

## THE WEEKLY PRINT

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SEPTEMBER 9, 2022

## Who knows the king?

*King Charles III has built extensive relationships within the U.K.'s Jewish community*

By Jenni Frazer

He mourned the death in 2020 of Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, saying he had “lost a trusted guide and an inspired teacher.” He has spoken movingly of the need for Holocaust remembrance, that “we must never cease to be appalled, nor moved by the testimony of those who lived through it.” He has pressed for interfaith understanding, and warned against antisemitism, of “branding those who are different as somehow deviant.”

And he was even on hand earlier this year in the south of England at the unveiling of a statue to an obscure 13th-century Jewish businesswoman, Licoricia of Winchester, who helped to fund the building of Westminster Abbey and is believed to have bankrolled three English kings.

Prince Charles, the former Prince of Wales, has, according to many observers, deep and long-standing ties in Britain's Jewish community, despite assumptions that the British royal family barely notices the Anglo-Jewish community. Now, as he assumes the throne as King Charles III after the death on Thursday of Queen Elizabeth II at 96, after a remarkable 70-year reign as monarch, interest is intensifying about who has the new king's ear in the Jewish community, how he would deal with rising antisemitism in England and what his

seemingly complicated views are concerning the Middle East.

The monarchy is “very deeply rooted in British political life,” Professor Vernon Bogdanor, a political scientist and historian, who is professor of government at King's College, London and author of *The Monarchy and the Constitution*, told *Jewish Insider*. “I think the Jewish community has always felt that it is a guarantor of tolerance.”

The new king's long relationship with the Jewish community can perhaps best be viewed through the lens of tolerance. As the Prince of Wales, a title he assumed in 1969, Charles had almost no official or unofficial links with the Jewish community in the early years of his adult life. But lately, it is a rare communal event that is not blessed with the prince's presence, such as direct, hands-on patronage of charities such as World Jewish Relief (the humanitarian arm of British Jews), the Jewish Museum, the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust, or the youth movement, the Jewish Lads' and Girls' Brigade. He made history in 2013 by attending the installation of Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis, with whom he has a relationship, at a London synagogue, becoming the first royal to participate in such an event.

He has also taken a keen interest in

Holocaust issues, commissioning, earlier this year, portraits of seven U.K.-based survivors. Last year the prince wrote the foreword for a memoir written by 98-year-old Lily Ebert, one of the survivors whose portrait was among the seven paintings. At the unveiling ceremony, Ebert showed him the tattoo forced on her in Auschwitz, telling Prince Charles, “Meeting you, it is for everyone who lost their lives.” The prince insisted, “But it is a greater privilege for me.”

Charles has also built a relationship with Karen Pollock, the chief executive of the Holocaust Educational Trust, who was instrumental in introducing both Charles and Camilla to survivors.

In January 2020, Prince Charles, drawing directly on the actions of his grandmother, Princess Alice, who saved Jews during the Nazi invasion of Greece, and who is buried on Jerusalem's Mount of Olives, was the keynote speaker at the World Holocaust Forum at Yad Vashem.

He has also worked closely with Paul Anticoni, the head of World Jewish Relief, who first introduced Charles to the organization's humanitarian work in Krakow.

Speaking in the aftermath of a general election in which many British Jews were appalled at the prospect of a victory for Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn, the prince's words had additional resonance. He told his audience: “The Holocaust must never be allowed to become

simply a fact of history: we must never cease to be appalled, nor moved by the testimony of those who lived through it. Their experience must always educate, and guide, and warn us.

"All too often, language is used which turns disagreement into dehumanization," he continued. "Words are used as badges of shame to mark others as enemies, to brand those who are different as somehow deviant. All too often, virtue seems to be sought through verbal violence. All too often, real violence ensues, and acts of unspeakable cruelty are still perpetrated around the world against people for reasons of their religion, their race or their beliefs."

The affinity Prince Charles has for the Jewish community has been reciprocated. Since 1801, British Jews have recited a prayer for the royal family on Shabbat, at a point in the Shacharit service where other communities might pray for the welfare of the government. The prayer resonates with the prince: He has referred to it many times in his public appearance at Jewish events, not least at a reception he gave for the Jewish community at Buckingham Palace on Hanukkah in 2019.

He said then that he believed the links between the British monarchy and the country's Jewish community were "something special," adding, "I say this from a particular and personal perspective, because I have grown up being deeply touched by the fact that British synagogues have, for centuries, remembered my family in your weekly prayers. And as you remember my family, so we too remember and celebrate you."

The warmth with which Prince Charles approaches the Jewish community today is not believed to have come from his mother. Though she did host some events for British Jews, it was the queen's late husband, Prince Philip, who was the driving force in building relationships with the Jewish community. He had close personal friendships with the South African-born scientist Lord Zuckerman, and the society photographer Baron, whose real name was Sterling Henry Nahum. Both were clever men whose fresh take on social issues intrigued Philip, who enjoyed their company immensely.

Like his father, Prince Charles has close friendships with members of the Jewish community. But they are extremely circumspect, and declined to be quoted for this article. Their continuing friendship is dependent on their continuing discretion: As one friend of Charles admitted to *Jewish Insider*, "If there is one thing

I have learned over 25 years, it is better never to talk at all."

Last year, Charles was given the prestigious Bridge award by the Council of Christians and Jews. In his acceptance speech, he said: "The Council of Christians and Jews was established nearly 80 years ago and was far ahead of its time in recognizing how religious and racial prejudice, hatred and discrimination present such a threat to the harmony of our society."

"Yet I do think the essence of its mission has never been more relevant than it is today," he continued. "We must not forget that the CCJ was founded in 1942, at the height of the Holocaust, by Chief Rabbi Hertz and Archbishop Temple in order to support Jewish refugees from Europe and combat antisemitism, and to build a bridge between Jewish and Christian communities at the most dire moment in their long, often troubled relationship... This noble mission and this widely held vision about what is right are now challenged by the vicious distortions of history which attempt to diminish or deny the Jewish experience of antisemitism over the millennia, but particularly the Holocaust."

