis, to name just some of the regime’s recent human rights violations.

In 2020, an Iranian journalist living in Paris was lured to Iraq, kidnapped, and brought to Iran for torture and televised forced confessions before he was executed. Ruhollah Zam was well-known among Iranians, but his life was not spared despite outrage and appeals. Since the execution of the French resident, not to mention a history of terror attacks on dissidents on French soil, Prime Minister Emmanuel Macron has been too eager to accommodate the regime, having just spent two hours speaking with its president, Ebrahim Raisi, who is personally culpable for executing thousands of political prisoners in a prison massacre in 1988.

Hostage-taking is a key means for the regime to extract financial and other concessions from appeasing Western governments. Sharmahd has been living in California with his family since 2003, but he is a German citizen, and his family is angry at the German government for doing little to secure his release. Not only has the German Foreign Ministry not responded to the family’s pleas to exert financial disincentives on Iran in the form of trade restrictions, it has only condemned the nation’s threatened use of the “death penalty” in Sharmahd’s case—as if Sharmahd was legally detained and brought before a fair court for a crime he committed and the only issue was with his sentencing. The Biden administration has also never meaningfully intervened. Even in the case of U.S. citizens taken hostage, the administration has refused to exert pressure. On the contrary, the long string of concessions provided to the regime with hopes of bringing it back into the Iran nuclear deal has emboldened it further.

The landscape is dangerous for Iranian dissidents, even on American soil. Just a few days ago, in Brooklyn, a man with an AK-47 was arrested after “lurking for two days” outside the residence of Iranian dissident journalist Masih Alinejad. Police found a high-capacity magazine and 66 rounds of ammunition in his car. Last year, Alinejad was also the subject of a kidnapping plot in which four Iranian intelligence agents planned to abduct her from her home in New York.

Sharmahd himself was nearly assassinated on U.S. soil in 2009. The man who had plotted to take his life was permitted to return to Iran after serving only eight months in a U.S. prison.

Sharmahd’s daughter Gazelle Sharmahd has led a global campaign to free her dad. “I am proud to be the daughter of a man who dedicated his life to advocate for human rights. I am honored to see that he was brave enough to continue broadcasting about the grave human rights violations that the regime brings upon its own citizens for all of these years,” she said. She believes that her dad being both a U.S. resident and German citizen has worked against him because it has allowed the countries to pass the buck.

"Gazelle Sharmahd believes that her dad being both a U.S. resident and German citizen has worked against him because it has allowed the countries to pass the buck."

“When foreign governments break international law and want to enforce their terror outside of their borders, we cannot sit back and ignore this,” she told me. “We have to make it clear that this is unacceptable, because if we don’t, these terror attacks against our people are just the beginning of a new era.”

Gazelle and other human rights advocates are vocal about mounting transnational repression. According to her, it can be stopped only if governments of free nations prioritize security and freedom within their own borders over profits or diplomacy with tyrannical states. If free nations fail to take a principled stance, the world’s worst rights abusers will be emboldened to take more hostages and terrorize with greater impunity. They certainly cannot be trusted in negotiations over issues which have trumped human rights, such as the nuclear program or foreign investment and trade.

It is imperative to start with an insistence on the release of all hostages as the first step in any “confidence building” with repressive regimes, says Jason Poblete, who has been serving as an attorney for Jamshid Sharmahd and other hostages taken by the regime. Poblete emphasizes, as former hostages and political prisoners who have been freed typically do, that “quiet diplomacy” never works and is merely a ruse to continue holding captives for leverage. Sharmahd's detention is meant to pressure the West to succumb to Iranian demands. But these hostages have the best chance of freedom if Biden exerts more pressure, not less.

When he was a free man living in California, Sharmahd would explain to his daughter his lifelong commitment to exposing the regime’s rights abuses. “I want to tell him I get it now,” says Gazelle. If her father’s life is taken, he will join thousands who have been executed by an Islamist cabal that began its revolutionary rule with hostage-taking, and continues it to this day to sustain its power. ■

This article was originally published on August 2, 2022.
The Gnat Who Tormented Titus

By Cynthia Ozick

Wicked Titus (the name the Rabbis gave),
Commander-in-Chief of Roman arms,
strategist of bloody harms,
took Jerusalem in fief,
razed the Temple to its grave,
and Zion brought to grief.

