

# THE TAB

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## T MORE TABLET



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## NEWS

# The Status Quo Wins

The midterm elections were a victory for status quo centrists in both parties

BY MICHAEL LIND

The red wave may have turned out to be a red ripple but, despite inflated expectations, it's not the Republicans who look to have been hardest hit by the midterm election results but the progressive wing of the Democratic Party. Assuming that the House is captured by the Republicans, with or without the Senate, it is clear that the progressive policy agenda, the progressive theory of American partisan politics, and the progressive theory of the American constitution are now quite dead.

Let's start with the progressive policy agenda. The economic agenda of the Democratic Party today is the "low carbon care economy." This is a synthesis of the Green New Deal, a crash program to kill the oil and gas industries and replace them with heavily subsidized renewable energy sources, and the American Families Plan, a massive expansion of taxpayer subsidies for institutional child care, universal preschool and elder care. The jobs of the future, in this vision, are divided between a small number of gigs assembling windmills and solar panels which will replace coal, oil, and natural gas in America's energy mix, and a much greater number of positions in federally subsidized day care centers and retirement homes.

To dramatize the low carbon care

economy, the Biden White House last year issued a series of cartoon panels, "The Life of Linda," modeled on a similar Obama administration cartoon, "The Life of Julia." Biden's Linda is an apparently unwed mother who works in manufacturing and has a son named Leo, who grows up to work in green energy: "Thanks to his community college training, Leo lands a good-paying, union job as a wind turbine technician." The cartoon series explains how both Linda, the single mother, and Leo, the fatherless child, will flourish within an expanded system of cradle-to-grave welfare and education subsidies. As the fantasy world of the cartoon suggests, the progressive agenda sought to appeal to different groups of key Democratic Party supporters who do not share many economic interests. To work, the progressive vision had to unite the Democratic Party's green donor class with overwhelmingly Democrat-supporting service sector unions like the teachers unions and SEIU as well as the "anti-patriarchal" feminists for whom husbands and fathers are unnecessary and oppressive.

Following Biden's election in 2020, progressives hoped to use their guaranteed two-year trifecta of control over the White House, House, and Senate to ram through the massive subsidies for renewable energy and vast expansions of caregiving and education jobs at

the core of their policy agenda. They planned to do this by means of the parliamentary maneuver known as “reconciliation,” which allows a bare majority in both houses to circumvent the Senate filibuster’s de facto supermajority requirement. The opposition of two Senate Democrats, Joe Manchin of West Virginia and Kyrsten Sinema of Arizona, derailed that would-be juggernaut.

The low carbon care economy is now as dead as a doornail, even if the Republicans end up controlling only one house of Congress. In the unlikely event that the Democrats win another trifecta in the next few electoral cycles, it will be difficult if not impossible, given the impacts of rising energy costs, for Congress to oppose greater extraction and use of oil, natural gas, and even coal in the U.S. Moreover, if there is a turn toward austerity to reduce inflation or the debt built up during the COVID pandemic, the money will not be there for the enormous increase in spending on day care, elder care, preschool and community college that makes up the other half of the progressive agenda. The low carbon care economy blew up on takeoff.

Just as dead as the energy-and-care agenda of the progressive Democrats is their theory of American partisan politics. The Democratic left, backed by their echo chamber in the media and the universities, attributed the 2016 election of Donald Trump to racism on the part of resentful, lower-class white “deplorables,” and the supposed epidemic of “disinformation” coming from Russia and malicious saboteurs online. The party’s progressive wing took comfort in their conviction that, as immigration made Hispanics a larger share of the electorate, a “coalition of the ascendant” made up of college-educated whites and “people of color” would soon establish one-party Democratic rule at all levels of government.

Oops. Between the 2018 and 2022 midterms, the Democratic advantage over Republicans among Black women dropped 7 percentage points, while that among Black men dropped 11 points. For Hispanic voters, who were supposed to secure the Democrats their permanent majority, the advantage declined by 14

“Parties that get tired of losing sooner or later change their appeals to win over some members of the other party, making elections more competitive again.”

percentage points among women and 21 percentage points among men.

Racial depolarization was accompanied by educational polarization. Between the 2018 midterm and the 2022 midterm, the Republican advantage among non-college-educated white voters climbed from a 24-point margin to a 34-point margin, and Republicans even gained slightly among college-educated whites. According to CNN, from 2018 to 2022 “voters of color,” both non-college and college-educated, while mostly voting for Democrats, shifted in significant numbers from the Democrats to the Republicans.

As I have argued elsewhere, “educational polarization” is really a marker of class polarization, inasmuch as the children of college-educated parents in the U.S. are much more likely to graduate from college, making a college degree a semi-hereditary title of nobility. Underlying racial depolarization and educational polarization is the trend, seen among Western democracies in general, for “the left” to be identified with affluent, educated whites and for “left” parties to lose not only working-class whites but many minority group members to the increasingly downscale and populist parties of the right. In 2022, that trend continued in the U.S.

Last but not least is the politics of the

American constitution. Anticipating a Republican tsunami that would sweep them out of both houses of Congress in 2022 and the White House in 2024, many progressive pundits and academics hysterically argued that the 2022 election might be the last small-d democratic election in American history. Before the midterms, the presidential historian Michael Beschloss warned that if Republicans won control of the government, “our children will be arrested and conceivably killed” by a MAGA regime which, to use President Biden’s phrase, was “semi-fascist.” Less apocalyptic Democrats like the pollster David Shor warned that without greater appeal by Democrats to the working class, “the modal outcome for 2024 is Donald Trump winning a ‘filibuster-proof trifecta’ with a minority of the vote.”

In spite of the alleged biases of the Senate and the Electoral College, in 2020 the Democrats won the White House, the Senate, and the House of Representatives. When this year’s midterm votes are all counted, the Democrats may end up controlling the White House and the Senate while losing the House, the body in which Democrats should do best under the theory that the Constitution is rigged against the Democratic Party.

America’s progressives suffer from bipolar mood swings. Now, thanks to racial polarization, they predict the inevitable triumph of the Democratic Party with the help of “voters of color,”

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while the Republicans survive only as a permanent minority party filled with resentful whites. At the same time, according to other progressives, it is the Democrats who may forever be frozen out of the federal government, thanks to an unfair Constitution designed by slave owners that permanently advantages white supremacist Republicans who want to arrest and kill Michael Beschloss' children.

The boring truth is that the pendulum in American politics swings back and forth. Parties that get tired of losing

sooner or later change their appeals to win over some members of the other party, making elections more competitive again.

For the time being, the U.S. remains a 50-50 nation, with the political branches of the federal government going back and forth between the two national parties. The kind of generational hegemony enjoyed by the McKinley Republicans after 1896 and the Roosevelt Democrats after 1932 is unlikely to return. That is bad news for progressive Democrats, who dream of the kind of sweeping

structural transformation of the U.S., led by the federal government, that can only occur through a supermajority. It is bad news as well for those on the libertarian right or New Right with ambitious schemes for public policy reform. It is not necessarily bad news for status quo Republicans or for incrementalist centrist Democrats, two factions that can flourish in conditions of divided government and narrow majorities. ■

*This article was originally published on November 8, 2022.*

## NEWS

# No More ADL

When it comes to Jews, the organization now does more harm than good

BY LIEL LEIBOVITZ

**P**op quiz:

Which of these two individuals do you find more problematic?

