

THE TAB

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NEWS

How Religious Jews Became Official Scapegoats of COVID Policy

Debates surrounding the pandemic continue to rely on false narratives about Haredim

BY MOSHE KRAKOWSKI

Dr. Anthony Fauci became famous early on in the pandemic for his dedication to lockdowns and masking. For many, this made him a hero—and anyone who questioned or defied these measures a villain. Perhaps no one in the country became greater COVID pariahs than religious Jews. “Just drove through Hasidic Williamsburg. Saw at least 250 people, and not a *single* person was wearing a mask,” *New York Times* reporter Eliza Shapiro tweeted in outrage in May 2020.

But rhetoric about COVID has changed. Officials who once advocated for harsh restrictions are quietly seeking to distance themselves from their earlier positions. It's clear why Fauci, along with former New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio and President of the American Federation of Teachers Randi Weingarten would like to revise the record. The policies they supported are no longer

popular. There's mounting evidence that restrictions like mask-wearing and school closures did little to reduce the spread of COVID—but that these policies did cause enormous harm, including the worsening adolescent mental health crisis. But before we allow such officials to simply move on, it's worth revisiting how the casual slandering of religious Jews became an accepted part of COVID discourse—especially since some of the decisions Haredim were vilified for have come to seem arguably wiser than those advocated by public health authorities.

Both Fauci and Weingarten now downplay their moral clarity during the pandemic. Fauci claims he never called for lockdowns, he only issued guidance. Weingarten—who once aggressively lobbied, and even sued to ensure that public schools stayed closed, while calling demands for schools to reopen “reckless,” “callous,” and “cruel”—recently testified before Congress that she had always wanted to open schools:

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The brilliant Jewish Arabist Hedwig Klein helped the Germans compile the definitive modern Arabic dictionary before being murdered in the camps

BY JULIA STONE

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In middle-old age, finding a new way to look back at the past offers hope for the future

BY JONATHAN SILIN

Jewish Demons

On salamanders, wondrous creatures, and the early modern blending of the scientific and the magical

BY MAOZ KAHANA

Jazz Fest's Big Shabbat

In New Orleans, celebrating 30 years of Jews and jazz on a trip Across the JEW.S.A.

BY TABLET PODCASTS



“(We) spent every day from February on trying to get schools open.” (The string of community note fact checks that her Twitter account has accumulated demonstrates just how absurd this claim is.)

The emerging consensus on COVID is that more targeted and nuanced policies, such as those some European countries adopted, would not only have been significantly better for the economy, but also for public health—physical and mental. Of course, it’s easy to see the right thing in hindsight. What’s hardest to swallow is not that our public officials made mistakes about how to handle an intensely difficult and confusing situation, but that they so viciously demonized those who saw things differently.

In August of 2022, Fauci singled out Haredim as poster children for the loss

of herd immunity: “when vaccinations get below that number you start to see outbreaks like we saw some time ago in the NYC area with Hasidic Jewish people who were not getting vaccinated.” (This, despite the fact that measles vaccination rates in the Hasidic community were shown to be 96% and other, non-Jewish, communities experienced measles outbreaks too.)

In November 2021, a Department of Health official confirmed in testimony to Attorney General Letitia James that Gov. Coumo’s COVID cluster zones had targeted Orthodox neighborhoods, even though other neighborhoods in the city met exactly the same COVID positivity metrics.

Haredim were routinely described as ignorant and clannish, and as engaging in mob behavior. Haredi religious beliefs and values were mocked as unimportant. In April of 2020, de Blasio issued a special “message to the Jewish community” threatening that “the time for warnings has passed” and indicated that he would be dispatching the police to “arrest those who gather in large groups.” Jews were the only one of the city’s many ethnic groups whom de Blasio singled out for public condemnation. And yet, just a few months later, he defended the large public gatherings taking place during the BLM protests in the summer of 2020. “When you see a nation, an entire nation, simultaneously grappling with an extraordinary crisis seeded in 400 years of American racism, I’m sorry, that is not the same question as the understandably aggrieved store owner or the devout religious person who wants to go back to services.”

An opinion piece in *The New York Daily News* blamed ultra-Orthodox Jews who “defiantly [refuse] to follow social distancing regulations” for burdening the health care system at a time when “the sick were flooding already strained health-care facilities.” The explanation? “The ultra-Orthodox do not always share their fellow citizens’ visions for civil society ... tolerance, cooperation and pluralism take a back seat to Jewish exceptionalism.”

Ah.

It’s true that over the course of the pandemic many Haredi Jewish

communities resisted some—and occasionally most—public health guidelines for containing COVID. While Haredi communities were extremely quick to shut down schools and synagogues at the very outset of the pandemic—there was no public celebration of Passover almost anywhere in the world in 2020—they were also much quicker to reopen than the country at large. By summer of 2020 many Haredi populations had returned to something close to their pre-COVID normal.

But Haredim were not alone in this regard. For example, residents of many majority African American and Hispanic neighborhoods in New York similarly masked at low rates. The difference was that journalists sought to understand this response rather than condemn it. *The New York Times*, writing about COVID in Israel, explained Haredi responses to COVID in light of that communities’ “deep distrust of state authority, ignorance of the health risks ... and a zealous devotion to a way of life centered on communal activity.” In contrast, the *Times* described similar responses within immigrant neighborhoods in Queens and in African American communities throughout the U.S. in terms of “entrenched inequalities in resources, health and access to care.” As several commentators noted at the time, most of the press refused to explore Haredi decision-making on its own terms, or to understand why Haredim made the decisions they did. Everyone “knew” that Haredim were simply flouting the law.

But this “knowledge” wasn’t real. We actually have very little clear or systematic data about how and why Haredim responded to COVID—or how the virus responded in turn. There are strong reasons to believe the Hasidic COVID death rate was exactly the same as the rest of New York, despite the community suffering a massive surge of deaths in the very initial wave that kicked off the pandemic.

This is a shame, because there’s probably an interesting story to be told here. Many Haredim eschewed CDC guidance at the height of the pandemic and after, but they didn’t eschew *all* guidance. Most Haredi communities

adopted their own internal guidelines in consultation with doctors and epidemiologists that community members trusted. Moreover, this guidance wasn't monolithic. From Lakewood, New Jersey, to Williamsburg, Brooklyn, Haredim adopted a whole host of *different* rules and practices—from outdoor synagogues and social-distanced classrooms, to targeted masking and isolating of the vulnerable, to schools and synagogues operating without any restrictions at all. Many Haredi municipalities worked closely with doctors and public health officials to craft policies that were both safe and culturally and religiously sensitive. Others dismissed government mandates as antisemitic targeting and ignored them entirely.

Here's an example of a nuanced account of one response to COVID: During the winter of 2020-21, I complained to the head of school at a Hasidic elementary school in Brooklyn that his community wasn't masking. (Despite my skepticism as to masking's efficacy, I generally think we should all follow the law except in the most extreme of circumstances.)