The flame of the Ark
brutally he blew to dark,
shaped of its tapestry a sleeve,
loaded it with loot.
For holy Zion, no reprieve.
Then homeward went the Roman boot.

At sea, up sprang a gale,
It shook the Roman masts to sticks.
“This God of theirs can play these tricks
on water, but the land is dry.
On land He can’t prevail.
Just let Him try!”
Thus spake that master of detritus,
Zion’s ruin, Wicked Titus.

Then came a Voice, a Voice on high,
trembling like a spider on a thread
let down from the mighty sky.
“Sinner,” it said,
“shake thou in dread,
Soon your brain
will entertain
a tiny jot, a living dot, a very gnat.
Its home will be in your head.
Make what you will of that.”

Now through the warrior’s nostril
skipped
the lightfoot tidy tread
of a speck so small it seemed not there.
Its legs were thinner than a hair.
Yet Titus heard it in his head.
It tickled and it whipped;
it meant to tease,
though ill at ease
in the cavern of the nose.
Upward then it rose
on wings infinitesimal,
a fluttering decimal,
until it could attain
the barren plain
that spread before
the inmost door
of the Roman’s nasty brain.

And there it jumped,
and there it bumped,
and there it humped
its little back,
and knocked and thumped
whack after striving whack.
For seven years it waged its war
with vast Rome’s military master,
sometimes beating lazily,
sometimes faster,
like hail against a windowpane,
knocking knocking crazily
like fists against the door
of the Roman’s wicked brain.

Seven years Titus fled
the hasty hammer in his head.
But it pursued him where he stood,
a pecker in his wood,
a chopper at his block,
knock knock knock!

He passed one noon a blacksmith’s forge,
and heard the anvil drown
the gnattish noise, “By George,”
said he, “I’ve got the cure!
Let the blacksmith’s work endure!”

So every day they scoured the town
to find a willing banger,
For thirty days the gnat was stunned:
amazed, or numb with anger,
it ceased to shiver or to dance;
it lay in quietude and trance,
and every movement shunned.

Huge was the glee
of Wicked Titus,
“A remedy!
I’m free, I’m free!
No foolish flea
can long affright us!”
But the diminutive thing
soon budged a wing
and tentatively put
a wee and sleepy foot
down upon the brain,
trying out a tap,
rapping out a rap,
restoring Roman pain.

And on and on it beat
with energetic feet —
though small and fragile,
see how agile,
hear the hammer drumming,
high and low, loud and dull,
within the Roman skull,
until, succumbing,
the gnat’s reluctant host
at last gives up the ghost.

It wasn’t a lion
that defended Zion!
Instead it took a gnat
to knock the tyrant flat,
veritable mite,
a mote that smote on the side of right,
a virtuous midge of a tittle,
a flea as proud as it was little
no wider than a needle’s prick
a gnat resolved to kick injustice down.

As happened with Titus,
even a gnat
can right us.
Great is that
gnat’s renown!

June 11, 1982
THE REST

Speaking from the White House on Monday, President Biden announced that the 71-year-old leader of the al-Qaeda terrorist movement, Ayman al-Zawahiri, was killed in a drone strike in the house where he was staying in the Afghan capital of Kabul on Sunday. Serving as a senior “mastermind behind the attacks against Americans” for decades, said Biden, Zawahiri was an architect in a 2000 terror attack that killed 17 U.S. military members in Yemen, as well as of the September 11, 2001, attacks that claimed nearly 3,000 victims. Following the killing of Osama Bin Laden by a U.S. special operations team in 2011, Zawahiri took over leadership of al-Qaeda. While the Biden administration earned praise from both political parties for the successful targeting of the jihadist commander, Zawahiri’s presence in the heart of Kabul renewed questions about how permissive Afghanistan had become since the chaotic withdrawal of American troops in 2021 ended with the Taliban back in power.

To mark the 20th anniversary of the Hebrew University bombing, in which Hamas killed 9 students studying at a school in Jerusalem and injured more than 100, the Palestinian Authority has raised the salary it pays to the families of those responsible for the atrocity by 14.29%, from NIS 7,000 ($2,251) per month to NIS 8,000 ($2,572). These payments are part of what the PA calls its “Martyrs’ Fund,” which pays a monthly stipend to the families of those injured or killed while carrying out acts of violence against Israel, be it a suicide bomber at a school or a man with a knife at a bus stop.