Kyrie Irving, a kooky basketball player who believes that the Earth is flat, that JFK was shot by bankers, that the COVID vaccines were secretly a plot to connect all Black people to a supercomputer, and that Jews worship Satan and launched the slave trade?

Or Jonathan Greenblatt, the head of the Anti-Defamation League, who accepted \$500,000 from Irving last week without even meeting or even talking to the all-star—and who was then forced to give back the donation when Irving blatantly refused to apologize?

Let's think about it for a minute. One of these guys is a weirdo with dumb opinions he may or may not actually believe. The other is running a soulless racket which just made it clear that you can say whatever you want about the Jews and buy your indulgences at a discount price.

Don't get me wrong: I absolutely

believe that Irving's endorsement of a Black nationalist documentary based on an obscure Jew-hating book, to say nothing of Kanye West's meltdown, will most likely contribute to a surge in antisemitism in America, particularly in the Black community. But we Jews don't control Kyrie Irving; in theory, we do control the ADL, and we shouldn't want our chief defense group to behave in a way that advances antisemitic conspiracy theories about shadowy Jews trafficking in money and influence for fun and profit.

All of this leads to one sorry conclusion: It's time to say goodbye to the ADL. It can't be killed, so we need to just walk away from this formerly venerable organization, and weaken it before it swerves so far off the road that it takes us with it.

If you think the above is hyperbole, or if you haven't been paying much attention to the ADL lately and still imagine it as a paragon of the good fight against antisemitism, here's a sizzle reel of Greenblatt's years in office. Since leaving the Obama White House and taking

over the organization in 2015, Greenblatt has turned the ADL into a partisan attack machine, fueled by corporate cash and increasingly oblivious to any real suffering of any real Jews.

Need some proof? Here we go.

In 2017, the ADL issued a guide to America's worst antisemites, a 36 (double Chai!) person rogues' gallery. Louis Farrakhan, the Black supremacist beloved by celebrities, wasn't on it. Nor was the Oberlin professor who argued that 9/11 was a Jewish conspiracy. Nor Linda Sarsour of the Women's March, who argued you can't be both a Zionist and a feminist, because the former makes you somehow less than human, and who equated Zionism with neo-Nazism. Instead, the ADL picked a posse of minor right-wing nutjobs and no one else. Unironically, it called its guide "Naming the Hate."

In 2018, the organization came under scrutiny for flubbing its reporting on antisemitic attacks—the group's bread-and-butter and a major source of its centurylong trust and prestige—perhaps to further the false impression that Jews were under attack by hordes of white supremacists heartened by the rise and rhetoric of Donald Trump.

In 2020, Greenblatt signed on to a campaign calling on Facebook to censor pro-Trump ads. His partner in this assault on free and political speech? Incredibly, it was Al Sharpton—who has still not publicly apologized for his role in inciting the Crown Heights pogroms in 1991. This politically motivated

commitment to curbing free speech continues: Last week, shortly after Twitter was purchased by Elon Musk (the left's favorite bogeyman du jour), Greenblatt issued a call to companies to suspend all advertising on the social network. The list goes on.

This rank partisanship is understandable: Impactful leaders make political calculations, and even if they err too enthusiastically on one side or another they may be forgiven for playing hardball to promote their organization's end. But the organization's end itself has changed under Greenblatt in ways that make the old ADL unrecognizable. Before Greenblatt's arrival, for example, the ADL defined racism as "the belief that a particular race is superior or inferior to another, [and] that a person's social and moral traits are predetermined by his or her inborn biological characteristics."

That perfectly sound definition was too much for Greenblatt's ADL, and so, in 2020, the organization changed its tune to define racism as "the marginalization and/or oppression of people of color based on a socially constructed racial hierarchy that privileges white people"—a definition they needed to change yet again in the wake of Whoopi Goldberg's 2022 comment that the Holocaust wasn't "about race."

Scroll on to the ADL's homepage these days and you'll be treated to a love letter to critical race theory, defined merely as a noble tool that "helps us understand how and why racial injustice continues to persist in the U.S." Parents who object to CRT being taught in their children's schools, another page cannily suggests, are borderline domestic terrorists or, at the very least, in the sway of white extremist groups.

Besides, sayeth the ADL, have no fear: "there is no evidence that critical race theory is being taught in K-12 schools." You know, besides the Critical Race Theory Coalition Summit hosted by the Portland Public School District. Or the Loudon County Public School District's partnership with a group called The Equity Collaborative to train teachers in CRT. Or the California Department of Education endorsing a CRT-based ethnic

studies curriculum despite more than 100,000 objections.

And what of the Jews? In the wake of some complaining that the group founded in 1913 to protect one of America's most threatened minorities from prejudice and violence seems much less focused on Jews these days, a senior ADL staffer in charge of Jewish outreach tweeted: "One of these days we need to talk about how the Jewish community's reactions to antisemitism coming from Black people is inherently tied to (implicitly racist) fears of Black violence."

The possibility that "the Jewish community's reactions to antisemitism coming from Black people" might be tied to attacks like this one, or many more like them, was obviously out of bounds. Which was actually of a piece with the ADL's new recommendation for how Jews globally should react when violence is done to us: "Jews," tweeted the same senior staffer, "\*have\* to be ok with Palestinians \*explaining\* why some turn to terrorism." In case you're scratching your head here, let me simplify: The ADL believes that whenever Jews get violently stabbed, shot, blown up, or beaten, our first reaction must be to search our souls for what we must've done to deserve it.

Sure, Greenblatt and the gang occasionally murmur some correct condemnation of some real hater, but no one in their right mind can inspect his tenure and deny that he has hollowed out the ADL of any and all connection to its original mandate, instead using its clout to turn it into an effective and stealthy progressive, partisan operation. And this actually puts real Jews in danger, because anyone can now claim that talk of antisemitism on the rise is merely political propaganda. Bad vibes, as the kids say.

Let's zoom out for a minute and try to understand how we got here.

In 2015, Jonathan Greenblatt was named head of the Anti-Defamation League. Until that point, the organization had been run for nearly three decades by Abe Foxman, a Holocaust survivor who had spent the war hiding with his Catholic nanny. Foxman joined the

## Why Adidas Struggled to Dump a Star

From *The Wall Street Journal*

A strange thing about both Nike and Adidas is that the very celebrities they pay to endorse their products can be found among the risks the companies disclose to their investors. Some of their greatest assets also happen to be potential liabilities.

Adidas's most recent annual report warns that "the company is exposed to a multitude of business partner risks" through its relationships with athletes and creative partners, which is a legally acceptable way of saying they are humans, and humans are unpredictable. But the company assured investors that it spreads that risk across many people "to reduce the dependency on the success and popularity of a few individual partners."

This might as well be called the Kanye rule. Adidas defied it. The company doesn't break out Yeezy sales figures, but analysts estimate he was single-handedly responsible for around 8% of Adidas's \$21 billion annual revenue.

So it was suboptimal when he posted to Instagram a mock newspaper front page in September faking the death of Adidas's then-chief executive, Kasper Rorsted, who is alive. And when he wrote on Twitter in early October that he would "go death con 3 ON JEWISH PEOPLE" as he bragged in a podcast interview about his anti-Semitism.

Adidas put its relationship with Mr. West "under review," but it took several weeks for the German company to drop him. This struck many as several weeks too long.

—Ben Cohen

 NEWSLETTER



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ADL as a young man and rose through its ranks before taking over as director in 1987. He earned his reputation as a serious moral authority who was unafraid to take unpopular positions.