Charles added, "Trying to build bridges between faith communities and to deepen mutual understanding has been a major part of my life's work. So I cannot tell you how profoundly grateful I am for such a very special accolade."

His response reflects his often-repeated declaration that when he accedes to the throne he will not be merely a "Defender of the Faith," as the monarch pledges in the Coronation ceremony. For many years he was mistakenly said to want to be known as "Defender of Faiths" — in other words to speak out on behalf of other religions besides the Church of England. But now Prince Charles is understood to be content to allow this description to remain in the Coronation.

Bogdanor told *Ji* that while the coronation is an Anglican, or Church of England, religious service, Charles may well seek an additional ecumenical service to follow it — in which the voices of other religions will be heard.

"He's in a unique position because he's the first heir to the throne who's actually found a real role for himself," says Bogdanor. "There's no job description, and he could have spent his time in nightclubs. But he hasn't done that: perhaps most important are the various charities that he's involved with, in particular the Prince's Trust, which has helped more than one million

young people find work or launch businesses in the past 40 years."

Bogdanor says Charles' view is that "everyone ought to belong to a community, and when people don't belong, there's trouble." For many years, he says, the prince believed that members of non-white communities felt they did not belong [to British society], and so went out of his way to meet and talk to ethnic minorities. "After 9/11 he did a lot with Muslim communities in his speeches, to ensure that people didn't equate all Muslims with extremists; and after the 2011 riots in Tottenham [an inner-city London area where there is considerable poverty] he went back five times to see what had gone wrong and to see whether people could be helped with jobs. He's done a lot to integrate people and to help them feel part of Britain. That's a really important contribution."

The monarchy is "very deeply rooted in British political life," says Bogdanor. "I think the Jewish community has always felt that it is a guarantor of tolerance."

That is certainly the view of the representative body of British Jewry, the Board of Deputies. Its president, Marie van der Zyl, told *Jewish Insider*, "The Board of Deputies of British Jews has always had a strong connection to the Crown; our organization was formed in 1760 to pay homage to George III on his ascension to the throne."

She said she had met the prince several times, "in particular, an event at Buckingham Palace to celebrate the UK Jewish community's contribution to this country, on which we worked together. We were also honored to have the Prince of Wales as guest of honor at our 250th anniversary dinner. He has engaged closely with our community through [his] position as patron of a number of key Jewish charities, and has made a considerable effort over many years to form a strong connection with British Jews; we are delighted that he has done so."

Better placed than most to understand the future king is Sir Lloyd Dorfman, a leading member of the Jewish community, who is currently vice president of Prince's Trust International, or PTI. He chaired PTI from 2015-2021 and also Prince's Trust UK from 2015-2018. [CVO and CBE are national honors given to Sir Lloyd for his charitable work.]

Dorfman told *Jewish Insider*, "I have seen the Prince close up through my involvement with Prince's Trust over the past 20 years. I have seen how engaged and passionate he is about

helping young people and what a difference the charity has made. He cares deeply about their futures and is well-informed. He is incredibly hard-working and tenacious. On a personal level, he is also extremely thoughtful to those around him, and I have heard and seen firsthand many instances of personal kindness... As king, I have absolutely no doubt that the British Jewish community could have no greater friend or sovereign.”

Charles was on intimate terms with the former chief rabbi, the late Lord Jonathan Sacks, and was said to have been devastated by his death in November 2020. He said that the country “lost a trusted guide and an inspired teacher. I, for one, have lost a true and steadfast friend.”

Earlier this year the prince went to Winchester, the town in the south of England which was once the heart of medieval Jewry, after the unveiling of a singular statue. It was of a 13th-century Jewish businesswoman, Licoricia, who helped to fund the building of Westminster Abbey and is believed to have bankrolled three English kings.

Among the crowd in Winchester was the rabbi of Maidenhead Synagogue, Rabbi Jonathan Romain. He knows the prince well, having received a national award from him in 2003 (the MBE, or Member of the Order of the British Empire) for his work in helping mixed-faith couples. Informally, since Maidenhead is

the closest synagogue to Windsor Castle, Rabbi Romain could be described as the royals’ rabbi. He points out that these days the monarch — whoever that might be — does not have a great deal of power.

Among all these bona fide good vibrations — a princely visit to a synagogue in Wales, the royal opening of a new Jewish community center in Krakow — there are some reminders that not everything has been sweetness and light to get to this stage.

For example, it took the assassination of Israeli Prime Minister Yitzchak Rabin in November 1995 for Prince Charles to visit the country for the first time, when he represented the queen at Rabin’s funeral. Prior to that visit, his father had been the only royal to travel to Israel since the country’s founding. Philip went in 1993 for the reinterment of his mother, Princess Alice, at a convent in Jerusalem — and even then it was described as an unofficial visit.

Charles also represented the Queen at former Israeli President Shimon Peres’ funeral in 2016. Peres had been awarded an honorary knighthood by Britain in 2008.

His supporters say that whatever Charles’ private views on Israel and Zionism were and are, the fact that Israel — despite repeated invitations — remained a largely royal-free zone in the Middle East should be laid firmly on the shoulders of the British Foreign Office. Since royals abroad are often there as supplementary

trade ambassadors, decades of Foreign Office advice was not to permit members of the royal family to go to Israel, lest it upset its Arab neighbors.

Almost 40 years ago, however, there was a glimpse of how Charles felt about Israel in a letter he wrote to his great friend, the explorer Laurens van der Post. In this 1986 letter, later leaked and published a couple of years ago by the *Daily Mail*, Charles had just finished a tour of Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Qatar.

He’d very much enjoyed the tour, he told van der Post: but he had learned that “I now appreciate that Arabs and Jews were all a Semitic people originally and it is the influx of foreign, European Jews (especially from Poland, they say) which has helped to cause the great problems [in the Middle East].”

Time has moved on, and the Middle East is not the same as in 1986. Bahrain has signed the Abraham Accords with Israel, Saudi Arabia has opened its airspace to Israeli flights and the prince himself — even if he remains naive — has demonstrated an affinity for Israel.