Since the start of 2022, more than 1,345 people have been injured in Philadelphia shootings, and 311 people have been murdered—a six-month homicide rate that already exceeds the total killed in the entirety of 2016. As in several other cities across the nation, gun violence has flourished here since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. But so too has the drug trafficking, particularly in Kensington, leaving scores of dead drug users in its wake. Three months ago, the 17-member city council unanimously voted to declare a state of emergency in Kensington. FEMA has never deployed an emergency crisis operation to an urban neighborhood where the only disaster is human-made—but Kensington doesn’t exactly have a precedent.

On a recent earnings call, Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg announced that users would be seeing twice as much content from accounts they don’t follow—a huge shift from the company’s previous practice of letting friends fill each other’s news feeds with vacation pics and baby photos. “One of the main transformations in our business right now is that social feeds are going from being driven primarily by the people and accounts you follow to increasingly also being driven by AI recommending content that you’ll find interesting from across Facebook or Instagram,” Zuck said.

Eli N. Evans, “the poet laureate of the southern Jews,” as one scholar called him, has died. Born in Durham, North Carolina, in 1936, Evans went to Yale Law School before serving as a speechwriter for President Lyndon B. Johnson. Evans went on to author three books on the history of Jews in the south and to spend almost 50 years working to support a wide range of causes, from Jewish education to biomedical research and the civic life of New York City.

FROM THE BACK PAGES

It happened out of nowhere. One day, I woke up, clocked into my job, and thought, “I don’t hear a lot about climate change anymore.” By that point there was only the distant childhood memory of a trailer for An Inconvenient Truth showing a floating, context-less image of a starving polar bear in the Arctic. I wondered about it all day, and when my shift ended, I punched the words into Google. This decision—my decision to just look something up—would shape the contours of my life for the next six years. Sometimes I wonder, if it hadn’t been climate change, would it have been something else? Or, if I hadn’t proactively looked for it, would doom-laden headlines have found me eventually?

I believed every word of every news story. And then, at some point, even the most serious reports didn’t seem to take climate change seriously enough.

It’s hard to convey how overpowering that initial dive into the climate change media ecosystem felt. The more I read, the worse it got. Thousands-year-old methane stores were being released into the atmosphere, which would cause catastrophic runaway warming. It was the first time I understood that life was fragile, and not just my life, but all human life. I didn’t know how to react to this information, so I read more doom headlines.

—Katherine Dee

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To Live and Die for the Network State

Balaji Srinivasan’s new book provides a thrilling road map for rebuilding society. But can it work without the blood, soil, or faith that has always inspired nations?

BY ANTONIO GARCÍA MARTÍNEZ

Lonely sits the city
Once great with people!
She that was great among nations
Is become like a widow;
The princess among states
Is become a thrall.

Lamentations, 1:1

Recently, I experienced a social novelty.
Anna Gát, founder of a roving social club and literary salon named Interintellect, very graciously invited me to one of her events. A dozen or so of us, some known to me but most not, gathered in the backyard of a tastefully restored San Francisco Victorian and drank and ate and discussed various topics of the day. It was a convivial and enjoyable affair, that crackling mix of novelty and familiarity among like-minded strangers and acquaintances that’s virtually impossible to find in coastal cities, outside the confines of the workplace at least.

As I walked home down the steep slope of Fulton Street afterward, I thought: This is like a synagogue, but without Jews or Judaism. Like many things nowadays, the seculars have reinvented a religious concept to cope with the very barrenness that secularism bequeathed us.

Synagogues aren’t the only legacy institutions with attempts at secular reboots: We’re on to nation-states as well. Noted entrepreneur and online provocateur Balaji Srinivasan recently published his intriguing tome, The Network State (available online in a readable format here). The first sections are an introduction to the World According to Balaji, which will seem familiar to anyone who’s followed the very opinionated poaster for any length of time. And for those who haven’t, and are perhaps unfamiliar with the canon of references inhabiting Balaji’s fervid mind, the text is absolutely jammed with esoteric references and links to outside sources. At times the book feels less like a book and more like a Wikipedia page; it’s not clear to me how you’d even read it in printed form, which is perhaps why there isn’t one (Kindle and online only).

The most interesting section is the one currently relegated to the end on the titular concept itself, the network state. It is not, as Balaji is quick to point out, some metaverse concept visitable only with virtual reality headsets. No, it’s an actual patch of land (or several of them) with a physical border and representation in the United Nations. As Balaji defines it:

A network state is a social network with a moral innovation, a sense of national consciousness, a recognized founder, a capacity for collective action, an in-person level of civility, an integrated cryptocurrency, a consensual government limited by a social smart contract, an archipelago of crowdfunded physical territories, a virtual capital, and an on-chain census that proves a large enough population, income, and real estate footprint to attain a measure of diplomatic recognition.