Most importantly, however, Foxman kept the organization's focus precisely where it had to be: on its 26 regional chapters staffed by hard-working and dedicated men and women who both diligently collected data about antisemitism on a granular and local level—reporting their findings to law enforcement and keeping Jews safe—and forged meaningful ties with other communities, investing in the education needed to make sure future generations wouldn't be inflamed with antisemitism's feverish appeal.

Eight years later, the organization is nearly unrecognizable.

Lots of current ADL critics like to focus on the fact that Greenblatt was a veteran of the Obama political machine. But the rest of his resume may offer even more insight into his views.

In 2002, Greenblatt and his business school roommate founded Ethos Water, a premium bottled water social enterprise later acquired by Starbucks; he also founded All for Good, a volunteerism platform supported by “a coalition of leading companies, non-profits, and government agencies”; was an operating partner at Satori Capital, a private equity firm focused on conscious capitalism (much better than the unconscious kind!); and CEO of GOOD Worldwide LLC, which, among other things, published a broadsheet distributed exclusively at Starbucks. These broadsheets, Greenblatt claimed, were not intended to convince anyone “to vote Democratic or Republican,” insisting his product was ideologically neutral. But the first issue kicked things off with a little lecture on ... carbon emissions.

What Greenblatt was an expert in wasn't antisemitism or bigotry; his real skill—the one every single line on his resume speaks to—was knowing how to launder the expansion of obscene corporate power via costumes of righteousness. This made him a perfect fit for the Office of Social Innovation and Civic Participation, a creation of the Obama administration basically

**“The ADL believes that whenever Jews get violently stabbed, shot, blown up, or beaten, our first reaction must be to search our souls for what we must've done to deserve it.”**

designed to allow the White House to quarterback the donations to, and the investments of, a wide swath of America's enormous nonprofit sector. Rather than having NGOs operate distinctly, the apparent idea was for the administration to issue marching orders, set agendas, and apply enough pressure for corporations and the donor class to follow suit. If you want to see this synergy of corporate America, social causes, and the Democrat Party in action, just look at the Black Lives Matter movement, which has, to date, raised \$49.5 billion in pledged corporate dollars without delivering anything by way of transparency or accountability.

A similar strategy has also done well for the ADL. The organization is now a big business: Its revenue for 2020, the most recent year for which data is available, was \$91,313,791—almost double that from the year Greenblatt took over. And while the organization does not disclose the identity of its donors, it did recently reveal that these now include Apple, Uber, MGM Resorts, and other behemoths. With these revenue streams rushing forth merrily, it's unlikely that anyone, from within the organization or without, would succeed in changing course and restoring this organization to its foundational mission.

The logic here is that the ADL is 10

times more powerful as part of the Democratic Party coalition than outside it. A more powerful ADL gains Jews a proverbial seat at the table, while at the same time augmenting the ADL's bank account with contributions from party donors and large corporations—which, in turn, makes the ADL an even more powerful advocate. In return for permission to hold the Jewish card, the ADL agrees to play that card on behalf of the party. A little circular, but it works for everyone involved.

Everyone, that is, except actual Jews. Jewish interests are abandoned in exchange for permission to run a protection racket. When your *raison d'être* is being the go-to guy for blessing or denouncing misbehaving celebrities—depending, of course, on where they fall on the political spectrum and how “con-trite” they're willing to be in public—you can't actually protect the dentist in Cleveland who wonders why his kid in college just had her mezuzah ripped off her doorpost or the Hasidic kids in Brooklyn now regularly getting their heads bashed in.

To understand why, think, for a moment, about Kyrie Irving. What would the head of a serious version of the ADL have done? It's actually pretty simple. First call attention to how messed up this situation is, not by issuing pompous statements with corporate logos slapped all over but by doing exactly what a bunch of Jewish kids did at a Brooklyn Nets home game earlier this month: wearing a T-shirt that says “Stop Anti-Semitism” in the front row of the stadium. Those kids probably invested a few hundred bucks, and in return received news coverage all over the world, appearing not as shadowy peddlers of indulgences but as what Jews actually are: outsiders getting pummeled left and right by bigots and haters.

Then, this ADL chief would go on TV and instead of cozing up to Sharpton, America's greatest living pogromist, simply deliver the following speech: “I feel bad for Kyrie. I admire what seems like his willingness to seek out knowledge and to stand alone for what he thinks is true. But for all his alleged seeking, he still can't find the right answer. He's making the same mistake that

millions have made throughout history—being smart and curious enough to wonder how the world works, but only finding imaginary Jews at the end of every road. This is the road to ignorance and misery, not to knowledge.”

Except, of course, that you can't give that speech if your current or hoped-for donors are made up of the real thing Kyrie would uncover if he looked a bit more carefully: the very large corporations who have melded with government to create an almost impregnable, opaque, all-containing blob that controls American life, from dictating public health priorities to changing the way we produce and consume food.

Instead, all you can do is shame people who are confused and undereducated using the brute force you have at your disposal: corporate power. Cancel their contracts! Nix their ad campaigns! Make them bleed cash! Which, as we all saw this week, only amplifies the original noxious allegation.

This is why having no ADL would be so much better than having the one we currently have. Because of its own massive conflicts of interests, the ADL under Greenblatt may very well be, inadvertently or otherwise, contributing to the growth of antisemitism, not its diminishment.

This is as much of a philosophical question as it is a practical one. If your goal is to exterminate antisemitism—make the world's most ancient and persistent hatred disappear, vanish, go kaput—then what we've seen from Greenblatt this week is understandable: Let's educate or punish one hater at a time, until they've all reformed or disappeared. But if you believe, like me, that antisemitism will never go away, this approach is nothing more than a silly game of whack-a-mole. If we believe antisemitism is here to stay (and if you doubt it, do I have a few really good history books for you), then what you need is a real

defense organization—one that doesn't waste time with selling indulgences but instead forms bonds with groups and communities across the American spectrum, remains very vigilant to every attack no matter the perpetrator's identity, and provides real education in large part by, ya know, speaking the truth clearly and unequivocally.

Here, then, is my solution to the problem that is Jonathan Greenblatt's ADL: Let's accept that the ADL is no longer a Jewish organization and ask for a divorce. Greenblatt can keep everything: His anti-racism, AstroTurf organization and all the corporate money trees he shakes on its behalf. We *amcha* Jews walk away with nothing—nothing, that is, but our dignity and our safety, both improved by no longer being pawns in a profit game that is endangering us more by the day. ■

*This article was originally published on November 7, 2022.*

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## COMMUNITY

# Magic Man

Rokhl's Golden City: Remembering mentalist Max Maven

BY ROKHL KAFRISSEN

**T**here's a lot of talk right now about the future of Twitter. It seems obvious to me that social media, especially Twitter, has been a major vector for anti-democratic, anti-science disinformation across the globe. Even worse, the people who profit from the major platforms seem to have no interest in getting rid of bad actors and the garbage they push. Not to mention how psychologically damaging and even addictive social media can be at the individual level.

And yet, despite the very, very bad, social media has also been a powerful

tool of genuine social connection, delivering on so much of what makes life good. In my own experience, that meant making amazing friends and professional connections through Twitter, none of which would have happened off-line.

Social media has also become the place where I get reader feedback and Yiddish questions. In early 2019, for example, I started getting the occasional Twitter tag from a user with the curious name of “Max Maven.” I eventually learned that Max Maven (born Philip Goldstein) was a very highly regarded and beloved member of the international mentalist (mind reading) and stage

magic community. And he was a regular reader of my column!