Meanwhile the last word should go to the (foreign-born, refugee) grandmother of a British Jewish writer and political consultant, Lord Finkelstein. She nailed the situation pithily: “While the Queen is safe in Buckingham Palace, we are safe in [London suburb] Hendon Central.” That sentiment will surely apply equally to King Charles. ♦

SEPTEMBER 14, 2022

## Bahrain’s business booster in the U.S. is a Jewish woman from Manama

*As the tiny nation’s trade representative to the U.S., Rose Sager is tasked with bringing American investment to Bahrain*

By Gabby Deutch

Rose Sager rarely leaves home without what she calls her “Bahrain bag.” It’s a tote bag that says “Bahrain,” something a tourist might bring back from the tiny Gulf nation. It was, for Sager, a conversation piece: As Bahrain’s trade representative in the U.S., her job is to convince American companies to do business in her home country.

Even in the unfriendly underground world of the New York City subway, people sometimes

ask her about it. Usually, they’re just wondering what Bahrain is. One time, she stayed in touch with a person who asked her about Bahrain and, after hearing from Sager about it, went to visit on vacation. “I find that fascinating to this day,” Sager explained to *Jewish Insider* recently, in her first interview with an American publication.

Being Bahrain’s biggest booster is part of Sager’s job description. But unlike nearly three-quarters of her fellow Bahrainis, Sager is not

Muslim. As a member of the country’s Jewish community, she is not just in the minority; the country has roughly three dozen Jews out of a population of 1.7 million people.

“We just blended into the country like every other religious affiliation. There were no differences,” said Sager. “It was just another group of people.”

When the oil-rich nation normalized ties with Israel two years ago as part of the Abraham

Accords, the country came on the radar of many American Jews for the first time. It was not just Bahrain's Jewish community that many Americans were now discovering; for many, Bahrain itself was an unknown, a little country in a far-flung part of the world.

"We've started spreading the word, and I feel like that made an impact," said Sager. "You can go not to every state in the U.S. but to many, and they are now, I feel, more familiar with Bahrain than ever, especially after the Abraham Accords."

Sager has lived in the United States since coming to New York for college more than three decades ago. But as much as she loved Bahrain, "I could not see going back to living in Bahrain the way it was then," she said. "At that time, the tallest building in Bahrain was, I think, eight floors. It was a small, simple country, we all basically assimilated into one culture. Everybody knew one another."

Now Manama, the country's capital, is a small, if significant, regional business hub. But during Sager's childhood — her family lived just outside of Manama's city center — life was quieter.

Her block was home to Jews, Muslims and Hindus, and they visited with each other during their respective holidays.

"We practiced our religion freely, all of us in our homes, because the synagogue was not used at that time," Sager said. On Hanukkah, "we lit the candles, and our Muslim friends were invited to come. On Passover, we would send over our homemade matzah."

The same happened on Muslim holidays. Jewish families were invited to Muslim neighbors' homes for Iftar during Ramadan. "During Eid, it was a real celebration and you'd go to different homes and wish them well and wish them happy holidays," she recalled. "A lot of people that went to Hajj [the pilgrimage to Mecca] and come back; you did a special visit to their homes and say the blessing because they came back from the Hajj. We never felt different. We just felt like we are part of the community celebrating their holiday as much as they celebrate our holidays with us."

Bahrain was once home to some 1,500 Jews. But after Israel was established in 1948, most of the country's Jews left for Israel or England due to antisemitic violence in the country. By 1967, when another round of riots broke out following the Six-Day War, just a few dozen Bahraini Jews remained — Sager's family among them.

The country's diplomats emphasize the

kingdom's commitment to tolerance and openness, which sets it apart from other Gulf states like Saudi Arabia, a close ally.

"In some ways, it is more surprising to non-Bahrainis that Bahrain appointed a Jewish ambassador and a trade representative," said Houda Nonoo, a Jewish woman who served as Bahrain's ambassador to the U.S. from 2008 to 2013. "It does not stick out to Rose or me or Bahrainis in general that we would be appointed to our roles." The two women are cousins.

When Sager arrived in Manhattan to study at City University of New York, it was a "major, major culture shock," she said, but she loved Manhattan. "Walking on Sixth Avenue, I remember looking at the high-rise buildings and saying, 'Wow, I hope I get to work in one of those buildings one day,'" she recalled. "And I did. That was a dream for me, to be able to work in New York City in one of the high-rise towers."

As Sager tells it, she got the job at the embassy almost by accident, after years spent in the finance industry and then the airline industry. She was back visiting Bahrain with her children the same summer that Washington and Manama were negotiating a free trade agreement, which was ratified by Congress before taking effect in 2006. "I always loved the country, really deeply have a lot of respect and admiration for the country, for the leadership, and I guess they heard me talking," she said. "So somebody said, 'Why don't you apply for a position?'" Months later, she was hired.

"I was given the position of promoting Bahrain and telling this country a lot about it. It was to promote the free trade agreement and all the business benefits," said Sager. To start, she attended any business event or convention she could find in the tri-state area. Sometimes, she knocked on businesses' doors to see who would talk to her.

"She goes out of her way. She goes from one state to another to promote Bahrain and to talk about Bahrain," said Sahar Hakeem, the assistant to Bahraini Ambassador to the U.S. Abdulla Bin Rashid Al Khalifa.

Sager has served four ambassadors, something of a rarity in the diplomatic world. "I always enjoyed traveling with her around the country," said Nonoo, who noted that Sager stuck to something of a uniform: She wore a red and white dress that looked like the Bahraini flag. "She has an incredible way with people that when she talks about Bahrain, it makes you want to book the next flight to come."

One Florida business leader did. Al Zucaro, president of World Trade Center Palm Beach, met Sager on a Zoom call last year; the next day, they were having lunch. (Like many New Yorkers, Sager eventually got tired of the fast-paced city and the cold and moved to Florida, although she still works throughout the Northeast.) Months later, Zucaro helped her organize a business delegation from Palm Beach County to Bahrain.