But he told me they had good reason: Before COVID was known to be endemic, his Hasidic group shut down all their schools, well before the government had even asked them to. But in late May 2020, his Hasidic group had tested everyone for antibodies and found that 70% of the men in the community were already positive—from community spread that took place *before* the state- and city-imposed lockdowns and mask mandates. At this point they decided that keeping schools closed would have no effect on further spread of the virus, and reopened them. While we don't have any independent corroboration of his claim, it is worth considering that an excellent survey of the Hasidic community conducted in April 2021 also indicated a self-reported 70% antibody figure.

The same 2021 survey also indicated that the vast majority of Hasidim who were vaccine hesitant, were reluctant because they were very young and had already had COVID. Many of those who had COVID chose to receive only one

“We actually have very little clear or systematic data about how and why Haredim responded to COVID—or how the virus responded in turn.”

dose (which was in fact the policy in Israel for much of the pandemic).

Haredi responses to COVID produced a natural experiment whose results have not been analyzed fully. Clouded by the rhetoric around Haredi irresponsibility, nobody has bothered to find out, for example, whether there actually was dramatic COVID spread in Haredi schools or synagogues after the first intense wave of COVID at the very outset of the pandemic. Nor has anyone tried to measure the impact of different practices within American Haredi communities—something that might have provided valuable data to the country at large. Whereas in Israel both academics and the media took the trouble to consider a range of complex explanations for Haredi behaviors during COVID, in the U.S., *The New York Times* and others instead continued to run sensationalist stories framing Hasidim as a threat to public health.

But this lack of curiosity had a more pernicious outcome, too. The net result of the constant drumbeat of Haredi malfeasance was to associate Haredim with disease, normalize prejudice toward them, and encourage bigotry to proliferate cheerfully, without being recognized for what it is. There's a direct line between Shapiro's 2020 tweet from Williamsburg and an outpouring

of shockingly anti-Haredi articles that she and other reporters at the *Times* and other major newspapers have published since.

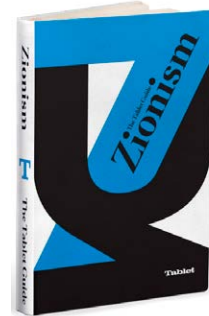
In December 2022, for instance, *The Washington Post* illustrated an article about measles outbreak among a Somali community in Ohio with no pictures of members of the Somali community in question, but of Hasidim in New York. And just last week, the *Times* ran an article about nonsensical “environmental concerns” surrounding the construction of a Jewish cemetery in Rockland County, New York, which launders an updated version of medieval well-poisoning accusations made by the borderline neo-Nazi hate group Rise Up Ocean County.

As a policy matter moving forward, the Haredi example is important. The more we let different communities find their own way, the greater our opportunity to see what works and what doesn't. Had we treated Haredi communities with a bit of understanding and tolerance, instead of lazily writing them off as anti-science COVID deniers, we could have gathered important data about what worked and what didn't in managing an unprecedented global pandemic. ■

This article was originally published on May 30, 2023.

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How the Teachers Union Broke Public Education

A former public school teacher documents the profound betrayal of America's students

BY ALEX GUTENTAG

On May 17, the Oakland, California, teachers union ended a two-week strike—the union's third strike in five years. The district offered a substantial salary increase for teachers before the strike even began, but negotiations remained deadlocked for days over the union's other demands. The Oakland Education Association (OEA) put forward several "common good" proposals that included drought-resistant shrubs, a Climate Justice Day, reparations for Black students, and converting unused school and office buildings into housing for homeless kids and their families.

Most of these "common good" issues were outside the legal scope of teachers' contracts, but as *The Wall Street Journal* editorial board pointed out, OEA is not a rogue branch of the teachers union. The National Education Association (NEA)—the largest labor union in the U.S. representing teachers and other school faculty—explicitly tells teachers to bargain for the "common good," advising union branches that, "When we expand the continuum of bargaining, we build power, and go on the offense in order to fight for social and racial justice."

What makes the NEA's bargaining approach so remarkable is the fact that this union and its counterpart, the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), have recently inflicted profound racial and social *injustice* on the country's school children in the form of extended school closures.

As an Oakland public school teacher, I

was a staunch supporter of the teachers union and was a union representative at my school for three years. In 2020, however, I began to disagree with the union when it prevented me from returning to my classroom long after studies proved that school reopening was safe, even without COVID-19 mitigation measures. In my experience, the union's actions were not motivated by sincere fears, but rather by a desire to virtue-signal and maintain comfortable work-from-home conditions.

Although union bosses like Randi Weingarten continue to obfuscate their role in school closures, the historical record is clear: The union repeatedly pushed to keep schools closed, and areas with greater union influence kept schools closed longer. Politicians, public health officials, and the media certainly had a hand in this fiasco, but the union egged on dramatic news stories, framed school reopening as a partisan issue, and directly interfered in CDC recommendations. Teachers saw firsthand that virtual learning was a farce and that children were suffering. While there may be plenty of blame to go around, teachers' abandonment of their own students was a special kind of betrayal.

I am well aware that there were many problems plaguing public education before school closures, and that teaching was a challenging and exhausting job. Today, however, the crisis teachers face is an order of magnitude worse than it was in 2019, and this crisis is almost entirely self-inflicted. Public school enrollment is plummeting, kids are refusing to go to school, and disciplinary problems are spiraling out of control.

Many districts are in freefall. In Baltimore, one high school student told the local news that, "The rising number of violence within city public schools has been unfathomable." More than 80% of U.S. schools have reported an increase in behavior issues. Nearly half of all schools have teacher shortages, and teachers continue to leave in droves.

Nationally, the chronic absence rate doubled, and it is not showing signs of improvement. In one San Francisco elementary school, almost 90% of students were chronically absent in the 2021-22 school year. In New York City, 50% of all Black students and 47% of all Latino students were chronically absent. Parents have no idea how far behind their kids really are, and schools cannot repair learning loss on a mass scale because the available workforce is simply not up to the task.

What happened in 2020 was the result of a long process in which the union replaced labor-related goals, which are finite and measurable, with activism, which is infinite and abstract. In 2018, a group of West Virginia teachers kicked off a national teachers strike wave. Most of these strikes had reasonable goals and broad public support, but, like all social movements, this strike wave gave birth to insatiable fanaticism.

In his 1951 book *The True Believer: Thoughts on the Nature of Mass Movements*, Eric Hoffer explained, "The danger of the fanatic to the development of a movement is that he cannot settle down ... The taste for strong feeling drives him on to search for mysteries yet to be revealed and secret doors yet to be opened. He keeps groping for extremes." The teachers union may have once had noble intentions, but these intentions have been hijacked by histrionic fanatics whose thirst for extremes might have contributed to the deaths of thousands of children and teenagers.

Although it still has the veneer of a labor organization, the teachers union is an activist arm of the Democratic Party. Since 2016, progressive leaders of the AFT and the NEA have increasingly prioritized political causes like Black Lives Matter and their opposition to Donald Trump. What's more, external elements have also parasitized the union

for their own objectives. For several years, left-wing publications and organizations pressured the teachers union to embrace social justice goals unrelated to those of traditional organized labor. The Democratic Socialists of America (an organization mostly composed of college-educated millennials) even made open attempts to infiltrate and influence the union.