In 2005, Maven published a very limited-edition book called *The Protocols of the Elders of Magic*, a play on the title of the notorious antisemitic hoax. The fact that hardly anyone even knows what's in the book, and it's almost impossible to find, hints at Maven's smartly sardonic sense of humor.

For the last few years, Maven had been researching Jewish magicians, while also being treated for glioblastoma, a form of aggressive brain cancer. In a Twitter direct message, he told me that he was interested in writing a book on the subject—“but that will take time.” To my great sadness, Max Maven wasn't given that time. He died in Los Angeles on November 1, 2022, at the age of 71.

Back in March 2021, I got an invitation from him for a virtual talk he was giving on Jewish magicians, part of his ongoing research. I waffled on attending until the last minute. I still wasn't quite sure who he was and, as a rule, I'm extremely wary of invitations from strange men on social media. And yet,

once I logged onto the talk, a glance at the chat showed that a couple of my Yiddishland friends were already there! And, of course, Maven's presentation turned out to be fascinating.

When it was over, I realized, too late, that I should have told Shane Baker about it. In addition to being an internationally recognized authority on Yiddish, Baker is also a pretty good stage magician, as well as being well read in the history of magic. Baker had been out of town when I got the invitation and I assumed he was too busy to attend. When he got back, I mentioned it to him. *Do you know this guy, Max Maven?* Stupid question. *Of course* he knew Max Maven. *Game recognize game; subculture recognize subculture.*

It was Baker who told me that Max Maven was *avek in der eybikayt*, gone. The news had quickly spread through magic and mentalist social media. I asked Baker if he would share a few words about Maven, which he graciously agreed to do:

"Max Maven was endlessly inventive within the field of mentalism: A simple search of the conjuring archive [index to magical literature] produces over 1,300 effects and publications with his credit. But—without offering any spoilers—to be a 'maven' in the theft of thoughts, one must be incredibly observant. And although Max Maven's *shtik* was specifically mentalism as opposed to magic, he obviously had vast curiosity and knowledge of the entire field and shared deep observations on the various magicians' fora. We're going to miss him."

As I've already mentioned, the subcultures of stage magic and Yiddish have some surprising points of contact. My friend Josh Dolgin is largely known by his stage name, Socalled, under which he performs his own brilliant fusion of Yiddish, klezmer, and hip-hop. Most people probably don't know he has a second performing persona (and maybe even a third and fourth waiting to be revealed...) he uses for stage magic: Dolgini. Of course, Dolgin was one of my fellow Yiddishland habitues I bumped into at Maven's 2021 virtual talk.

Back in 2019, Max Maven tagged a couple of Yiddishists, including myself, in a highly nerdy Yiddish research

question. He was looking for a photo of Frank Seiden. Seiden, according to Max Maven, had recorded over 200 Yiddish songs between 1901 and 1905. Maven was looking for a photo of him. Knowing that there are other folks with a specific research specialty in early Yiddish 78s, my eyes sort of slid over the question. A simple Google search would have told me that not only was Seiden a Yiddish recording artist, but as *Professor* Seiden he worked as a magician and all-around entertainer. I have to assume that Seiden was one of the characters we would have met in Maven's planned book about Jewish magicians.

Last year, Daniel Carkner (another Yiddishland colleague) published a fascinating article on Seiden. You can even hear him singing a bawdy Yiddish song about ladies who disappear to the tenement rooftop with their boarders.

Frank Seiden arrived in New York City in 1877, a year before Erik Weisz (later known by his stage name, Houdini) arrived in New York from Hungary. Both men were Jews from Eastern Europe—Houdini, the son of a rabbi. The field of modern stage magic was booming and Jews, not surprisingly, were over-represented. Personally, I don't think that over-representation had anything to do with being Jews, except insofar as Jews exceeded at being Americans, and Americans were having a love affair with stage magic.

It's interesting to me that at the same moment (1878) a young Erik Weisz was arriving in New York City with his rabbi father, Avrom Goldfaden was publishing one of his most famous Yiddish operettas, *The Sorceress*. In it, the sorceress of the title, Bobe Yakhne, is well known for her skills in reading Tarot cards, making love potions and casting spells. But through her, Goldfaden articulates what was the Maskilic, Enlightenment attitude toward such magic:

"You are still convinced that I perform magic? You still believe that I stir cauldrons... that I spin a wheel in an oven, that I stick a pair of scissors in the earth and cause something that way? Those tricks I do only to swindle money out of fools who are idiots enough to believe in such things. Really, those

things have no worth- what constitutes my magic? In the practical experience I gained in the world. Life experience and wisdom. The expertise to swindle, that is the whole of my magic; outside of that it's nothing." (Quoted from Alyssa Quint's translation in *The Rise of the Modern Yiddish Theater*.)

It seems to me that at some level, Goldfaden is aligning himself with the sophisticated, pro-science attitudes of the day, but at the same time, he is using the nefarious character of Bobe Yakhne to propose the illusions of the theater (*his* theater) as an enlightened successor to the illusions of traditional superstition. In that way, he has much in common with modern stage magicians, many of whom (like Houdini) made it their work to discredit fraudulent psychics and mediums as part of the entertainment. ...

I messaged Dolgin recently to see if he had any memories of Max Maven's 2021 presentation on Jewish magicians. He wrote back with immense enthusiasm, saying Maven's talk was "one of the best Zooms of the pandemic by far." It had "research, an actual thesis that was explored and proven, incredible details..." Indeed, Dolgin wrote in his message that Maven's "work on Jewish magicians is super important" and wondered who would take it up now that Maven was gone.

I wondered this, too. And it kills me that if not for the ongoing pandemic, and Maven's illness, he would have no doubt been pressured by the community of Yiddish oddballs to join us at Yiddish New York or Klezkanada. And I take it as a reminder that despite an ocean's worth of garbage gyres floating across social media, there's magic to be found there, too. ■

*This article was originally published on November 11, 2022.*

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## THE REST

→ After **Chinese leader Xi Jinping alluded to a forthcoming “reunification” with Taiwan** at the recent Community Party summit, a Nikkei survey of 50 foreign companies doing business on the island found that roughly half had completed or begun drafting **emergency operation plans should China invade Taipei**. One Japanese financial firm and three other international companies said they also completed detailed evacuation procedures for getting expatriate employees and their family members off the island, though a possible Chinese invasion has even some domestic workers entertaining a possible departure. “We’re currently asking all of our Taiwanese employees whether they would want to stay or leave,” one executive said.

→ Nearly **half of British households anticipate they’ll reduce their holiday spending to offset the soaring cost of living**, a forecast that worries U.K. businesses and eateries already struggling with ongoing inflation. A recent Barclays survey of British citizens found that 59% of respondents would spend less money on holiday gifts and 42% would reduce their time and money spent socializing throughout the holiday season. Already, restaurants and leisure business have felt the crunch, with spending across both categories expanding at the slowest pace since the spring of 2021, during COVID-19 lockdowns. Not that those who stay at home are saving that much money, as spending on energy bills was up 36% for Brits compared to this time in 2021.