"I am of the opinion, this is a personal comment, you don't know someone until you visit them in their home. So I committed to putting together a delegation of people to travel to Bahrain," Zucaro told JI. Sager has clearly worked her magic on him: "I think that Bahrain," he added, "is an incredibly unrealized opportunity for a lot of businesses in the United States."

Trade between the U.S. and Bahrain in 2019 totaled \$4 billion, according to the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative. Bahrain is one of only two Gulf nations (along with Oman) with which the U.S. has a free trade agreement, and Sager touts the ease with which foreign businesses can set up shop in Bahrain. "When they come in and set up a business, I feel like we give them the red carpet treatment. There's no red tape," she explained. The desert nation has become a hub for cloud computing, attracting major investments from Amazon Web Services in recent years.

Zucaro said about 40% of the participants on his delegation came back from Bahrain with business opportunities. The welcoming business environment is important, he said, but that there's a certain cultural appeal as well: "The religious freedom, the respect for female participation, all of that... Rose is the epitome of that," he said.

Sager is used to American misconceptions about her home. "Number one is fear," she said. "I get a lot of things like, Is it safe? Are we allowed to be dressed like this, or do we have to cover up? Can a woman travel by herself there?" (Yes, yes and yes, according to Sager.)

Despite the country's acceptance of Jewish Bahrainis, for many years Bahrain and Israel did not have a diplomatic relationship. Sager said that unlike in some other Arab nations, Bahraini schools identified Israel on a map, implicitly acknowledging its existence. But Israel was rarely discussed by Jewish Bahrainis.

"After the wars, a lot of the Jewish community moved to Israel, and, sadly, there was no direct



communication with them, like even some family,” Sager said. In the summers, her family would meet Israeli family members in England.

When she heard the news about the Abraham Accords, “it was a major surprise — a pleasant surprise,” noted Sager, who said the news came as a relief. “I never thought I would have a flight going from Manama to Tel Aviv, that was never in my wildest dreams,” she said.

The increased international Jewish interest in Bahrain since the Accords has been reflected in the country’s Jewish life. Former White House special advisor Jared Kushner donated a Torah

scroll to the reopened Manama synagogue. A year ago, the synagogue held its first minyan since 1947. And in October 2021, the first Jewish wedding in 52 years was held in the country, for Nonoo’s son. “The direct flights from Israel started the week before, and luckily we were able to bring in the *mashgiach* on one of those flights as well as the kosher meat and wine from Israel,” Nonoo said.

On Sager’s most recent visit to her home country, she stopped by the Manama synagogue that had been shuttered for most of her life. “We had some Muslim people there, one actually

read from the Torah in Arabic, because we have a Torah there that was translated,” said Sager, who grew up reading Jewish prayers in Arabic, not Hebrew. “I spoke to the visitors that were coming in from different nationalities, even some from the U.S. Navy that just came to see and sit through the service. We had tourists from Israel, and European tourists.”

Sager has yet to visit Israel, but it’s a priority for her. “I would love to visit the Bahraini Embassy. I just think that is so, so amazing,” she said. “Never did I dream of that happening.” ♦

SEPTEMBER 12, 2022

## ‘Like the Gold Rush’: Aryeh Lightstone on what more the Abraham Accords could have been

*Second Trump term might have added up to 10 more countries, says former U.S. ambassador to Israel’s chief of staff, author of the new book, ‘Let My People Know’*

By Jonathan H. Ferziger

*The article first appeared in The Circuit.*

Aryeh Lightstone, former U.S. Ambassador to Israel David Friedman’s closest aide, said that the Abraham Accords have “succeeded beyond the imagination of most of the leadership involved” since they were signed two years ago on the White House lawn.

On the other hand, Lightstone said, he believes an additional five to 10 countries would have normalized relations with Israel had former President Donald Trump won a second term and followed the playbook that yielded the historic 2020 agreements with the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Morocco and Sudan.

“It would have been like the Gold Rush,” Lightstone, 42, who was chief of staff to Friedman and was appointed special envoy for economic normalization in the Middle East, told The Circuit in an interview. He said the Biden administration could have expanded the cohort of nations initiating ties with Israel if it hadn’t been gripped by “Trump derangement syndrome” and distanced itself from the previous president’s achievements when first taking office. President Joe Biden has since said that he “strongly supports” the Abraham Accords.

Lightstone, an ordained rabbi, now hunts

for potential Israeli investments as a consultant to Affinity Partners, the Saudi-backed private equity firm started by Jared Kushner, Trump’s son-in-law and special White House adviser who led the team that negotiated the Abraham Accords. Lightstone recently wrote a book about his diplomatic experiences titled *Let My People Know: The Incredible Story of Middle East Peace – and What Lies Ahead*, published by Encounter Books.

*This interview has been condensed and edited for clarity.*

**Jonathan Ferziger: How would you rate the success of the Abraham Accords thus far?**

Aryeh Lightstone: If you want to grade it on a curve, you had a pandemic, you’ve had three Israeli prime ministers and you’ve had two U.S. presidents. You had Iran, China and the Russia and Ukraine issues. I would argue that the Abraham Accords have not only withstood the challenges thrown at it but have grown and succeeded beyond the imagination of most of the leadership involved. Overall, I give it an 8 1/2 out of 10.

**Have you been surprised by the way that business connections have developed since the agreements were signed?**

What surprises me is that it’s normal. I think that, in and of itself, is remarkable. When [UAE’s] Mubadala invests [\$1 billion] in natural gas coming from Israel, it’s astonishing. If you were to just say that sentence five years ago, nobody would have believed a single component of that. The fact that relations are normal means that normal business circumstances will triumph and what that means is, like any other economic circumstance that becomes deregulated – because ultimately, this was enormous deregulation — the UAE, Bahrain, Morocco, Sudan, Kosovo, all had regulations [against trading with Israel] that prevented economic growth.