At one time, the teachers proudly viewed education as an engine of social mobility. Today, the union is a captured institution, and it argues that the country must be remade for education to even be possible. Favoring ideological indoctrination over academic achievement fundamentally devalues teaching and learning. It is this devaluing that was the nail in the coffin for the school system.

Public education itself is one of the most important “common goods” there is, and treating it as “nonessential” has had profound consequences. Kids feeling depressed, not wanting to go to school, and misbehaving when they get there is a natural response to the message adults have sent them. There were many forces that made public education so fragile to begin with, but it was the teachers union that dealt the final blow.

In 2020 and 2021, like many other sectors of society, the teachers union lost the capacity for moral reasoning and developed a monomaniacal obsession with “safety.” The sentiment expressed in the infamous Chicago teachers union tweet (“The drive to reopen schools is rooted in racism, sexism, and misogyny”) exemplified the degree of hysteria in large, urban school districts. Ignoring the clear harm they were doing to children, union leaders made increasingly cruel, hypocritical, and illogical decisions.

School closures were a yearlong exercise in anti-solidarity. Teachers expected essential workers to deliver food for them, pick up their trash, and literally keep the lights on—all while the union withheld real education from these workers’ children. In July 2020, I offered to return to teach students with severe disabilities in person, but a union leader told me no teachers could go back. To provide federally mandated special

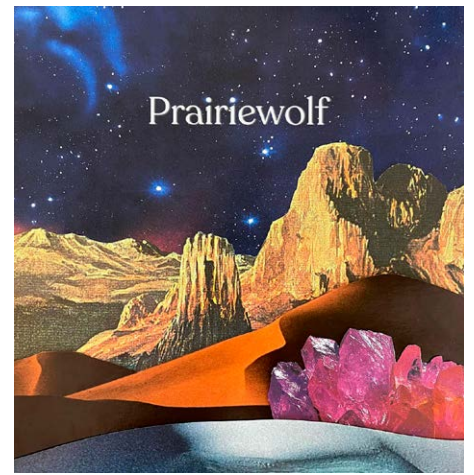
education services, the school district hired a private agency to go house to house for some students, which was supposedly safer than allowing me to teach them in small groups outside. Despite the union’s claim of doing something righteous, it had simply displaced the “risk” of teaching onto a private contractor.

In early 2021, the district also set up after-school pods for some special education students, but teachers like me were not allowed to supervise them, so the district used low-wage aides to staff the pods. Again, the teachers union displaced “risk”—this time onto underpaid workers. At my school’s union meeting, teachers complained about the fact that small groups of disabled students were now coming to campus for a few hours a week, citing their concerns about “safety protocols,” even though these teachers were still working remotely.

When I set up my own small, in-person literacy group for students whose parents wanted it, I tried to keep it secret from my colleagues. A union representative called me, and she told me that seeing any kid in person would make the community “unsafe.” If I did this, she said, it would be equivalent to crossing a picket line. At this time, private schools in California were open, and public schools had been open for many months in Europe and other U.S. states.

During my school’s union meeting in April 2021, when we were finally about to go back to work in person, some teachers threatened to call parents and tell them not to send their kids back to school because it was still “unsafe.” This was after all of my colleagues had skipped the line to get vaccinated early.

In the fall of 2021, the Oakland union supported a vaccine mandate for students that would have pushed 3,000 unvaccinated kids back into online learning (40% of whom were Black). Later that school year, Oakland teachers staged a “sick out” to demand N95 masks, and at the behest of the union, Oakland schools maintained an indoor and outdoor mask mandate until April 2022. On the Instagram page of my old school, which serves low-income students of color, about half of all the kids and staff pictured this year were still wearing masks, even in April 2023.



Album of the Week

Prairiewolf, *Prairiewolf*

Prairiewolf’s delightfully calm self-titled album creates the musical equivalent of looking out onto the stars in the middle of the desert, a sound the trio calls “Rocky Mountain kosmische.”

“Kosmische” is German for “cosmic rock,” or as it became better known outside of Germany, krautrock. While associated now with Kraftwerk, *Station to Station*-era David Bowie, and cocaine, krautrock was initially based in social rebellion. Young West Germans in the ’60s had a lot to rebel against. Finding it hard to find much value in recent German history, *kosmische* sought to abandon what had become the default in music—the influence of American and British rock—by exploring the sounds of the future.

That impulse led to a sonic explosion, the results of which eventually found their way into cult classics like Spaceman 3 and The Beta Band. This is the sonic terrain in which Prairiewolf is operating. Will it sound a little like elevator music to some? Sure. But this is an elevator you could live inside.

—David Meir Grossman

The union's fixation on "safety" was a mania that amounted to the psychological abuse of children, and it has had lasting effects. This mania had little to do with actual safety, and more to do with signs of fealty to the Democratic Party. It is this fealty—not labor principles or educational concerns—that currently drives the union's actions.

During her congressional testimony on April 26, 2023, Randi Weingarten reiterated her support for teacher vaccine mandates. "There's someone in this audience here today who disagrees with me about it," she said, gesturing to the seats behind her. The person she was referring to was Stephanie Edmonds, a New York City public school teacher who was attending the hearing. Edmonds' religious exemption was denied, and she lost her job due to the city's vaccine mandate for public employees.

"It seems like a little bit of a mistake to me to admit that she thought it was OK to fire her members," Edmonds told me. If Weingarten claims to always fight for teachers, why did she find it acceptable for New York City to fire hundreds of union members and flag their fingerprints for the FBI?

"There's a political power aspect to it," Edmonds said. Vaccine mandates effectively weed out teachers who don't share the Democratic Party's ideology. Edmonds also pointed out that because it controls teachers' benefits, the union manages billions of dollars of investments. "I think it's probably connected to a lot of their financial ties," she said. "Teachers union funds are invested within the pharmaceutical industry."

The union is indeed a vast machine with particular financial motivations. Above all else, it is a bureaucracy, and this explains, in part, how its leadership is composed. Over time, the people who rise to power within the union are not those who care most about improving schools and teaching conditions, but those who are most devoted to expanding the union's power. Science fiction writer Jerry Pournelle described this process as the Iron Law of Bureaucracy: "In any bureaucracy, the people devoted to the benefit of the bureaucracy itself always get in control and those

"Vaccine mandates effectively weed out teachers who don't share the Democratic Party's ideology."

dedicated to the goals that the bureaucracy is supposed to accomplish have less and less influence, and sometimes are eliminated entirely."

"I think that workers deserve representation," Edmonds told me. "They deserve safe workplaces. I just think that when these unions get so massive then they have different interests than the individual teachers."