The most radical (and underrated) change wrought by technology has been the decoupling of information from physical movement, the flight of bits liberated from the slow lurch of atoms. This dislodges human life from a geographic setting, making what you see, think, and experience independent of the colored shape on the map labeled “San Francisco, California, USA” (or whatever). It’s what the early media theorists like Marshall McLuhan puzzled over, the global wiring-together of the human nervous system. His “global village” however was one warmed by the blue tones of an old-timey television receiving signals from a centralized transmitter in a still geographically and politically unified state.

What the early luminaries missed, prescient though they were, was the unique many-to-many property of mobile computing; left to self-sort ideologically and aesthetically, consumers in a globalized society bereft of meaningful religious or cultural ties would organize themselves into patchwork quilts of belonging no longer limited by political borders. In the case of affluent elites, their self-organized state would look like an urban archipelago in a more rural and regional sea. (In the United States, the political color codings here are obvious.)

This network state idea could be dismissed as just another unworkable fantasy from crypto bros. Except that they’re not proposing some unlikely future, but rather describing a de facto reality that’s only accelerated with the post-COVID crackup. The network-staters are already here, we just don’t refer to them as such. It’s not like the long-term viability of normie liberal democratic nation-states has lots of champions these days. Over half of Americans think a civil war is possible...
in the next few years. Well, why don’t we find a more peaceable rupture? asks Balaji, who makes it very clear he is not fantasizing about some violent civil war.

It’s easy to imagine what that looks like: In my Jekyll-and-Hyde, blue-city/red-state dualism (I’ll let readers guess which I think is the evil one), I already bounce between being a rootless cosmopolitan who’s part of the Borg and a desert redneck with a Jeep and various bits of hardware illegal in California. In my blue Borg mode, I simply teleport between three to four neighborhoods in San Francisco, three to four neighborhoods in New York, and a similar patch of Miami, with perhaps detours to Austin or Seattle. I don’t even know where most of my friends (most of whom I met online) even live anymore; we just meet at various focal points like conferences held in the same areas of our network state. If we declared those areas (and people) to be part of the “Networked Crypto-Republic of Balajistan,” complete with U.N. representation and passports, would I even notice that it happened? Not really … since I’d never leave it.

Well, I might, but few other Balajistanis would. Today, I autopilot my Tesla 3 DoucheMobile from San Francisco, over the Sierra Nevada, to the Mad Max desert of Nevada. In our future network-state world, I’d cross some sort of border (perhaps we can repurpose those impossibly stupid “inspection stations”), and show my visa for the “Real American States” (or perhaps I’d hedge my bets with two passports). Then I’d see the first of several Trump flags flying on the way to my desert retreat in what’s now a foreign country. That world need not even exist for the Balajistanis. They can drop it completely from their consciousness, aided by Web3 social networks like Farcaster, where the app layer can just delete entire swathes of the network as if they don’t exist.

One piece of nuance worth stressing: It’s clear that Balaji does not align with the standard urban blue tribe in his thinking, dismissing that crowd as part of the “NYT” tribe, one in the trinity of players he feels will rule the world (the other two are the Chinese Communist Party and crypto itself). It is rather curious that this new crypto tribe geographically lines up almost exactly with the American urban blue tribe (itself a subset of the global neoliberal elite network). If you plotted the geographic density of The Economist subscriptions, it would overlap to almost 100% of the putative Balajistan sketched out above. You might need to narrow down the network states to individual neighborhoods within the concerned cities, drawing an international border between, say, Pacific Heights and SoMa in San Francisco, or the Upper West Side and the Flatiron district in New York City. The post-partition reshuffling of populations will be pretty lit.

Vitalik Buterin, founder of Ethereum and another crypto luminary who often opines on matters beyond the blockchain, reviewed Balaji’s thesis at length. Buterin also fixates on the motivating why? of such a novel state, and what glue could possibly serve to unite an invented nation.