What do these countries actually need from each other? [The] UAE is probably one of the most professional and impressive investment houses that the world has ever seen. So now with those platforms, having access both to direct investments in Israel, and access to Israeli technologies for that platform, you’re going to see deals happen. Bahrain is obviously a separate and a different economy. What are they looking

for? An enormous amount of fintech. These deep technology relationships [with Israel] are moving along nicely, and you see them because they're happening, because they're not abnormal.

Morocco is a completely different story. I am incredibly bullish on what can happen with Western major multinationals and Israeli technology with a country of 40 million people that is geographically situated in a fantastic time zone. I think Morocco's going to become the new Ukraine and India for sort of back office, and technological opportunities for multinational, specifically American and Western European, companies.

The Middle East and North Africa region needs Sudan to be a net food producer, and not a net food importer. And I think that you've got a lot of meaningful, powerful and visionary leaders who are sitting here rolling up their sleeves saying, how do we bring Sudan back to a time where they are the breadbasket of Africa? Because you've got enormous food security challenges, right? And I think you've got a confluence of events of Sudan trying to come out of the horrendous histories of the past.

**How would the Abraham Accords have developed had President Trump won a second term in office?**

I think you'd have had five to 10 more countries as part of the Abraham Accords. It would have been like the Gold Rush of 1848. You would have unadulterated U.S. economic power in the greater Abraham Accords countries like we've never seen before in this region. We would be energy independent at home in America. We'd be pivoting as much trade away from China as humanly possible. Imagine taking the Abraham Accords countries and placing meaningful and sustainable industry in Egypt, Ethiopia, Sudan and Morocco.

**Would Saudi Arabia have normalized relations with Israel?**

Saudi Arabia is publicly reported to be a question of when and not if. There's an economic dividend to be paid. I know Oman sees it. I'm sure Saudi Arabia sees it too. Go look at the greeting that President Biden got when he went to Saudi and look at the greeting

that President Trump got when he got to Saudi. What did President Trump run on? When he ran for office the first time, if you remember, as the most Islamophobic racist presidents in America's history. He ran on the Muslim ban, as it was known in the press, and he shows up to Saudi Arabia. There's a meeting of dozens, if not close to 100 leaders of the Arab Muslim world. And he comes in and tells them radical Islam is not good for me, but it's much worse for you. And they respected that and they understood that and they heard that and they greeted him royally. Because I think they appreciated the straight talk.

**So you weren't impressed with how Biden was greeted by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman?**

If you look at the conversation around President Biden's trip, it was 'Will he or will he not fist-bump or shake hands with the Crown Prince?' That became the conversation and not the fact that if Saudi modernizes, that will be the single greatest achievement for this part of the world, this part being in the Middle East. There are a billion and a half Muslims who look to Saudi Arabia five times a day. Saudi Arabia can look a lot like Abu Dhabi, or it can look a lot like Afghanistan. I think the world is going to be much better if Saudi continues on the trajectory of looking much more like Abu Dhabi and Dubai. There's an enormous desire to modernize the country. We should be rooting for their success and we should be helping with their success.

**You were given the job of running the \$3 billion Abraham Fund, which was set up to promote regional economic cooperation through private sector investment. How did you feel about its demise?**

The one thing that upsets me greatly was the canceling of the Abraham Fund. If the United States of America could bring all of these entities together and say, we're going to do this with Israeli technology and Gulf Cooperation Council support, political and otherwise, we could accelerate that. When you're dealing with a country like Sudan or with parts of Egypt and elsewhere, and these projects take too long, that gives an opportunity for another coup, for another leadership issue. There's not a lot of patience.

The money that the United States stipulated for this was not charity. It was a loan. We were going to make our money back. We were going to be a convenient platform. That's all we needed to do. There's lots of money in the region to do game-changing projects, but there's also a lot of disparate personalities and interests. And when the United States of America creates a platform and says, look, this is not going to reach 100% of what you're looking for but you can't get there anyway. So we're going to hit 75% of your to-do list and 50% of their to-do list, and 40% of their to-do list and America is going to this project, the project happens. Instead, these projects just wind up sort of limping along because there is no shepherd shepherding them. It's not a money issue. It's a platform issue.

**Why wasn't [former Prime Minister] Benjamin Netanyahu allowed to go to the UAE before he left office and get his share of the glory for signing the Accords?**

To the best of my knowledge, he wasn't treated badly. There was an enormous amount of logistics issues that were happening. Prime Minister Netanyahu deserves enormous credit. The Abraham Accords would not have occurred without him, and history will remember that.

**Do you think the Palestinians will ever accept the Abraham Accords?**

Yes, because peace is going to win. We live in an information age where the people growing up in Jenin and Ramallah see Dubai and Abu Dhabi. They see Riyadh, they also see Afghanistan. They also see Tehran. They also see Haifa and Tel Aviv. There's a point in time, where the Palestinians will have leadership that will look out for the future of the Palestinian people and not for their own bank accounts, or whatever it is that the so-called Palestinian leadership look out for. I promise you, they get it. All they need to do is deregulate. It will fly because it is meant to fly. There are too many fantastic things happening.

**In writing your book, Let My People Know, what were you trying to add to the sum total of knowledge about what happened behind the scenes of the Abraham Accords?**

Every waking moment of that job was a thrill of a lifetime. It was like shooting fish in a barrel. It was people who wanted to do what we wanted to help them to do, so that was fantastic. If these Accords had been led by anybody other than President Trump and, possibly, anybody other than Bibi as the signatory on behalf of Israel, this likely would have been the greatest news story of the last 20 years. Peace breaking out meaningfully in the Middle East. And expanding. It was rapid fire. Every other Friday, there was another country joining and there were countries who were still calling back after President Trump lost the election. There were

countries that were still calling after January 6.