Teachers union leaders claim that all their critics are simply "anti-union," but it is union leaders' responsibility to garner public support, and it is their own fault that they have lost it. The union's job is, fundamentally, to secure employment, adequate pay, and good working conditions for its members. To do this, the union needs to have positive partnerships with parents and families. By willfully damaging these partnerships, the union achieved something privatizers like Betsy DeVos, the Koch brothers, and the Waltons once only dreamed of: an explosion of support for charter schools, vouchers, and school choice.

Today, the teachers union is attempting to gaslight parents instead of apologizing. Jennifer Sey lost her job as Levi's brand president for criticizing school closures. I asked Sey about Weingarten's recent attempts to rewrite history. "You can imagine my dismay," Sey said. "I got pushed out of my job for opposing her."

In June 2021, Sey, who sent her children to public schools, had to answer questions about her views in a town hall style meeting at Levi's. "One of the questions I was told to be prepared to answer was: Are you anti-union?" Sey explained.

This political bullying backfired. A lifelong supporter of public schools, Sey has now lost confidence in the teachers union: "After the last three years, I am officially anti-teachers union. And pro school choice." Sey is one of many parents who feel this way, and the union has done nothing to allay their concerns. Despite the fact that they already extorted \$190 billion in "emergency" COVID funds from taxpayers, union leaders insist that public schools are failing simply because they do not have enough funding. However, basic academic gaps do not require billions of dollars and societal transformation to be addressed. There is evidence that simple curricular changes, for example, can vastly improve student literacy.

Nevertheless, union leaders maintain the self-serving mythology that it is impossible to improve student outcomes until the entire treasury is poured into the education system. This narrative excuses teachers' failures and, crucially, helps union bosses garner member support. As Hoffer wrote in *The True Believer*, "Every great cause begins as a movement, becomes a business, and eventually degenerates into a racket."

School closures were not just an issue that impacted teachers, kids, and parents—this policy will have decade-long ripple effects that will reverberate through every aspect of society. While savvy middle class and affluent families may opt for charter and private schools as a solution, the poorest and most vulnerable children, such as my former students, will remain trapped in a rotting system. The children who never catch up will grow into damaged, illiterate adults who cannot participate in the labor force and who are plagued by social dysfunction and decay. Ultimately, the union will achieve its vision of remaking the world—only it will be a broken, disfigured world that no one wants. ■

This article was originally published on May 31, 2023.

The Hijacking

A new anti-memoir memoir revisits a critical moment in the history of air piracy while plumbing the false consciousness of American Jews

BY MARCO ROTH

On an early September day in 1970, right before the start of the New York City school year, Martha Hodes, 12, and her sister Catherine, 13, boarded TWA flight 741 in Tel Aviv en route to New York via Athens and Frankfurt. They were returning from a summer with their mother, a principal dancer for the Martha Graham company, in Israel. Their father—also a pioneering Graham dancer—had been the girls’ primary custodial parent even before the official divorce. Leaving Frankfurt, the plane was hijacked by two members of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine and rerouted to a makeshift airstrip in the Jordanian desert. There, the girls, along with the majority of the passengers and crew, endured six days of captivity aboard the aircraft itself.

The Hodes sisters and their fellow captives were soon joined by the passengers and crew of two other hijacked planes; a fourth plane was flown to Cairo, while the attempted hijacking of an El Al plane was foiled by the rapid reaction of the Israeli captain and crew. The five hijackings probably even now remain the most complex and daring act of coordinated air piracy in the history of terrorism, especially if one considers the additional logistics involved when the lives of passengers were still deemed to be of some value. Some of the hostages, including the Hodes sisters, were eventually released to hotels in Amman, while others—mostly military-age men, crewmembers, and a few Jewish military-age women and girls—were dispersed to various safe houses in refugee camps and cities in Jordan that were then effectively under PLO control.

The events of the hijacking were extensively covered in the mass media of the time and were later the subject of at least one history book—by David Raab, another survivor, who was 17 years old at the time, traveling with his mother and younger sisters. Raab was separated from his family and became part of a contingent of hostages whose eventual liberation was the fortunate byproduct of the military victory of the Jordanian army during what became known to Palestinians as “Black September.” Catherine Hodes got “quote of the day” in *The New York Times* for Sept. 13, 1970, “Now I am going to thank God and have a bath,” and both Hodes girls were interviewed by another fellow hostage, a sociologist who published her findings as “Individual and Group Responses to Confinement on a Skyjacked Plane.”

Now Martha—who went on to become a leading historian of the American Civil War and also of interracial sex and marriage in 19th-century United States—has published a book about the experience, *My Hijacking: A Personal History of Forgetting and Remembering*. Her motives for writing about the events of her past are not rooted in a desire to offer a definitive history of a particular episode in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, neither is she interested in providing, at this late date, a simple testimonial account of a traumatic event in her personal life. Instead, Hodes attempts something dramatically different from most histories and most memoirs. She wants to answer a personal set of questions: “Why do I remember so little?” “Why did I feel like I wasn’t even there?” and especially, “Why do I have no memory of being afraid?” Her book functions as an investigative report and a narrative of her research,

discoveries, and revisions, as well as a Rashomon-style, multiperspectival recounting of the events and political context of the hijacking. The personal pronoun in the title prepares the reader for this intensely subjective framing while also making the book sound a bit like the 12-year-old’s back-to-school essay that Hodes couldn’t bring herself to write once she was finally able to start seventh grade.

Hodes sets out to test her memories against the testimonies and accounts of other surviving witnesses, transcripts in the archives of TWA and the U.S. State Department, video footage stored by the CIA, and documentary evidence from PFLP reminiscences; she returns to the diary she kept as a child and the transcripts of two interviews she and her sister gave on their return—one, separately, to Sylvia Jacobson, the sociologist, and the other, together, along with their father, to their cousin, a reporter for the Boston *Phoenix*.

Hodes discovers that her 12-year-old self was a thoroughly unreliable narrator—less of the experiences she actually wrote down but of the range of experiences and emotions she was willing to admit. A faithful teenage diarist, inspired, she says, by Anne Frank, with whom she shares a birthday, Hodes later realizes she was also editing her diary as she wrote it, crossing out a sentence taking note of a stewardess comforting her crying older sister—in one instance—and, in other cases, entirely failing to note worrisome events like the moment when she and all the other

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Jewish passengers were taken off the plane, herded into a circle, and held for an indeterminate length of time, unsure if they were about to machine-gunned. “The most frightening moment occurred like this...” she writes, at the end of one page, only to discover that she either failed to write it down at all or recorded it on a piece of loose paper that, unlike several others in the diary, she “allowed to slip away, either on the plane or as soon as I got home.” As Hodes writes, “I see that the aspiring writer in me constructed not a full record but instead a tolerable story; not a truthful story but instead a bearable one; not an honest story but instead a story I could tell when I got home, most especially to my father ... That narrative of omissions would comprise my version of the hijacking and I would carry it with me for years and years afterward.”

At other times, 12-year-old Martha is able to see and remember things that other hostages repressed. Her strongest memory—what she calls, following trauma theorists, “a flashbulb”—is of the copilot coming out of the cockpit with a hijacker’s gun at his neck. She finds no record of this in the copilot’s official testimony or in any other passenger’s accounts, begins to wonder if she invented it, only to discover, through a late interview with the copilot that indeed he’d desperately needed to take a shit and one of the hijackers had led him to the bathroom at gunpoint, but he hadn’t bothered to put it in his official TWA debrief.