Physically courage is realizing there are fates worse than death or injury, that there are events in this world that one would rather die than see come to pass. It’s easy to imagine what that looks like: in your Jekyll-and-Hyde, blue-city/red-state dualism (I’ll let readers guess which I think is the evil one), you already bounce between being a rootless cosmopolitan who’s part of the Borg and a desert redneck with a Jeep and various bits of hardware illegal in California. In your blue Borg mode, you simply teleport between three to four neighborhoods in San Francisco, three to four neighborhoods in New York, and a similar patch of Miami, with perhaps detours to Austin or Seattle. I don’t even know where most of my friends (most of whom I met online) even live anymore; we just meet at various focal points like conferences held in the same areas of our network state. If we declared those areas (and people) to be part of the “Networked Crypto-Republic of Balajistan,” complete with U.N. representation and passports, would I even notice that it happened? Not really … since I’d never leave it.

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Generally, I am used to the Big Compromise Idea being a leftist one: some form of equality and democracy. Balaji, on the other hand, has Big Compromise Ideas that feel more rightist: local communities with shared values, loyalty, religion, physical environments structured to encourage personal discipline (“keto kosher”) and hard work … This style of thinking is foreign to me, but I find it fascinating, and important. Stereotypical “wealthy white liberals” ignore this at their peril: these more “traditional” values are actually quite popular even among some ethnic minorities in the United States, and even more so in places like Africa and India, which is exactly where Balaji is trying to build up his base.

Ultimately Buterin is a liberal: The only conceivable binding ties among individuals in society, other than ground rules around human rights, are economic and regulatory relationships. After rejecting the binding agents of the right that Balaji floated (such as restrictive lifestyle customs, i.e., “keto kosher”), Buterin lists a set of wonky policy and tax proposals for which this new state could be an experimental test bed.

But that doesn’t seem to be how nations are forged. Consider one such nation currently straining to survive against a foreign invader: Ukraine. What exactly drove hundreds of thousands of Ukrainian civilians to take up arms and risk being blown to bits in Russian artillery barrages rather than submit to Russian rule? Surely it wasn’t disagreement with Putin on property-tax regimes. No, something else is at work.

Physical courage is realizing there are fates worse than death or injury, that there are events in this world that one would rather die than see come to pass. That’s what makes people give their lives—ideally in building, but often in fighting and dying—for a cause or nation. And that’s what nobody seems capable of mustering anymore, no matter how sophisticated the technology behind DAOs or novel cryptographic governance mechanisms. The how is there, without much in the way of why.

The reality is that the level of tribal affiliation requisite to birth a nation-state violates the universalism of contemporary liberalism, which refuses to countenance any form of identity that isn’t purely self-constructed and elective. To severely paraphrase Carl Schmitt, the fundamental task of
politics is making the friend-enemy distinction that defines your group in opposition to the Other. That’s a distinction no longer considered legitimate, even where it’s feasible—as in the case of the State of Israel, which is why it catches so much shit from sanctimonious Western countries, many of them ethnostates themselves. It’s also why, as with salons, this new nation-state business feels like a secular version of a Jewish concept—Zionism but without the Judaism.

In his collection of letters On the French Stage, German poet Heinrich Heine recounted a visit he paid to the Cathedral of Amiens in 1837. His accompanying friend asked Heine why nobody built such marvels anymore, and Heine replied:

Dear Alphonse, in those days men had convictions, whereas we moderns only have opinions, and something more is needed than an opinion to build a Gothic cathedral.

Something more is also needed to build a state, whether of the network or regular variety. Our opinions alone, no matter how lit the resulting Twitter threads, simply aren’t equal to the task. Something must stir inside us that says: Here I will die so that my children may one day live. That’s what has motivated every generation of Israeli as it has marched off to a perpetual war of survival; it’s what motivates the fierce resistance of the Ukrainians against the Russian invasion now. Without that, any aspiring state is just a gated community for the working wealthy; much like the ones for old retirees in South Florida. San Francisco and Manhattan are already functionally that: Can modernity produce any new politics, or will our Enlightenment-era nation-state simply die a slow, sclerotic death?

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COMMUNITY

The New Jewish Awakening

Our obsession with the narrative of our community’s decline overlooks threads of optimism and opportunity

BY BENJAMIN SPRATT AND JOSHUA STANTON

At his 1902 inaugural address as president of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, Solomon Schechter called for the widespread establishment of Jewish schools and places of learning across the United States. Today, we bear witness to an American Judaism transformed by this vision. The Association of Jewish Studies now lists more than 75 departments of Jewish studies around the country, including most of the top universities in the world. Jewish day schools, numbering 906, now shape generations of emerging Jews, and Judaism is now taught as a world religion in public high schools and colleges around the country.