→ In another blow to those millennials and Gen Zers with aspirations to create wealth through homeownership, the **United States is running out of viable land, and it’s adding more fuel to the fire of astronomical home valuations**. While our nation has abundant empty spaces, the desirable areas with the requisite transportation, energy, and water systems concentrated around fast-growing cities like Nashville, Tampa, and Austin are already owned, and the owners aren’t interested in selling, nor are they interested in re-zoning to build multifamily dwellings. “The number of vacant lots zoned for residential use in Nashville fell by 43.5% between 2016 and 2021,” The Wall Street Journal reported, just as Nashville home prices rose by more than 50% over the same period. While some home prices could soon begin to drop because of the Federal Reserve’s attempt to tame inflation, the dearth of available ground suggests rising land prices will be a long-term problem.

→ It’s been a somber few days in **Philadelphia**, which had the unfortunate honor to become **the first city to lose two major championships on the very same day**. Just as the Philadelphia Phillies fell to the Houston Astros in Game Six of the World Series, the Philadelphia Major League Soccer squad, the Union, lost the MLS championship in a penalty kick shoot-out to the Los Angeles FC. The baseball and soccer post-season runs had been a healthy distraction for the city, something it needed as it still contends with a gun violence epidemic that has seen more than 1,400 people shot in the Kensington neighborhood alone since 2015. Home to the biggest open-air drug market in the country, **Kensington saw another mass shooting on Saturday night**, in which nine people were shot after a group of several perpetrators fired 40 shots upon a crowd outside a neighborhood bar before fleeing the scene.

## THE BIG STORY

**The Supreme Court of New York struck down a pair of New York City vaccine mandates that led to the sacking of roughly 1,700 unvaccinated first responders and other public workers earlier this year. The ruling came about after a group of workers from the Department of Sanitation sued the city for unlawful termination, arguing that a vaccine exemption in March for celebrities, athletes, and “performing artists” undermined the validity of the mandate, as did the several months the city kept workers employed while it considered their requests for exemption. In his Oct. 25 opinion, Supreme Court Justice Ralph Porzio agreed with the workers, writing, “If it was about safety and public health, unvaccinated workers would have been placed on leave the moment the order was issued ... If it was about safety and public health, no one would be exempt.”**

**The court found that the fired workers should be reinstated as well as compensated for back pay missed because of the wrongful termination. But, for now, that order will likely apply only to the group of sanitation workers who participated in the lawsuit rather than to all public employees who fell afoul of the mandate, until an appeals court weighs in on a challenge to the Supreme Court’s order now being pursued by the city’s attorneys.**

—Sean Cooper

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# The Freedom to Think Differently

Judith Shklar's minority liberalism offers both an escape hatch from the Hobbesian tyranny of democratic majorities and a pathway to becoming the freest and most authentic versions of ourselves

BY BLAKE SMITH

To appreciate the strangeness—and power—of Judith Shklar's concept of “the liberalism of permanent minorities,” we should consider how illiberal are the consequences of our commonplace talk of minorities and majorities. We use these terms both in a racial-ethnic sense, to describe people's belonging to categories like “white,” “Jewish,” etc., and in a political sense, to describe what parties, bills, opinions, etc., will prevail in our democratic society in which power is, ostensibly, what majorities wield over minorities within the limits of our respect for rights. This suggests that to belong to a racial majority is a kind of victory over minorities in the same way as having one's preferred candidate take 50.1% of the vote. It means, moreover, that we see each other not only as members of static, defined, known racial categories (which is disturbing enough) but as part of a process in which the relative size, and therefore power, of these groups is always changing. Every person we encounter, by these lights, is therefore a harbinger of a welcome or unwelcome future, in which people like us will either be empowered or weakened.

In her second book, *Legalism: Law, Morals and Political Trials* (1964), Shklar offered an idiosyncratic defense of the liberal order based on the danger of majoritarian thinking rooted in what she took to be the lessons of the catastrophe of Nazism. To those who saw in Hitler's Germany a warning

against the danger of an all-powerful state, Shklar urged that we must not forget that the condition of possibility for the Third Reich was the transformation of ordinary Germans' values through persuasion rather than coercion. Civil society, imagined by many traditional liberals as threatened by overweening, intrusive governments, can itself be the source of “the currents of grand ideology and absolutist morals” by which ordinary citizens bully, silence, and often ultimately convert those who wish to live and think otherwise.

The cultural resources by which we could create for ourselves authentic, independent lives, Shklar insists are not “just ‘there.’” They must be carefully nurtured and protected, because they are vulnerable “to quick and deliberate change” imposed by the intolerant. “Individual autonomy,” my ability to do what I want with my own life, respecting others' freedom to do likewise, is a contentless abstraction unless we live in a society in which there is a genuine “diversity of morals” and a variety of points of view and ways of living. This diversity is constantly imperiled by civil society itself. A moral crusade, organized by a few determined actors, can destroy the diversity of opinion without which individual freedom withers.

Liberals, Shklar argues, must therefore accept that state power is required to maintain personal freedom. A liberal state not only upholds individual rights, but resists such crusades when they arise out of civil society. It guarantees “freedom to profess” to the “chronic dissenter” not only for the sake of his

own freedom, but in order that his point of view, whether accepted or rejected, might be a spark from which others can light the fire of their own thinking.

Shklar's heterodox liberalism understands that the state has a crucial role in preserving cultural and intellectual diversity and must make active—but non-partisan—efforts to promote that end. To borrow the language of economic liberalism, Shklar's liberalism opposes laissez-faire policies in the “marketplace of ideas,” and instead champions an interventionist state that breaks monopolies and fosters innovation. Shklar's version of the liberal state champions liberalism from the perspective of “permanent minorities,” individuals who imagine themselves as belonging to groups that can never take power or impose their views on society. Her work asks us to rethink the meaning of “diversity” and “minority,” words that have become the slogans of a “fanaticizing consciousness” today.

Into our everyday experience of racial and ethnic difference, liberal majoritarian intolerance brings in the same way of thinking that the 17th-century political philosopher Thomas Hobbes, in his relatively neglected *De Cive*, took to be the worst aspect of democracy. In a society where political power belongs to majorities, each of us hopes to “obtain praise and honor” by seeing our own views prevail in political contests. This means, however, that we are continually engaged in “an uncertain trial” by which we hope to find that people like us constitute the majority.

Democracy recreates—on an emotional and symbolic rather than physical level—the “war of all against all,” the constant conflict among individuals from which Hobbes, in his better-known *Leviathan*, argued that politics is meant to liberate us. To gain this “vainglory,” this thrill of being (at least able to imagine ourselves as being) haloed with power and prestige by virtue of our belonging in the winning group, we are drawn into ceaseless conflicts with our fellow citizens, who become allies or obstacles to our enjoyment. We “hate” those who disagree with us and are “hated” by them. Our conception of

race in terms of “majority” and “minority” extends that conflict into the most routine, and most intimate aspects of our lives.

For example, the workplace. The beginning of a new academic year, for me and many of my colleagues in higher education, brings announcements from administrators that there are fewer white people than ever on campus. This is the obvious, if usually unstated, message of statistics showing that this year’s entering class is the “most diverse” yet—and it is, presidents, provosts and deans imagine, self-evidently good news. Even when, as is already the case at most elite universities, the student body is noticeably less white than the general American population, there is more “progress” to be made in bringing “diversity” to campus. White faculty, hearing this, are expected to look at each other and say—as they almost always do say—“how wonderful!”