The result of these scrupulous exercises in comparative memory is a book that constructively challenges most readers’ (as well as most publishers’ and literary agents’) basic assumptions about how memoir (and memories) work, and also how the primary sources used by professional historians work. The archive is both valuable and treacherous. As a historian, Hodes reminds us that she always “implores” her students to ask “Why did this person tell this story this way?” Her answers, in this case however, are more psychological than historical, or more to do with a personal family history revolving around the dynamics of her parents’ divorce, a gifted child’s protectiveness toward her

“History, then, is what can be glimpsed between the blinds of the family.”

vulnerable custodial parent, and her reluctance to face up to the legacy of their mother’s absence.

History, then, is what can be glimpsed between the blinds of the family. The title’s personal pronoun gains an ambiguous darker meaning as the book unfolds—hinting that Hodes herself had been a kind of hijacker of her own feelings and memories for nearly 50 years.

In the terms Hodes sets out for herself, *My Hijacking* succeeds as a valiant and valuable act of self-investigation, a meta-autobiography that’s also a sensitive work of historiography. But the book becomes most interesting and truly alive in those moments when it most escapes the author’s second, more mature effort to control the narrative. In other words, *My Hijacking* is also worth reading against its own grain, as a historical document.

Unintentionally, Hodes offers us an in-depth cross-section of a moment in the history of savagery, an account of a milder age of mass terrorism and of air travel. The seats were bigger and human beings could actually sleep in them for several days, especially when furnished with tranquilizers from the Red Cross. Lavishly produced print airline magazines with color photographs of other countries and advertisements for dolls

offered the girls hours of escapist entertainment even after the electricity had been shut off. Taking over the plane, the female member of the PFLP hijack team announces “Kindly fasten your seatbelts, this is your new captain speaking, we will take you to a friendly country with friendly people.”

The “commandos” as Hodes refers to them—never terrorists, which would have been an anachronism—distribute the pretentious propaganda literature of PFLP founder George Habash along with freshly made pita and falafel. Several exchanges between captors and captives are included, including 10-year old Yosef Trachtman’s response when asked by a Palestinian fedayeen whether he believed people should fight for their country, “Yes, if it is their country.” Hodes’ favorite personal memory was of the “commandos” and kids playing jump-rope outside the planes. Two years later, Israeli athletes were castrated in Munich.

Many of the earliest released hostages would provide favorable reviews of their captors—either from a tactical wish not to jeopardize those left behind, or, less nobly, because they, unlike others, really had been comparatively well-treated. About the experience, one woman tells a reporter that it was “very wonderful.” Another stewardess put a PFLP button in her lapel. While the Jewish passengers tended to be less enthusiastic, even Hodes’ sister Catherine concedes, in the Boston *Phoenix* interview with their cousin, that “the plea of any peoples to get back their homes is a valid plea,” and that “mistakes were made when these people were kicked out in the first place.”

It is in places like these that *My Hijacking* also becomes a remarkable document of assimilated postwar American Jewish identity. This history, however, is told in passing, scattered in various chapters. Neither of Hodes’ parents came from religious families, both families had lost ties to Europe. The Shoah, which Hodes refers to throughout as “The Holocaust,” was known to them, but not viscerally. In the course of her retelling the hijacking story it becomes clear that several hostages were survivors of the camps. Yet—when Hodes finally recounts her

'The Jewess and the Synagogue'

The discussion about women's roles in American synagogues began more than a century ago

BY JENNA WEISSMAN JOSELIT

Once upon a time, when American Jewish women were called—and called themselves—“Jewesses,” figuring out what Judaism meant to them and what they meant to Judaism was one of the pressing issues of the day. Throughout the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Jewish newspapers, for instance, were abuzz with editorials and feature articles about the relationship between “the Jewess and the synagogue,” or the “Jewess and Judaism,” especially as it played out on the street and within the sanctuary.

Much of this public discourse fastened on what it took to be the fairer sex's seeming affinity for religion, a proclivity said to be born of both biology (the “womanly temperament”) and sociology (the “comparative monotony of her rounds”). Few American Jews, and fewer Americans, for that matter, doubted that women were far more predisposed than their menfolk to the contemplation of higher, and better, things.

Up for grabs, though, was how to make the most of that predisposition in a rapidly modernizing America. On that front, consensus gave way to confusion and even controversy. Some American Jews called for maintaining the status quo, insisting that it was the home and only the home that was, and should remain, the locus of Jewish women's religiosity. Others advocated dismantling the status quo and making the synagogue the locus of Jewish women's religious identity. Still others, seeking only the slightest adjustment to the existing landscape, were open to the possibility

of charitable activity outside of the home, but not much else.

These days, the high-flying rhetoric that accompanied each of these positions makes for engaged reading; it might leave you cheering, cringing, or rolling your eyes. I'd like to think that it had a similarly galvanizing effect on readers more than a century ago when, say, in 1896, they happened upon an article in the *Jewish Messenger* calling on the synagogue to enlarge the Jewish woman's opportunities for engagement. That institution “should not be satisfied in utilizing the services of the Jewess as decorator merely, but as builder and architect as well,” an editorial declared, adding that the Jewess “is ready for the synagogue and the synagogue must open its portals for the Jewess.”

Or perhaps, a decade later, when leafing through the pages of the *American Israelite*, readers took note of Rabbi Max Heller's homily on the “delicate sex-division” within Judaism in which, said he, “woman is the preserver of religion, while man is its pioneer and shaper. Men hew out the paths; women are the makers of homes.” By the Reform rabbi's lights, maintaining that distinction was key to the future of American Judaism, eliciting, one imagines, a bristling “harrumph” on the part of some of the newspaper's more progressive female readers.

Back and forth it went, generating lively discussion and what one participant called “ventilation” and another “agitation.” Is it any wonder, then, that the pace of change was slow, incremental, and even tentative?

The first step toward enlarging the Jewish woman's “sphere of usefulness” was to form and join a synagogue sisterhood of personal service, whose members attended to the needs of the Jewish poor. By clothing and feeding those on the margins, training them in the “arts of sewing and mending,” and introducing them to contemporary notions of hygiene and housekeeping, these “corps of visiting Jewesses” didn't threaten the primacy of the home so much as augment its impact. They were doing what they had always done, but on a much larger and more public scale: Municipal housekeeping, it was called.

Several decades later, amid the growing professionalization of social work, the sisterhood and with it, those Jewish women interested in doing more for themselves and their faith began actively to “cultivate the temple-going habit.” Attending Sabbath and holiday services increasingly became a priority. The object of sisterhood women, observed Mrs. Abraham Simon, president of the Federation of Temple Sisterhoods, in 1916 “is not so much to raise money as to raise Jews in loyalty, in dignity and in religious enthusiasm.” The most effective way to do just that, she claimed, was to “rally 'round the synagogue!”