Yet just 120 years after Schechter’s address, the Jewish Theological Seminary faces existential peril. Not because of failure, but because of its astounding successes. And it is not alone. Like many of the other institutions that helped strangers in a strange land find their footing, it faces an obsolescence of its own making. The communities it fostered, equipped with modern leadership, and taught to thrive in an American context have outgrown the needs that the institutions were established to serve.

Our communal leaders, and more than a few prominent academics, fear that the death of long-standing organizations will mean the death of the American diaspora itself. A narrative of Jewish self-destruction coalesced after the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey revealed that a rising number of Jews married someone who was not also Jewish, waited to have children, had fewer children, were leaving Jewish population centers, and were disconnecting from synagogues and other mainstays of Jewish life. Jewish leaders and intellectuals interpreted the data in grim terms.

Literary critic and writer Leslie Fiedler likened intermarriage to a “silent Holocaust” in his 1991 compilation of essays, Fiedler on the Roof:

Not a single one of my own eight children has, at the present moment, a Jewish mate; nor for that matter do I ... In any case, there is no one to say kaddish for me when I die. I am, in short, not just as I have long known, a minimal Jew—my Judaism nearly non-existent—but, as I have only recently become aware, a terminal one as well, the last of a four-thousand-year line. Yet, whatever regrets I may feel, I cannot deny that I have wanted this, worked for it. ...

Many other communal leaders used the less incendiary expression “continuity crisis” to describe how intermarriage would bring about the decline and fall of the American diaspora.

Today, this story continues to shape the way that Jewish leaders view the American diaspora. A New York Times article from 2018 proclaims, “American Jews Face a Choice: Create Meaning or
A contemporaneous piece in *Haaretz* argues, “Assimilation Is the Failure of American Jewry, Not Israel.” Even Israeli leaders are weighing in publicly. As one headline notes: “Israeli minister says US Jews marrying non-Jews is ‘like a second Holocaust.’”

Our obsession with the narrative of decline overlooks threads of optimism and opportunity. The comfort of this well-worn story anchors us in continuity with past generations’ angst. We feel the inevitability of failure, even when much is going well. We are still just a fiddler on the roof, bound by fate to come crashing down.

This narrative roots our attention in a history which may not repeat, and ignores fundamental changes in Judaism’s place within American society. And when we widen the aperture of our lens, we may see a new, compelling narrative.

The number of people who self-identify as Jewish continues to grow rapidly—from 5 million to 7.5 million people since the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey. New institutions, initiatives, and Jewish identities continue to emerge. Rising generations redefine roles and structures of power, spreading centralized power into networks of impact. In opening this broader lens of understanding our diaspora, we see a Judaism filled with transformations, and ensure the security of both populations. Yet in an era where Israel wields military and economic might like no rival in the region and Jews comprise a growing portion of America’s powerbrokers, these missions feel increasingly out of touch with the needs of our people.

In the wake of these successes, American Jewish institutions have been left with a vacuum of new purpose, causing us to defend existing achievements and default to past tropes. The American diaspora needs a new unifying vision, as a network of individuals harnesses Jewish tradition to realize the human power for good in an increasingly complicated world. We are on the cusp of a Jewish awakening, inspired by Jewish practice but open to all.

Thousands of people join Judaism every year across the country as “Jews by Choice,” while hundreds of thousands more live with Jews or as Jews without formal conversion. American Judaism is finally beginning to acknowledge the hundreds of thousands of Jews of color who had been undercounted in population studies. Nearly 60% of children with only one Jewish parent are raised as Jews—and an even larger majority are exposed to Judaism.

New possibilities abound. Lines of individual empowerment that Jews—and the countless people connected to Jews or exploring Judaism—now feel.

In the 21st century, American Jews hold more wealth, access, and power in the larger society than in any diaspora of the past three millennia. Jews run for president, lead industry, create new fields of study, and shape law and policy, while Jewish culture captivates the collective through television, comedy, music, and art. Rather than the narrative of the resilient underdog, the story of the modern American Jew is one of potency and choice. Even as American Jews face ongoing tribulations from antisemitism, national surveys over the past decade also report that American Jews are consistently the most liked religious community in the United States.