Until recently, a similar story was told in our national political discourse. Because of political decisions made since the 1960s, such as the Hart-Cellar Act’s expansion of the range of countries from which immigrants could come to the United States, white people are becoming a minority in this country—and are already a minority among new births and teenagers. There had been for some time prior to Donald Trump’s election in 2016 a sense among those who set the tone of opinion in media, educational, and cultural institutions that this was, again, good news—not least for the Democratic Party. The latter, it was hoped by the left, would soon wield a permanent political majority in a “majority-minority” country. Much of the energy behind the (in retrospect short-lived and overdiscussed) “alt-right” during this period came from some white people’s suddenly unconcealed resentment not only at becoming a minority but at the fact that membership in any university, corporation or other institution with even the least sort of status depended on one’s not airing any resentment, and indeed confirming one’s elation, that there are ever-fewer people like oneself.

White liberals, from politicians to university administrators, who

**“Hobbes argues that democracy is a bad form of government because it extends political conflict into our everyday interactions with each other.”**

celebrate the decreasing numbers of white people—in relative terms within our growing population, and in absolute terms within elite institutions—only apparently escape the Hobbesian logic of resentment. They show themselves sanguine about the declining power of their “own group,” but only in order to figure themselves as belonging to another group with what they see as a better claim on future majority status: the virtuous majority that supports the moral crusade for diversity. When that group’s power is threatened, as it was by the election of Trump in 2016, white leftists rage with the same shrieking, self-serving intensity as white reactionaries threatened by demographic trends. No one likes to lose, and in our society it would seem that being a minority means being a loser—except, of course, insofar as racial minorities can be imagined as wresting predominance from the former white majority.

After the 2020 election, both Democrats’ hopes and white resentments about the meaning of demographic change seem exhausted. Members of racial minorities are not—as should have been obvious to pundits from the start—bearers of unalterable political values that put them forever in the camp of the left. Nor does the left represent a stable set of values; many of its

most controversial positions in recent years, from defunding the police to advocating child sex-reassignment, would have been incomprehensible in earlier moments—and are perhaps already being sidelined, precisely because they are not popular with minorities. The tone of the far right has likewise shifted and is now much less preoccupied with the maintenance of America’s historic ethnic majority than with, for example, reviving illiberal Catholic political theory or promoting a reactionary style of masculinity: discourses that, however troubling, are conceived as open to participation by “based” minorities.

Yet while the alt-right has come and gone, it still appears untenable, in the long run, that white people should be expected indefinitely to applaud their becoming a minority—particularly given that, they will likely never allowed the same measure of open self-advocacy and group “pride” which other minority groups can expect to see ratified by the state and corporate employers. If Hobbes is right about the way democracy undermines itself through the churning resentments of defeated minorities—which are, to his mind, inevitably frustrated would-be majorities—we should expect that the white left performance of ethno-masochism, of cheering on their group’s minoritization, can only continue to animate dangerous backlash from their less fortunate or masochistic brethren even after the welcome moment when Trump joins the alt-right in irrelevance. Hobbes argues that democracy is a bad form of government because it extends political conflict—the anguished bitterness of the defeated, the hubris and cruelty of the victors—into our everyday interactions with each other. He suggests that we cannot avoid thinking of ourselves, in such a regime, as members of real or potential majorities and minorities. If we are in the majority, we fear losing power and act against minorities which, as they grow, might threaten us. If we are in a minority, we long to take, or retake, power. In any case, the instability of our condition seems to justify action against our enemies; democracy, for Hobbes, is always a step away from civil war.

Shklar's concept of "permanent minorities" who understand themselves as such and therefore support liberalism to ensure genuine diversity represents the hope that Hobbes might be wrong. In a democracy tempered by not only by liberalism's commitment to individual rights, but by certain liberals' understanding that these rights are only meaningful in a society where a range of viewpoints and lifestyles are actually on offer, there might be a way to escape having to think of oneself as a member of a shrinking or growing racial or political bloc.

"Permanent minorities" could also appear to be Shklar's way of thinking about the place of Jews in modern Western politics; "permanent minorities" would by these lights be what Jews were in the Europe of her childhood (born in Latvia in 1928, she narrowly avoided death in the Holocaust), and in the North America of her adult life. Many Jewish intellectuals seem to have supported the Wilhelmine and Weimar regimes in Germany, the Third Republic in France, or the postwar, American-led global order, precisely because they sensed that the rule of law and tolerance of diversity of opinion were crucial to Jewish flourishing.

But, of course, Jews—no more than another demographic group—are not "permanent minorities." For the Nazis, Jews were not "permanent," they could be annihilated. For Zionists, they were not fated to remain minorities, but could constitute a majority outside of Europe, in their historical homeland. And for some radicals of the left, there could be a future in which there were no minorities at all, humanity having discovered its common identity through Marx's "species-being" or some other cosmopolitan horizon.

Nor is there any reason why

**"The ghetto, the millet, and other techniques of segregation all preserved, at a great cost of freedom and dignity, the existence of minorities."**

"permanent minorities" must support liberalism, let alone liberal democracy. Jews, like many other groups, have also been minorities in illiberal, undemocratic societies in which political power had no relationship to demography. Empires throughout history have offered such groups varying degrees of tolerance, usually on the condition that they support a static order in which each group, and each individual, has an unchanging place: The ghetto, the millet, and other techniques of segregation all preserved, at a great cost of freedom and dignity, the existence of minorities.

The "permanent minorities" Shklar conceives, however, demand not only the freedom to perpetuate their own existence (for instance by educating their own children and running their own affairs) but "the freedom to profess" their beliefs in the public square. They are minorities that might convert new members—and might lose old ones. They have lost "the spirit of certainty" and fear, rather than enact, the type of "repressive behavior" that crushed Spinoza.

The closer one looks at Shklar's text, the less these minorities appear like any particular community. They begin to glimmer instead an appeal to what Jacques Derrida in his provocative

reinterpretation of Friedrich Nietzsche (in *The Politics of Friendship*) called the "friends to come," an unknown audience of possible readers who might be inspired to understand that their own freedom, their ability to make themselves anew through thinking, is impossible unless there are, freely spoken in their hearing, the thoughts of many others.

Such people are perhaps always a minority, destined to be in conflict with the majorities and would-be majorities who see authentic diversity of thought as a bewildering, frightening, evil chaos (to be combated, in our own day, ironically for the sake of a homogeneous pseudo-"diversity"). This elitist perspective predominates in Nietzsche, who learned it from Plato's meditations after democratic Athens put Socrates to death—and in Leo Strauss, who learned it from Nietzsche. But we might also say—and this is perhaps truer to Shklar's teaching—that the "permanent minority" names not any countable set of people, but a capacity, now too latent, within every one of us, to think differently, and thus become different, both from others and also from our previous selves. This capacity, she tells us, cannot be used in isolation—becoming who we might be is not something we can do on our own.

Thinking for ourselves, and so undoing and renewing ourselves, requires a social context of other thinkers who are free to say what they think out loud, protected from both state censorship and—through the action of a "strong but neutral" state—from the efforts of present and future majorities to annihilate thought. Perhaps only those who have tasted the dizzying sweetness of free thinking can know that there is something better than will-to-power and resentment that constitutes the emotional life of democratic politics. The primary task of a Shklarian liberal then, would consist of awakening others to that savor—to showing them that they, too, like each of us, are "permanent minorities." ■

*This article was originally published on November 10, 2022.*



## PODCASTS



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# Jewish Urban Farms Take Root in Australia

'Jews were people of the land before we were people of the book'

BY NOMI KALTMANN

**G**rowing up in Sydney, with its year-round beautiful weather, Mitch Burnie loved spending time outdoors in nature and gardening. Today, at 29, Burnie has turned that love into a project serving the city's Jewish community: an urban farm.