Filling its pews, which otherwise were thinly populated, American Jewish women of the interwar years helped to combat what at the time was called the “indifference” of their co-religionists. Besides, now that they were increasingly “emancipated” from the upstairs ladies' gallery to which they had once been consigned like “beautiful crockery ware,” and invited to sit downstairs, alongside their husband and children, they were able to enjoy and participate more fully in the proceedings, heightening the synagogue's appeal.

Even when women continued to be

ISRAEL & THE MIDDLE EAST

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On the Salamander

From Rabbi Moses Sofer
(1762-1839)

In my humble opinion, it appears that [the salamander] is surely a creature that [is created out of] the source of fire. And it grows in the famous fire-spouting hills. And ... when [the salamanders] emerge into the air they immediately die, therefore the sorcerers must prepare for them a hot location, similar to the source of fire in which they live ... [therefore] the sorcerers prepare a furnace that has been heated for seven years with myrtle trees, whose heat is thus close to [the heat of the] source of fire, and they attach the salamander to this [fire] in order to bring it here, and they are fruitful and multiply there, and men are anointed with their blood and [become] impervious to fire.

housed upstairs and the system of separate seating kept intact, as was the case within Orthodox congregations throughout the land, at least the lattice work that had once occluded their view, rendering women invisible, had been taken down. Once a hallowed tradition, it came increasingly to be seen as a stumbling block, an old-fashioned practice that got in the way of Judaism's integration into the modern body politic, and its abolition strongly encouraged. That "piece of ugly, contemptible medievalism," the *Jewish Chronicle* of London hotly put it in an article reprinted in New York's *Jewish Messenger* in 1877, "will have to go."

Several years later, in 1881, the New York newspaper upped the ante by questioning why the "lattice work on the constitution" of modern-day synagogues had been retained, precluding the Jewish woman's active participation in congregational affairs. "Why has the educated Jewess no voice in the synagogue, while every clerk or dry goods drummer can record his vote and be eligible to office?"

Advocating that some Jewish women be allowed to vote for members of the Sunday-school board and perhaps even be candidates themselves, the weekly anticipated opposition, even ridicule, among those Jewish leaders whose "idea of progress is Teutonic, not American." It stood firm. So did growing numbers of other American Jews. Little by little, resistance to the notion of women as independent, voting members of a congregation softened, making room for their voice. "What remarkable change has been affected in woman's position in the synagogue!" remarked the *American Israelite* a decade later. "How thoroughly Judaism has been occidentalized among us, the different estimate now placed on woman's proper place and function is sufficient assurance."

Even so, there were limits. The training of women as rabbis, much less opening the office of Parnass (synagogue president) "to the ladies," was something else again. Nothing doing. Might a female rabbi be something American Jews should consider? "Certainly not," the *Jewish Messenger* declared.

Others agreed. In 1897, the *Reform Advocate*, a Chicago Jewish newspaper, held what it loftily called a "symposium" on the subject of "woman in the synagogue." Sending out questionnaires to a dozen prominent Jewish ladies, it elicited their opinion as to the communal role they might continue to play or assume in the future, like that of a female rabbi.

"Should a woman occupy the pulpit? Certainly," declared Chicago social reformer Sadie American, especially if "she have [sic] the proper training and the native sympathy and spiritual insight, but only then. Let her not add to the number of unfit clergy." Mary M. Cohen of Philadelphia agreed. "The woman who is fitted by nature and experience to occupy the pulpit, should do so. There is no sex in spirituality."

Most of the respondents, however, were either hostile to the idea of a woman rabbi or hedged their bets. "Should woman occupy the pulpit?" "No—by all that is sacred—a hundred times no!" Katherine De Sola of Montreal responded passionately. "Let woman be as she has ever been, content to let *men* preach while *she* practices." To which Esther

Jane Ruskay of New York added that "a Jewish woman who has the best interests of her faith at heart has no desire to pose either as synagogue trustee, as deaconess, or high luminary of any sort. She knows she can best serve the interests of the synagogue by sending her husband and her sons there."

Other respondents, among them New York social reformer Minnie Louis, hemmed and hawed when it came to the womanly demonstration of "pulpit power." Woman, by her very nature, Louis believed, lacked the gift of oratory, and therefore might occupy the pulpit "as an occasional guest, yes; as a proprietress, no." Expanding on her beliefs, Louis went on to state somewhat categorically, that "no age will produce Savonarolas, Beechers, or Hirschs of the feminine gender."

It would take another 75 years before Louis' pronouncement would be put to the test and women ordained as pulpit rabbis. In the meantime, the "religious equality of woman with man" emerged as a social good, or, better yet, as a value in its own right. Modern Judaism's calling card, a testament to its alignment with modernity, it served as a litmus test on whether the age-old faith could more than hold its own as a modern phenomenon, or, alternatively, remain in thrall to the past. In its relationship to women, would Judaism cling to "*Schulchan-aruchism*," as the *American Israelite* evocatively put it, or prove itself "worthy of the age in which we live?"

The answer stares us in the face. All we have to do is to look around the contemporary synagogue sanctuary where women figure, and even predominate, as rabbis, cantors, prayer leaders, Torah readers, and congregants. ■

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FOOD

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tabletmag.com/sections/food

THE REST

→ **Quote of the Week: “Does the mayor have a date when he thinks poverty will vanish, the ‘trauma’ will ease, and the shootings stop? Is the July 4 weekend too soon, or will it be Labor Day?”** These are the questions posed by the Wall Street Journal editorial board to the new Chicago mayor, Brandon Johnson, after another gruesome Memorial Day weekend in Chicago. Carnage this past weekend tied the all-time record for deaths on Memorial Day weekend, with 12 people killed and 53 total shot. In a stark contrast to the promises from other big-city mayors to restore public order through effective policing, Johnson blamed the weekend’s violence, which he called “intolerable,” on the “trauma” of poverty rather than the actions of violent criminals. As the WSJ notes, Chicago voted for Johnson’s more “holistic” approach to fighting crime, but after the bloodshed over the weekend, the editors ask readers, “How do you like it?”

→ San Francisco doth protest too much. A new San Francisco Chronicle article summarizes a recently released package of IRS data that gives granular detail about how many Americans moved in 2020-21 and how much money they brought with them. The city of **San Francisco lost 32,111 people over that period and \$8 billion in net income. New York County (Manhattan) lost \$16.5 billion and Los Angeles \$8.7 billion, along with large segments of their population.** While the Chronicle piece is framed to point out that it wasn’t only the City by the Bay losing citizens and wealth, it’s a blistering indictment of California’s two largest cities, which together lost more than 170,000 citizens in two years. More than 700 San Franciscans moved to Miami and Palm Beach, Florida, during the time reviewed, and those two counties also had the greatest total net inflows of income from new residents, at \$6.5 and \$7 billion, respectively.