We still feel the momentum of immense organization of people, power, and purse to return our people to the Land of Israel, acculturate in America, and ensure the security of both populations. Yet in an era where Israel wields military and economic might like no rival in the region and Jews comprise a growing portion of America’s powerbrokers, these missions feel increasingly out of touch with the needs of our people.

Hello is most likely a temporary divergence from business as usual for Segall. One can hear him getting close to bringing his normal fire and fury on several tracks, but he refrains. It makes *Hello* feel special, like a one-off that won’t be repeated again. Many things longtime listeners already love about Segall remain, like his gorgeous harmonies and layered guitar. Except it’s a little chiller this time. After all these years of rocking, he deserves a break.

—David Meir Grossman
leadership are being redrawn, with clergy ceding power to a broadening cohort of Jewish professionals and lay leaders. Technology is enabling us to explore the possibility of communities based on shared interests and values rather than shared neighborhoods. Ongoing efforts could enable pluralism to overtake denominationalism and create spaces for people who range from open-minded ultra-Orthodox to hyphenated heterodox to learn, grow, and explore Jewishly together. Israel can engage with the American diaspora as a respected peer rather than a vulnerable dependent.

American Jewish communal institutions are changing at an unprecedented rate. Synagogues, community centers, federations, advocacy organizations, and seminaries once translated between Jewish and American identities. Some now face a loss of purpose—while many are racing to identify and adapt to the new needs of the people whom they seek to serve.

The mismatch between American Jewish needs and the offerings of American Jewish institutions has triggered a new expansion of the American Jewish story. Jewish startups have burst forth into the mainstream, disrupting notions of community, philanthropy, advocacy, spirituality, learning, and belonging. Some are already scaling up to compete with longstanding bastions of American Judaism, which themselves were once startups.

It has been more than a hundred years since last we witnessed a vast reimagining of Jewish life, when wave upon wave of immigrants from Eastern Europe graced our country. American Jews have realized the early goals of the prior awakening. Within the present resides the promise of another Jewish revival. Jews—and potential Jews and people who are Jewishly connected and those who are Jewishly curious—are hungry for new expressions of spirituality, values, and community. Grassroots leadership is springing up around us as external manifestations of internal transformations. An era of experimentation, growth, and adaptation has given more Jewishly connected people more space to articulate purposes that can unite the American diaspora.

Emblazoned upon the proud entranceway of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America are the enduring words of wonder about the burning bush. Even fully ablaze, “the bush was not consumed” (Exodus 3:2). The bush is glowing new colors today. A longer gaze and broader view show us what makes it wondrous: The fires do not consume it, but rather transform it into a beacon of purpose. We need only awaken to its brilliance and empower more people to behold it with wonder.

This article was adapted from the authors’ forthcoming book, Awakenings: Jewish Transformations in Identity, Leadership, and Belonging.

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HOLIDAYS

Mourning and Joy

Tisha B’Av is a time to come forward with our pain

BY SANDRA COHEN

Psalm 137 reminds us of the grief and despair that accompanied the destruction of the first Temple in Jerusalem, and the Jewish people’s exile to Babylonia. “By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat, sat and wept, as we remembered Zion ... How can we sing a song to God in this strange land?”

Growing up as a Reform Jew, I knew nothing of Tisha B’Av, the fast day commemorating the loss of both the First and Second Temples in Jerusalem, much less the minor fast days. What need had we of mourning, when we are so free to be Jewish, to act Jewish, in these United States? Why would we want to go back to a system of sacrificing animals to God when we can pray instead?

These are good objections.

But then I wrote my rabbinic thesis on Tisha B’Av and the minor fast days in the Tur and Bet Yosef (an early law code and commentary). I began to see the beautiful skill with which the rabbis had created, especially, Tisha B’Av. They took pieces of the laws of Yom Kippur (fasting, not wearing leather shoes, no anointing, no sex) and wove them together with rituals of mourning. We deny ourselves certain pleasures on Tisha B’Av, just as we do on Yom Kippur, but the tone of the day is completely different.

On Yom Kippur, we afflict ourselves, safe in the knowledge that by the end of the day we, if we try, will be made right with God, be given a chance to start again, freshly embraced by one another and the Holy One of Blessing. On Tisha B’Av, we are as mourners, weeping over that which will never be whole again. We sit on the ground to read Eicha, the Book of Lamentations. We do not greet each other, just as one traditionally does not speak to a mourner first. Traditionally, one should not even study Torah (aside from the sad parts!). And on Tisha B’Av, we find room to declare our losses, historically and personally. No one is whole.