After high school, Burnie avoided going to university: "I wanted nothing to do with it," he told me. "I had no intention of going." Instead, he earned what he dubbed "life experience" working as an informal Jewish educator at the Emanuel School, a Jewish school in Sydney, and as a Habonim youth leader in the U.K., after which he started working with a Sydney-based organization called Shalom, tasked with creating community activities for young Australian Jews. "Through these activities I was growing community and building connection," he said.

As part of his role at Shalom, Burnie looked at Jewish communities around the world to see if there were programs that could be emulated in Sydney. In 2018, he traveled to the United States, where he met with many Jewish organizations doing interesting things for young people, including Hazon, Moishe House, and Jewish Outdoor Farmer. After meeting those Americans, he realized that there was a growing movement focused on "connecting agriculture to Judaism," he said. "To identity and community. To *tzedakah*. And when I saw all of this, I thought, this is it!"

After returning home, Burnie wanted to open an urban Jewish farm in

Sydney, but there was a problem: "I didn't yet have the skills or knowledge." So, he took a short sabbatical from his job to seek out the training he needed. In early 2019, he was accepted to Hazon's three-month Adamah Fellowship, a program for adults in their 20s and 30s that integrates organic agriculture, farm-to-table living, Jewish learning, community building, social justice, and spiritual practice.

"I was the first and only Aussie to have ever been on it," he said. "Before I went, I spoke to the British person who runs the Jewish community urban farm in London. I realized this didn't just have to be an American thing—it could be global as well."

The fellowship, which he spent living in a tent on Lake Miriam in Falls Village, Connecticut, at the Isabella Freedman Jewish Retreat Center, was a formative experience for Burnie. "I woke up every day at 5 a.m. and sang the Shema with a group of like-minded Jews from across America," he recalled. "We were all there learning about regenerative agriculture and how to link it to Jewish festivals. We were delving into our people's history before exile."

The main lesson he learned? "Jews were people of the land before we were people of the book," he said. "We can only be people of the book if we understand the land."

When the fellowship finished, Burnie had a clear vision for what he wanted to create in Sydney. "I reached out to Hakoah [a local Jewish organization] and asked if I could have a tiny weedy corner in the corner of their massive complex to start our urban farm. They said, 'Yes, go for it.'"

Adamama, Australia's first Jewish urban farm, was born. Its name—a mix of the Hebrew word *adama*, meaning earth or soil, and *mama*—roughly translates as "Earth mother."

"We brought lawn mowers and whipper snippers and started clearing the land. We spent the first three months of 2020 building all this momentum—but then the pandemic hit," he said, recalling Australia's strict nationwide lockdown. The pandemic eventually brought the momentum back, however, in an unexpected way: "When we eventually came out of the lockdown, everyone wanted to come check us out because Adamama was outdoors," he said. "People wanted to learn about sustainable farming because food scarcity was on people's minds. We had the perfect place for everyone to go."

Since those early days, Adamama has continued to grow, hiring staff to expand its programs. Today, Adamama offers weekly volunteer sessions to learn about zero-waste cooking, community events around Jewish festivals such as celebrating Sukkot at the urban farm, and monthly classes.

Earlier this year, the urban farm moved to a new location in Sydney, to the suburb of Randwick, to premises subsidized by the local city council. "The [city council] said to me, 'Mitch, if you bring Adamama here, if you bring schools and participants, we will promote it.' And so, we did."

Over 5,000 people have volunteered at Adamama across all their programs.

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At least 20 volunteers gather each Friday morning, and usually a dozen on Sundays. They learn practical, hands-on ways to engage in permaculture, creating healthy habits, soil regeneration, and urban farming. The workshops offered at Adamama focus on sustainable living, including compost making, garden design, pickling, or following the Jewish calendar in nature.

The pickling workshops are especially popular, with the pickles sold at local grocery stores using ingredients grown at the farm and any profit reinvested in the urban farm. “We do pop-ups [at schools and community groups] to teach people about preserving food: sour dill pickles and kraut,” said Burnie. Any excess food grown at the urban farm is taken by volunteers at the end of sessions, as well as interested members of the public.

Gary Samowitz, who works for Haikoah in Sydney and was helpful in organizing Adamama’s first space, is proud of the success that the urban farm has become. “It’s a great activity because its intergenerational—you have parents

with kids and grandparents learning about farming,” he said. “Now there is a huge demand for people getting their hands dirty out in the sun, learning about some of the Jewish principles of farming from Mitch, so he has created a wonderful movement.”

Burnie’s model looks like it may soon be spreading to other parts of Australia.

In Melbourne, Elinor Hasenfratz is running Australia’s second urban Jewish farm, the Beth Weizmann Urban Farm, which has been operating for 18 months.

“Originally it was a traditional community garden model, where you would rent a box for a year, and you would have your single box that you had to take care of,” she explained. “That worked well pre-COVID—they had a teacher who would show people what to do.”

But during the pandemic, and after extended Australian lockdowns, the garden boxes became less well maintained. Hasenfratz, whose parents were avid gardeners, and who attended an agricultural high school in Adelaide, saw an opportunity. “When I saw there was a lack of direction,” she said, “I wrote

a proposal to Beth Weizmann [the local Australian JCC] and I said: There [are] such good bones [for this urban farm], there is so much potential. You just need a coordinator for the gardens.” Beth Weizmann suggested that she take on the role as urban farm coordinator herself.

“Mitch in Sydney was incredibly helpful during that time,” she said. “That’s when it shifted from a community garden to urban farm.”

The Beth Weizmann Urban Farm is currently finishing its winter harvest: broad beans, Asian greens, parsley, and radishes. “We had the perfect mix of warmth and rain. The urban farm grew. It’s a veritable forest of greens,” Hasenfratz said.

While Hasenfratz has not yet had the chance to visit Adamama in Sydney, she knows that she will have a new friend waiting for her when she comes.

“It’s so great to see the idea spreading,” said Burnie. “Every Jewish neighborhood should have one.” ■

*This article was originally published on November 8, 2022.*

## COMMUNITY

# It’s Time to Show Up

Being Jewish means being together—in synagogue, at the JCC, at the deli

BY DAVID SAX

**I**n early October, I had the pleasure of attending my godson David’s bar mitzvah. It took place in a relatively new Reconstructionist synagogue, three days after Yom Kippur, and all said, it was a lovely service. The rabbi, a woman originally from Ukraine, was a warm, welcoming leader who invited David’s father’s Mexican family (who are not Jewish) up to the bimah to actually see

the Torah up close, and explained patiently how it was handwritten, what its structure meant, and why it was so special for David to read from it today. The singing, performed by a younger volunteer on guitar and his older cantor mentor, got feet tapping and mouths enthusiastically singing the *Mi Chamocho* from behind their mandatory masks.

One part of the service stuck out at me, though. Next to the rabbi, there was

a giant TV facing the congregation. And on it, throughout the entire thing, were the faces of the dozen or so remote parishioners, watching and davening from the comfort of their own homes. A few times during the service the rabbi asked us to wave to them, or stopped to see if they had a name for Kaddish, and they were told to sing along, clap, and feel as though they were there. The week before, at my own shul’s Rosh Hashanah services, the rabbi had done the same, calling out a special greeting to “those watching from home” as she looked into the cameras like a game-show host,



## HOLIDAYS



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and asked those of us there, in the hard wooden pews, to send them our love.