→ The one reactor to rule them all is inching closer, as **new investments are made in German and Japanese fusion projects.** Germany’s Proxima Fusion, a spin-off of the prestigious Max Planck Institute, just received \$7.5 million to build a “stellarator,” a device first imagined by American physicist Lyman Spitzer in 1951 that can create stable fusion reactions that scientists can then study to get us closer to a useable fusion energy source. Ian Hogarth, co-founder of Plural Platform, a venture capital firm leading the investment for Proxima, said of the start-up’s work, “They’ve basically done the impossible. ... With 1990s computing resources, they successfully designed a stellarator... and now it’s setting records that basically are defining the whole field of magnetic confinement fusion.”

→ Dave Burt—CEO of investment research company DeltaTerra Capital and one of the characters famously profiled in *The Big Short*, Michael Lewis’ book about the guys who made a killing on the 2008 subprime lending crisis—says another huge liability lurks beneath our homes, especially in flood-prone areas. Burt says that **20% of U.S. homes may be overvalued due to underconsideration of their flood risk, potentially to the tune of about \$800 billion.** He predicts another 2008-style real estate crash unless banks start factoring in the possibility that their **lendees won’t be able to pay them back in the event of major flooding events.**

THE BIG STORY

Chris Christie, former New Jersey governor and long-ago ally of former president Donald Trump, is set to announce his candidacy for the GOP presidential nomination on Tuesday in New Hampshire, making him the ninth Republican candidate in yet another packed primary. Only 21% of the Republican party views him positively—polling that stands in stark contrast to both Trump, who drew a 77% favorability rating, and Trump’s primary challenger, Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, who garnered a 73% favorability rating in the same recent Monmouth survey.

After his botched campaign announcement alongside Elon Musk on Twitter was riddled with technical errors last week, DeSantis has tried to regain his earlier momentum by visiting Iowa, where he made his first appearance as an official candidate on Tuesday. Speaking to the crowd, DeSantis played up his differences with Trump, including his promise to secure the southern border after “listening to these politicians talk about securing the border for years.”

While DeSantis has lost some ground to Trump in recent months, David Kochel, an Iowa-based Republican strategist, told Politico that “it’s not a done deal.” Both Trump and DeSantis are far ahead of their challengers, including Christie, former vice president Mike Pence, former U.N. Ambassador Nikki Haley, businessman Vivek Ramaswamy, and Sen. Tim Scott.

—Sean Cooper

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The Forgotten Summer Camps

A new book shines a light on Yiddish-oriented programs

BY ROKHL KAFRISSEN

Once upon a time, I (very briefly) dated a man who hated summer camp. He hated it so much, he only went once, and, to my horror, quit midsummer. I should've known right then that this was not going to work out.

My horror stemmed from the fact that the camp he had (briefly) attended was in fact the same arts-intensive day camp I myself had attended, for many happy summers. It's hard to overstate how meaningful those summers were for me, both as a place to blossom socially and a space to find myself creatively. It was hard to contemplate not just hating it, but hating it enough to drop out midsummer. Thirty-something years later, I'd still give my right arm for a few more precious weeks of summer camp. Looking back more rationally, it's quite possible to say that this gentleman simply didn't need what camp offered. I probably wouldn't be the writer I am today without those summers. He, on the other hand, was already well on his own unique artistic path.

People feel very strongly about their summer camp experiences—especially Jews, and especially me, it seems. Summer camp is an American phenomenon that cuts across economic, religious, and ethnic lines. But American Jews took to “Jewish” summer camping, especially sleepaway camping, with a devotion unmatched among other religious groups. American Jews spend far longer periods at camp than other groups and often return to the same camp year after year. To be honest, my identity is far more tied to my summer camp than the university I

attended, though it feels a little strange to say it out loud.

Though Jewish camping has roots going back to the Progressive Era, it really came into its golden age, along with American Judaism itself, in the postwar era. Jewish summer camp became not just a place to spend a summer, but a place to learn *how* to be Jewish, as well as an ideological proving ground for the American Jewish future.

All of this is wonderfully explored in *The Jews of Summer: Summer Camp and Jewish Culture in Postwar America*, the brand-new book by Sandra Fox, Goldstein-Goren assistant professor of Hebrew and Judaic studies at New York University and the director of the Archive of the American Jewish Left in the Digital Age. In addition to being a scholar of tremendous talent, she is also a friend of mine and a colleague in Yiddishland.

One of the fascinating insights in Fox's book is that even as Jews make up a tiny part of the American population, Jewish camping is the most-studied of any American camping sector! That isn't such a surprise to those who have spent any time in the Jewish nonprofit world. Given the weighty goals carried by many Jewish camps, it seems natural that they would be studied and their Jewish “outcomes” closely analyzed.

Despite the close attention American Jewish camps have received, very little has been given to the postwar history of the Yiddish-oriented camps featured in Fox's book: Hemshekh, Boiberik, Kinder Ring, and Kinderland. Fox's book is the first scholarly intervention into this fascinating corner of Jewish camping, and will hopefully not be the

last. It's especially relevant to the ongoing mainstream fascination with a so-called “Yiddish revival.” As Fox writes, “[r]ather than emerging suddenly, the perceived Yiddish revival ... actually relied on an unbroken generational chain of cultural keepers, creators, and teachers, many of whom were educated and inspired by camps like Hemshekh, Boiberik, and Kinderland.” Excessive focus on a “revival” all but ensures erasure of these crucial continuities. Personally, I'm hoping that we will see more books about the camps themselves and the political and social movements they grew out of, such as Camp Hemshekh and the Bund, and Camp Boiberik and the Sholem Aleichem Folk Institute.

Fox herself was a camper at the Zionist Camp Young Judaea, Sprout Lake. Nonetheless, the seeds of future Yiddishism may have been planted when she became friends with another Young Judaea camper, Shifra Whiteman, daughter of beloved Yiddish teacher Paula Teitelbaum, also a product of Camp Hemshekh. As Fox writes in the book's acknowledgements: “I am overwhelmed by appreciation for another camp friend, Shifra Whiteman, who introduced me to the possibility of a Yiddish-speaking life when I was only a kid in her house in Queens.”

I'm fairly sure that I met Fox sometime around 2013, when I visited the then-new Yiddish Farm, in Goshen, New York. Yiddish Farm was offering intensive, Yiddish-only language immersion summer courses. Fox was at Yiddish Farm for two summers, first as a language learner, then as a guest, using, as she told me recently, the skills she acquired during her own camp experience, to facilitate social activities at Yiddish Farm.

Rather than being situated on a beautiful lake or offering drama courses, students lived on the spartan farm grounds, praying together, doing farm work, and reconnecting with the land. From my brief time there, I got the impression that Yiddish Farm, at least in the beginning, harked back to the much earlier versions of American camping, when, as Fox writes, “fresh air reformers saw camps as ideal settings for providing children with recreation, character

development, and physical health, ‘translating anti-modern anxieties into youth-specific terms.’” Not that Yiddish Farm was explicitly for children, but that the ethos was one very much of developing an alternative to urban, deracinated Jewishness.