SCIENCE

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I still have no desire to resume sacrifices in a rebuilt third Temple. And yet, on Tisha B’Av and the minor fasts, I fast. I mourn.

It is genius of the rabbis to have created liturgical space in which to be sad. A time to pause and note that the world is imperfect and I, as an individual, am also lacking. There is no one who does not have loss.

Those of us with mental health struggles feel this keenly. I hate being depressed on Purim or Simchat Torah; I feel so out of step with my people. Everyone looks so happy, and I feel at a distance from that joy, from that experience of laughing and dancing and celebrating life. Some years, I find my inner exaltation; some years, I dance with tears; some years, I don’t even make it to shul.

But Tisha B’Av is a time to come forward with our pain. The First Temple was destroyed, the rabbis taught, because of the sins of idolatry and sexual wrongs; the Second Temple, because of senseless hatred. And people today suffer because of other people’s ignorance, because of thoughtlessness and exclusion. We do not open our arms to those who are different, and we forget that one can never know someone else’s journey, their pain. We act with judgment, not kindness.

All this we mourn on Tisha B’Av. I mourn not a system of killing animals as a way to be close to God, but the idea of the Temple. It was never true that all Israel showed up on the pilgrimage festivals—Passover, Shavuot, Sukkot—but the idea that we would be a powerful one. One of names of the sacrifices in the Temple was a korban. The root of that word is “to draw near.” The animals were never the point; coming close to God was. I grieve for the loss of a center of the Jewish people, where we gathered together, peacefully, to celebrate. I long for communal wholeness.

Could we build a symbolic third Temple? Not necessarily of brick and stone, but one of kindness and inclusiveness. As many have noted, we need an era of ahavat kinam, of senseless love and embrace of one another.

It is traditional to face Jerusalem when one prays; if you are in Jerusalem, the mitzvah is to face the Temple itself. In practice, this results in Jews the world over not just looking for a Temple long destroyed, but, essentially, looking at one another. What would it mean if we actually saw one another, in all our differences, in all our splendor?

Jerusalem, and the Temple, are not just physical spaces, but are emotional ones as well, Psalm 137 cries out: “If I forget you, O Jerusalem, may my right hand lose its cunning; let my tongue cleave to my palate if I cease to think of you, if I do not keep Jerusalem in memory even at my happiest hour.”

Each person is created in the image of God; each of us is a unique version of the Divine, walking our own paths, seeking the good. We do not agree on so many things (and this is a good thing!), but when we open our eyes to the Tzelem Elokim, the image of God in every person, we create safe space for everyone. “Bring your joys,” such acceptance would say, “and bring your tears.” Together we can mourn our losses, and then help one another to rise up again, finding happiness in community.

And there, in the center of this circle, this worldwide congregation, we may indeed find another Bet HaMikdash, a House of Holiness, wherein God dwells. We will find the Holy One not in a building, but in a community. That is worth our hope and that can be our dream.

This Tisha B’Av, remember what we lost: a center for our community, a place to be near God. And then, seeing the imperfect world for what it is, we can rebuild.

This article was originally published on August 3, 2022.
Cold Sour Cherry Soup

BY JOAN NATHAN

INGREDIENTS

3 pounds fresh sour cherries or 3 14-ounce cans of pitted sour cherries
¾ cup sugar, or to taste
1 cinnamon stick
1 cup dry red wine
1 cup sour cream or crème fraîche
2 tablespoons fresh chervil

PREPARATION

Step 1
Pit the cherries if fresh; or drain the canned cherries in a sieve, retaining 3 cups of the juice in a saucepan, setting the cherries aside. (If you're using fresh sour cherries and there is no juice, put a cup or so of water in a saucepan.) Add the sugar, the cinnamon stick, and the wine to the saucepan and bring to a boil, stirring to dissolve the sugar, then reduce to a simmer and add the cherries. Cover the pot partially and simmer over low heat for 10 to 15 minutes, adding more juice or water if necessary.

Step 2
Remove the cinnamon stick and half the cherries and blend the rest until smooth. Cool slightly, return the whole cherries to the soup, and stir in the sour cream or crème fraîche and chill.

Step 3
Before serving, add an additional dollop of sour cream and, if you want, a little chervil for color and a slight anise flavor.

Yield: 6-8 servings

Hundreds of recipes at tabletmag.com/recipes