“How much longer are we going to do this?” I thought to myself, with more spite than I care to admit. “When are these people going to just show up?”

Judaism requires presence. In fact, it commands it. That’s the point of a minyan, a Seder, a Birthright trip, a shiva, summer camp, and everything else we hold dear as Jews. But for two-and-a-half years we allowed people to detach their physical selves from being Jewish. We did it first out of necessity, and a sacrificial sense of mutual safety. In those years, I attended online baby namings, weddings, bat mitzvahs, shivas, and services for every conceivable holiday. I arrayed two laptops at strategic angles by the Seder table, so each side of the family had an equal view. I participated in online Jewish food conferences, streamed Israeli movies from film festivals, and sat at home, alone, watching other Jewish cultural events. I helped my kids attend virtual weekly Jewish school for a few weeks, until it proved too much. I did what I had to do, but the crisis is now over, and here we are, still offering the remote option.

But enough is enough. For those of us who can, it is time to show up.

Why? Because who are we, the Jewish people, if we stop showing up? Are we a race? A set of loosely linked DNA molecules who consume a dairy product shmeared on a gluten product, neither of which we can digest properly? Being Jewish is being *there*, wherever it is you

“To actually go and experience, be with other Jews, face to face, shvitzing in the same JCC steam room together, in a way you can’t just digitize, dial up, or stream through a headset you strap onto your face.”

feel Jewish. To actually go and experience, be with other Jews, face to face, shvitzing in the same JCC steam room together, in a way you can’t just digitize, dial up, or stream through a headset you strap onto your face.

Show up to shul. Trust me, I know you don’t want to go. I don’t want to go. It’s far. The seats are uncomfortable. The service is long. The sermon could be cut in half. But there is also nowhere like it. In that space, you are fully immersed in the sounds and rhythms of the core Jewish tradition. And here’s the thing: It doesn’t matter if you believe in God, know the prayers, or even speak Hebrew. You can read along with fervent devotion, or you can zone out and daydream, and even still, the liturgy will pass through you and leave an impression. There’s a reason why we cannot do this alone. Why we must gather at least nine other Jews to pray. Anyone can read the Torah at home, or say *Aleinu* in their apartment. But no one stands up and sits down at home. No one sings—I mean really belts out—*Avinu Malkeinu* in their bedroom, because singing alone (shower excepted) is an empty gesture. The point is gathering together and going through it all as a

group, even if you find it boring, or get lost, or nod off partway through.

Show up for each other. To the shiva. And the bris. And the sukkah party of that neighbor you aren’t close with. The entire point is your body being in that space with other bodies. A gathering of the tribe. But be sure to console and kibitz, to pull people into corners and gossip, to hold hands and hug, and encourage kids to boo Haman and light the Friday candles. Every year, we used to throw a wild Hanukkah party at our house for all the neighborhood Jewish families we knew. It was a madhouse of kids, grease, booze, and noise, but it built friendships, and relationships, and established the foothold of a local community where before there was none. Community can only be built when we are together in the same homes, making a glorious mess, talking too loud, and being Jewish together. You can’t do that online. Not even close.

Show up to Israel. Get on a plane and go. Sweat in the dry heat of Jerusalem and the humid noise of Tel Aviv. Hit Masada at dawn. Feel your eczema burn in the Dead Sea. Argue with taxi drivers. Lust after the bronzed soldiers on the beach. Eat all the shawarma. Because if you don’t go, you don’t get to experience how, in the words of Rich Cohen, Israel is real. Not some mythic place in a distant story, or a tidy symbol for flag waving and nationalism, or a political topic you can master if you just read enough articles. No. Israel is a real flesh and blood country, with a geography, beauty, absurdity, and dynamism that’s rife with contradictions, and impossible to simplify. It is a Jewish state, but when you go, you realize that those Jews are wildly different, and there are many other humans (Muslims, Christians, Arabs, Druze) who live there, too, in harmony, conflict, and everything in between. But if you don’t show up, you won’t actually see that with your eyes, and gain an understanding of Israel beyond the coloring book you were given in Hebrew school.

Show up at the deli. Stand at the doorway and try to get the host’s attention. Kvetch about the wait, while the smell of rendered chicken fat and steaming

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# Hummus With Preserved Lemons

BY JOAN NATHAN

## INGREDIENTS

FOR THE HUMMUS WITH  
PRESERVED LEMONS

- 1 cup dried chickpeas**
- 1 cup tahina**
- 1 preserved lemon**
- ¼ cup lemon juice, or to taste, including**
- 2 cloves garlic, or to taste**
- ½ teaspoon ground cumin, or to taste**
- 3 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil**
- 2 tablespoons pine nuts**
- Dash paprika or sumac**
- 2 tablespoons chopped fresh parsley or cilantro**
- 1 teaspoon salt**
- Freshly ground pepper to taste**

FOR THE PRESERVED LEMONS

- 8 lemons, about 1 ½ pounds**
- ½ cup coarse kosher salt (about)**
- 1 cup fresh lemon juice, plus more if necessary**
- 2 tablespoons olive oil**

## PREPARATION

TO MAKE THE HUMMUS WITH PRESERVED LEMONS

### Step 1

Put the raw chickpeas in a bowl with cold water to cover and soak overnight.

### Step 2

Drain and rinse the chickpeas, then place them in a heavy pot with enough cold water to cover. Bring to a boil, skim off the scum that accumulates, then simmer, partially covered, for about an hour or until the chickpeas are soft and the skin begins to separate, adding more water if needed.

### Step 3

Drain the chickpeas, reserving about 1 ½ cups of the cooking liquid. Set aside ¼ cup of the cooked chickpeas for garnish. In a food processor fitted with a steel blade, process the remaining chickpeas with the tahina, preserved lemon, lemon juice, garlic, salt, pepper, cumin, and at least ½ cup of the reserved cooking liquid. If the hummus is too thick, add more reserved cooking liquid or water until you have a paste-like consistency.

### Step 4

Heat a frying pan and add 1 tablespoon of the olive oil. Spread the pine nuts in the pan and stir-fry, browning on all sides.

### Step 5

To serve, transfer the hummus to a large, flat plate, and with the back of a spoon make a slight depression in the center. Drizzle the remaining olive oil and sprinkle the reserved chickpeas, pine nuts, paprika or sumac, and parsley or cilantro over the surface.

### Step 6

Serve with cut-up raw vegetables and warm pita cut into wedges.

**You can** also add cayenne pepper to the hummus. Sometimes leftover hummus tends to thicken; just add some water to make it the right consistency.

TO MAKE THE PRESERVED LEMONS

### Step 1

Cut off the ends of each lemon. Cut each one lengthwise into quarters, cutting to but not through the opposite end. Sprinkle 2 tablespoons of salt into the cut sides of each lemon.

**Step 2**

Put the lemons in a large jar (it's fine if you have to squeeze them in; they will shrink), and cover completely with lemon juice, using a heavy stone to keep them down. Let sit for a day.

**Step 3**

The next day, weigh the lemons down with a stone or, if not covered with lemon juice, seal them with a thin film of olive oil over the lemons. Put the jar in the refrigerator and allow to cure for 2 to 3 weeks. Before using, scrape off the pulp if desired.

**Yield:** About 4 cups, or 6 to 8 servings

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