This was not a hard mental thing for the current administration to pick up and run with. The fact that they didn't do it is the height of Trump derangement syndrome. They decided not to go with policies that work because they were affiliated with somebody else. I fear the change in foreign policy over the last 20 months may set us in a direction that is irreversible and may have been one of those points in history where we were able to stop the growth in the outlandish actions of Iran and China and now Russia, and we've gone the opposite way. At

some point in time, there's a tipping point where they will just be unstoppable. I pray that we're not there. But we were at the point where they were stopping and we reaccelerated them and that's why I wrote the book. It's not a Republican thing. It's not a Democratic thing. The Abraham Accords are in all of our interests. And I tried to describe that because nobody knows who I am. Nobody cares who I am. Nobody should care who I am. I'm a guy who was on the ground and who saw peace happening. And people should be excited about that. Peace is a good thing. ♦

SEPTEMBER 14, 2022

## In the battle for Lansing, will Tom Barrett unseat Rep. Elissa Slotkin?

*The Michigan state senator is pressing GOP issues including crime and border security, but the election may turn on abortion*

By Marc Rod

Rep. Elissa Slotkin (D-MI) has proven her electoral mettle in the past two election cycles, eking out victories in a perennially competitive district. She claims the rare distinction of being one of only seven Democrats to win a district in 2020 that was also won by former President Donald Trump. State Sen. Tom Barrett, who is challenging Slotkin in Michigan's new 7th Congressional District, which is centered around Lansing, is hoping to break that pattern.

Barrett, who served in the Army for 21 years, including in Kuwait and Iraq, and went on to serve as a Michigan State House member for four years, echoed many Republicans this cycle in telling *Jewish Insider* he's running for Congress because he "feel[s] our country is on the wrong track... it's largely attributable to the failed decisions and bad policy that's coming out of Washington, D.C., under this current administration."

Barrett's top policy focuses are also consistent with those of many GOP candidates this cycle: crime, border security, energy prices and, a more recent addition to the playbook, eliminating the

Internal Revenue Service staff increases passed in the Inflation Reduction Act.

Slotkin — a former CIA and Defense Department official — has made domestic extremism, including antisemitism, a key element of her current term in Congress, serving as the chair of the House Homeland Security Committee's Subcommittee on Intelligence and Counterterrorism. During her 2020 campaign, Slotkin, who is Jewish, warned *JI* about the growing concentration of extremist activity in Michigan, and her district specifically.

Barrett seemed less focused on this topic. Asked about the issue, and Slotkin's emphasis on it, Barrett said last week that extremist groups are unacceptable, but blamed Democrats for "overlooking the issues of crime in every city in America."

"Those are real problems and real issues where real victims have been harmed. I'm not in any way excusing or delegitimizing ethnic intimidation and crimes of that nature. But we also have real crimes with real victims in the moment, right now taking place. Record numbers of murders with record numbers of violent crime on the streets," he said.

Pressed on what he meant by his references to "real crimes," Barrett said he felt Slotkin, and more broadly other Democrats, are "trying to suggest... that every Republican is somehow an extremist. And that's what I'm drawing the contrast to."

Barrett, who served for a time as a helicopter pilot, pointed to the U.S. pullout from Afghanistan as a particular impetus for his congressional run. While Barrett supported leaving Afghanistan, feeling that the pullout likely should have happened much earlier, he strongly criticized the U.S.'s pullout strategy, which he blamed for the deaths of 13 service members.

"There was no accountability afterward, those same generals and same advisors are still in charge," he said. He also blamed strategic failures on "advisors at the Pentagon who are hyper-focused on their political future and the woke progressive policies... and less concerned with the health, welfare and survivability of our military troops."

"We've seen adversaries abroad becoming more emboldened and I think a lot of that is a direct result of the weak posture on the

world stage that America has had under this administration,” Barrett added, including Iran’s nuclear enrichment on that list.

He called for “strong deterrence and strong penalties” against Iran, including a “full-court press” from U.S. allies and partners to stop Iran from developing a nuclear weapon. He said that also must include pressure on Russia and China, which he described as “enablers” for Iran.

“My concern,” he continued, “is that they’ve already developed a nuclear weapon.... you can’t undo that once that damage is done, and we have to do a better job of deterrence. We have to do a better job of prevention.”

Barrett called the U.S. Israel-relationship “one of the key alliances geopolitically in the world.”

He added that any political settlement between the Israelis and Palestinians “would have to originate from those that have the most at stake... One lesson I learned as somebody who traveled the world in different deployments is that we can’t force our American outcome ideals on to other cultures and other nations.”

Barrett, who joined the military a few years before 9/11, said that he began his service in the war on terror believing “in my heart” that U.S. troops and American ideals “would be welcomed with open arms,” which, he said, did not happen. His service, he said, taught him that the U.S. military’s mission abroad should not include nation-building.

“I think we have to be honest about that,” he explained. “It really taught me that there are unfortunately cultures in the world that dominate certain countries, that don’t value the things that we take for granted and value here in our country.”

Barrett expressed skepticism over the 2020

election results, joining 10 colleagues in sending a letter to Congress just before the Jan. 6 riot urging lawmakers to investigate voter fraud claims. In the weeks after Jan. 6, he told local media that he had no regrets about the letter.

During the Republican primary, Barrett campaigned as staunchly anti-abortion — with no exceptions — and his campaign website pledged to “protect life from conception.” It now describes him generically as “pro-life,” and bashes Slotkin’s pro-choice abortion stance.

Barrett’s shift in position is reflective of the challenges posed to Michigan Republicans by the Supreme Court’s decision to overturn *Roe v. Wade*. Adrian Hemond, CEO of political consulting firm Grassroots Midwest, told JI. Public polling has shown abortion to be a defining issue for Michigan voters, and the *Dobbs* ruling to be highly unpopular, Hemond explained.

“He’s on the wrong side of that issue in terms of where the voters in this district are,” Hemond said of Barrett. “If the election is about a different issue for you, then Republicans are competitive. The problem is that for a large swath of the electorate, this election is about abortion. And that is why you see Republicans trying to talk about anything else.”

Hemond noted that a *Detroit News* poll last week showed Michigan Republicans trailing among non-college-educated white women, which he described as likely fatal to Barrett’s prospects if the trend does not change.

Hemond said Barrett needs to find a way to talk about abortion “in a way that people think is reasonable,” arguing that “ignoring the issue does you no favors as a Republican at this point.”