Of course, *The Jews of Summer* is about much more than Yiddish camps. The book focuses on four major categories of summer camps: Zionist, Yiddishist, Conservative movement, and Reform movement. Rather than focusing on their differences, Fox draws out the broad similarities of the camps, exploring how they approached things like Holocaust memorialization through their own ideological lens.

The section on Tisha B’Av is particularly interesting. Fox notes that by midcentury, Tisha B’Av had fallen into obscurity among American Jews. That certainly resonated for this ’80s kid. Despite growing up in a fairly Jewy environment, I had never even heard of it until I was at my arts camp one summer, probably when I was around 13. It was there that I made a friend named Ziva. I remember her coming to camp and fasting and I was absolutely dumbfounded. I honestly had no idea, up to that point, that there were other fast days apart from Yom Kippur. And the fact that you had to fast, but could still do “fun” stuff, like go to camp, blew my mind.

Tisha B’Av, the Fast of the Ninth of Av, is the only holiday falling within the summer camp calendar. Though its somber tone is at odds with the care-free spirit of summer camp, each camp found a way to harness the richness of the day to their own goals. As Sandra Fox writes, “American Zionist educators embraced Tisha B’Av with nearly unanimous and zealous enthusiasm. To Zionists Tisha B’Av reinforced the legitimacy of their cause, the Holocaust and other historical tragedies proof that Jews could never be truly safe in the diaspora.” Reform camps, on the other hand, explored diverse themes through their Tisha B’Av programming, some focusing on “ancient tragedies” and others on the value of *tzedakah*, charity.

The Yiddishist camps approached Tisha B’Av in a variety of ways. Some were internally conflicted about having

such religious programming. Camp Boiberik’s leader, Leibush Lehrer, “presented a recitation of the traditional Eicha in Yiddish ...” as well as leading a Yizkor (memorial) service. His decisions around Tisha B’Av evoked bitter criticism from his colleagues within the movement, as well as some parents.

Camp Hemshekh had been founded for the children of Holocaust survivors. At Hemshekh, rather than Tisha B’Av, the third Sunday in August was Ghetto Night, followed by Ghetto Day. Similar to the observances at other camps, Ghetto Night “fostered an emotion-probing experience for campers through scripted recollections of the Holocaust, candle-lit spaces, and somber song. For children of survivors, Ghetto Nights proved particularly emotional as many campers learned of what their parents had gone through in detail for the first time.” Ghetto Night was also a nexus for the tensions between the ideological plans of the adult leadership and the youthful desires of the campers.

Fox writes: “Hemshekh’s ceremonies ended with campers exclaiming, ‘Long live Yiddish!’—the message of the evening made explicit. By exalting resistance fighters in the Holocaust, the ceremony implored campers to form their own sort of resistance, confronting the temptations to abandon their language and assimilate into mainstream American and American Jewish society.”

“Long live Yiddish!” may have been the script read by campers on Ghetto Night, but it wasn’t an attitude that necessarily came naturally, especially to children of the turbulent 1960s. As much as I care about Yiddish today, I can understand their own reluctance to go to Yiddish class during the summer. According to Fox, Hemshekh campers “went to great lengths to avoid attending Yiddish class,” but after Ghetto Night, there was a “huge shift” in their attitude toward Yiddish. “One counselor suggested that the camp should schedule Ghetto Day toward the beginning of the summer rather than the end, because then the staff could remind them for the next seven weeks, ‘But you cried on Ghetto Night, didn’t you?’”

Reading that passage, I’m reminded of my own, very different Jewish

education, in which the Holocaust became a kind of cudgel; I came to think of it as the “pedagogy of terror.” Is there, or was there, no other better way of bringing kids into Yiddish culture than profound guilt?

Obviously, the history is more complicated than that, and the future always holds surprises. I’m sure my parents and teachers could never have predicted that my life course would be altered by a burning desire to learn Yiddish, of all things. I was lucky that in my 20s, long past the age of summer camp, I stumbled onto Klezkanada, a beautifully intense, weeklong August retreat in the Laurentian mountains, outside Montreal.

Like many camp experiences, Klezkanada was made possible due to the heroic efforts of a core group of people. In this case, it was decades of work by Hy Goldman, who, with his wife, Sandy, pretty much single-handedly ensured that Klezkanada would continue from year to year. In his work outside Klezkanada, he spent more than 50 years as a physician at Montreal’s Children’s Hospital.

Goldman, known to everyone as Hy, passed away on May 19, 2023, at the age of 97. Eternally vigorous and dedicated to his work, you got the feeling that he would outlast us all. As attested by the many tributes on social media, Hy was a friend, a leader, a mentor, and, most importantly, a *mentsh*. He modeled the boundless love and dedication necessary to build and maintain not just an organization, but a movement. I will always be in awe of what he and Sandy built, and his memory will forever be linked with the extraordinary Yiddish continuity he made possible at Klezkanada. *Koved zayn likhtikn ondenk.* ■

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 NEWSLETTER

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Grandma Peggy's Kanafeh

BY JACK HAZAN

INGREDIENTS

FOR THE SYRUP

- 1 cup [200 g] sugar
- 1 tsp orange blossom water
- 1 tsp rose water

FOR THE PASTRY

- 2 lb [910 g] part skim or whole-milk ricotta
- ½ cup [120 ml] heavy cream
- ⅓ cup [65 g] sugar
- 2 Tbsp cornstarch
- 2 tsp rose water
- 1 tsp orange blossom water
- 1½ cups [330 g] unsalted butter
- 16 oz [455 g] box kataifi (shredded phyllo dough)

PREPARATION

Step 1

Preheat the oven to 350°F [180°C]. Have a 3 qt [2.8 L] baking dish ready.

Step 2

In a small saucepan over medium heat, whisk together the sugar, 1/2 cup [120 ml] of water, the orange blossom water, and rose water until the sugar dissolves, then decrease the heat to low and allow it to simmer for 15 minutes, or until the syrup thickens slightly. Pour the syrup into a heat-safe container and refrigerate until ready to use.

Step 3

In a 4 qt [3.8 L] saucepan over medium heat, whisk together the ricotta and heavy cream. Bring the mixture to a gentle boil.

Step 4

In a medium bowl, whisk together the sugar and cornstarch. Stir it into the ricotta mixture and allow the mixture to return to a gentle boil, then lower the heat to a simmer. Add the rose water and orange blossom water and simmer for 5 minutes more, whisking occasionally. Remove the pan from the heat and let cool.

Step 5

Melt the butter in a small saucepan over low heat. Do not allow it to boil! As the butter melts, tear up the kanafeh into shreds and place in a medium bowl. Pour the melted butter over the kanafeh and toss them together until the kanafeh is completely saturated.

Step 6S

pread half of the kanafeh in the bottom of the baking dish, then top it with all of the ricotta mixture, spreading it evenly. Top with the remaining kanafeh. Bake for 1 hour, or until the top turns golden.

Step 7

Remove from the oven, pour the syrup over the kanafeh, and allow the dish to cool slightly. Scoop servings with a spoon and serve warm. Store the dish, covered in plastic wrap, in the fridge for up to four days.