The new 7th District tipped slightly toward Republicans in the 2020 presidential election,

and the *Cook Political Report* rates it as a toss-up. Hemond noted that the district, which includes the state capital, Lansing, and Michigan State University, is “trending the wrong way” for Republicans, particularly in the areas that are growing. Plus, Slotkin holds an inherent advantage as the incumbent.

Another major liability for Barrett is his finances. Slotkin’s campaign has raised \$6.9 million to Barrett’s \$1.4 million, and he has just \$447,000 left in his coffers, compared to Slotkin’s \$6.6 million, as of mid-July. That, according to Hemond, has left him reliant on outside groups to support him with ad spending.

The National Republican Congressional Committee has spent more than \$2 million in the district, in addition to another \$1 million from the GOP leadership-aligned Congressional Leadership Fund. The Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, meanwhile, has spent \$1 million in the race.

If he hopes to bring home a victory in November, Hemond said Barrett needs to “raise money fast.” He noted that Barrett’s campaign has some potentially viable attacks against Slotkin — casting her as beholden to a lobbyist and campaign donor whose condo she currently rents and tying her to President Joe Biden. But, Hemond added, “the campaign does not have enough money” to ensure those attacks stick.

Hemond said an even larger obstacle for Barrett may be the top of the ticket, where Gov. Gretchen Whitmer, a Democrat, led Republican Tudor Dixon by 13 points in the *Detroit News* survey. Dixon, he added, is even more outmatched than Barrett in fundraising.

“That’s a massive problem for a Republican candidate if the top of the ticket is financially collapsing,” he explained. ♦

SEPTEMBER 13, 2022

## From Ukraine to Afghanistan, Israeli nonprofit SmartAid aims to bring tech to crisis zones

*SmartAid’s co-founder, Shachar Zahavi, previously co-founded and ran the disaster response group IsraAid*

By Melanie Lidman

The article first appeared in eJewishPhilanthropy.

The room in the refugee center in Moldova looks more like an advanced customer call center than a classroom: 20

laptops with noise-canceling headsets, an interactive projector at the front of the room, high-speed internet access powered



by SpaceX's Starlink satellite internet service.

But after 45 minutes of quietly concentrating on the screens, the 15 children sitting at the desks put down their headsets and run off towards recess, the sounds of shrieks and games echoing through the hall.

There are more than 170 classrooms like this one across Poland, Moldova and Ukraine, run by SmartAid, an NGO founded in Israel in 2016 to provide customized tech responses to humanitarian and natural disasters around the world. In Moldova, SmartAid partners with the International Center for Cooperation & Development Phoenix, a local organization, to run nine smart classrooms for Ukrainian refugee children, with five more set to open this month.

The classrooms are an outgrowth of a project from the Ukrainian Ministry of Education called the "All-Ukrainian Online Schedule," which allows students to continue their classes with Ukrainian teachers online, regardless of where the students or teachers are located. Even when kids in the same room log into different classrooms, they still have a similar break schedule. Around 90,000 Ukrainians are still in Moldova today, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

"We discovered, after a month, that one of the big problems is studying," said Irina Rusanovschi, the founder and director of Phoenix, a Moldovan NGO she created in 2014 to focus on local children's issues. "When we went to visit the refugee centers, we saw kids and students sitting in front of their mobile phones for hours to try to be online with their teachers in Ukraine."

Rusanovschi and other parents like her know from the pandemic how hard it is for kids to try to study online. Around 7 million Ukrainians have left since the Russian invasion in February, and around 4 million have returned, according to United Nations data. Many refugee families in Moldova are housed in dormitories with everyone in the same room, and the buildings do not have sufficient internet bandwidth for all the kids to be online at the same time.

SmartAid's classrooms try to eliminate those problems by taking students out of

their living spaces.

"It's important for them to be all together in the same room, because when they have free time, they can communicate with other students around them," Rusanovschi said, adding that this helps combat some of the isolation that dogged Zoom classes during the pandemic.

The smart classrooms are generally built at refugee centers or dormitories where there are large populations of refugees. In addition to the smart classrooms, SmartAid has also donated thousands of tablets and laptops to Ukrainian students where smart classrooms aren't available for schoolwork, telehealth or mental health counseling.

The classrooms are one of SmartAid's many interventions in international crises. Shachar Zahavi, the group's co-founder, knows what it's like to be the first on the ground after a natural or humanitarian disaster. He has coordinated relief in dozens of emergency situations over 18 years, first as the founder and CEO of IsraAid, an Israeli first responder and disaster relief organization that launched two decades ago and has sent teams to disaster zones around the world.

Zahavi first started thinking about the glaring gap between how aid organizations were utilizing existing technology during the 2010 earthquake in Haiti, which killed, by some estimates, 300,000 people.

"In the beginning, no organization was willing to go into Port-Au-Prince because we were afraid of riots," he said. "But if there was a use of drones [to view the city], we could have seen there were no riots, and we wouldn't have lost two to three days of response."

The main challenge that SmartAid tries to address is the disconnect between the people on the ground in disaster areas and the tech companies far away in their offices in Silicon Valley or Tel Aviv: Doctors, social workers, nurses and teachers on the ground have local and cultural knowledge, but might not be familiar with cutting-edge technology. Tech companies employ programmers and developers who are passionate about social justice and who are up on the latest gadgets and software, but lack the cultural knowledge to adapt their technology successfully for local

implementation.

"The idea behind it is building some kind of a bridge between the tech world and the aid world," said Zahavi. "The use of technology in [the] nonprofit world is really low... It's become a little more popular since COVID-19, but not at the level that it can really affect humanitarian aid."

In Zahavi's experience, when most humanitarian aid organizations think about cooperating with tech companies, they consider those companies as financial donors only. Zahavi wants to change that, to get the tech companies more involved in shaping disaster response itself.

"It's not just to bring the tech to humanitarian organizations, but also to help the tech community understand that you have amazing ideas, but there's a difference between [solutions for] Uganda and Kenya and Rwanda," said Zahavi. Although the countries are next to each other, he added, "The differences are big, because in one country the telecom and [financial technology] is more upgraded, and [in] the other ones it's less."

SmartAid gets its funding from Kärcher, the Ted Arison Family Foundation and other corporations and private donors. It has 10 full-time employees, 50 rotating project-based employees and more than 300 core volunteers. SmartAid's estimated 2022 budget is \$900,000, up from \$300,000 in 2021. It receives donated services from tech firms that have a value of around \$5.5 million, including hardware, software, products and services from marquee companies like Elon Musk's SpaceX, Salesforce, Toyota and DHL.

SmartAid has deployed that approach in past crises as well. Immediately after Hurricane Dorian hit the Bahamas on Sept. 1, 2019, killing 74 people and causing \$3.4 billion of damage, the biggest need was for telecommunications. The storm had wiped out the internet and phone lines on the hard-hit Abaco Island, and aid workers on the ground had no way to coordinate with their organizations or with each other about what was needed where. SmartAid built a communications hub where aid workers could access the internet through SmartAid computers or a WiFi connection powered by Starlink satellite, and also

provided walkie-talkies to organizations and distributed 5,000 solar-powered lights in addition to portable water purifiers and hygiene packs for women.

Zahavi has found that providing telecommunications is essential to relief efforts, and can even be a challenge in developed countries. Following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, remote border crossings to Poland and Moldova had bare-bones communication infrastructure and couldn't handle the tens of thousands of refugees passing through each day, as well as the hundreds of organizations trying to help—who were relying, in some cases, on a single cell tower.

Zahavi also stressed the importance of understanding what infrastructure is and is not available in the area groups want to serve. In the early days of the Ukraine crisis, organizations received many donations of medical devices for the front lines. But a lot of the donations were earmarked for places without reliable electricity, which the devices needed to function. SmartAid addressed the issue by trying to match solar generators with devices in need of power.

A potential area of growth, Zahavi said, is in financial technology, or fintech. Direct cash relief is one of the most efficient and effective ways to support people displaced by conflict or disaster, according to the International Rescue Committee. But it can

be difficult, or even dangerous, to get that cash or preloaded credit cards into people's hands if they are located in areas of active fighting or banks are in collapse. Fintech payment apps like Venmo or PayPal allow for transactions to continue without cash or local bank infrastructure.

In Afghanistan, SmartAid is supporting vulnerable women with cash relief and communication packs of cell phones and solar chargers to connect them to mental health professionals.

"There are high-tech and low-tech solutions, and it doesn't need to be the AI [artificial intelligence], it can be three levels lower," said Zahavi. "There's clean water that is a product of pulling humidity from the air, or clean water that pumps water through sand and special chemicals that cleans the water," he said. "There are a lot of different levels of technology that eventually get the water clean."

One of the hurdles of using tech for disaster relief, Zahavi said, is the problem of what to do when devices break. If a product sits in a corner gathering dust because no one knows how to fix it, it's useless. In Ukraine, where there are nearly 300,000 people working in tech, that wasn't an issue. But elsewhere, it can be.

"If you cannot buy the product that gets broken in the country, you need to think twice before even bringing it in," said

Zahavi. "But if the product is already in the country, that means that the industry already exists, and you need to map out the right service providers and expand that circle of service providers."

SmartAid tries to identify local professionals who can repair the technology. It also works to make sure that, following any disaster, the technology can stay in the community that hosted the refugees, in order to make locals feel like they're also valued.

For the smart classrooms, this means that, if and when the Ukrainian students are able to return home, the laptops and smart classrooms will stay in Moldova. Rusanovschi said most of the refugee centers in the capital city of Chisinau are currently housed in educational buildings, so an in-house computer lab will be useful in the future.

In the meantime, they've started using the smart classrooms at night, to teach Ukrainian parents Romanian and English in hopes of helping them adapt to their new lives. And during the day, Rusanovschi said, the smart classrooms provide a small bit of normalcy for children who have spent the last six months in limbo.

They wake up, go to a school, do their classes and they are together with other kids," she said. "They're making friends. There's a feeling of going to school." ♦

SEPTEMBER 9, 2022

## The battle over Brooklyn's Maimonides Medical Center – a guide for the perplexed

*Here's how Maimonides entered a financial crisis, what this might mean for Borough Park and what activists and elected officials want to do about it*

By Ben Sales

The article first appeared in eJewishPhilanthropy.

In May 2021, Maimonides Medical Center seemed like it was riding high. The worst of the COVID-19 pandemic appeared to be over for the 711-bed hospital in south Brooklyn, it was about to acquire the nearby New York Community Hospital and it had just signed a

deal giving it some local cred: a naming-rights agreement for the stadium of the Brooklyn Cyclones, the borough's minor league baseball team, due to last until 2031.

Sixteen months later, Maimonides is in trouble. The medical center, named for a renowned medieval rabbinic sage and located in the heavily Jewish neighborhood of Borough Park, may be on the brink of insolvency after the

New York Post reported that it lost \$145 million last year. Now, even as the hospital says it's on the way to having sound finances, Borough Park residents and the officials who represent them are asking whether the hospital will survive through the end of this year, let alone until the next decade.

Here's how Maimonides got to this point, what this might mean for Borough Park and

what activists and elected officials want to do about it.

### **A year of bad news**

The loss of \$145 million is just the latest piece of bad news to emerge for Maimonides, Brooklyn's largest hospital, which mostly serves low-income patients. The year has been punctuated by news stories detailing overcrowding, alleged malpractice, employee protests and questionable financial practices. The coverage came as the hospital received poor ratings from the state Department of Health and another government agency.

In February, nurses at Maimonides held a public event to protest what they called "severe understaffing and ineffective nurse retention policies." A statement announcing the event alleged that Maimonides had "poor working conditions" and was "overflowing with patients."

Three days later, the *Post* reported that Maimonides CEO Kenneth Gibbs' compensation increased 77% in 2020, from \$1.8 million to \$3.2 million, even as the total number of patients discharged from the hospital dropped from 35,000 to 30,000. The hospital said the jump was "a one-time payment" to Gibbs' retirement plan because he'd been at the job five years.

In July, five local lawmakers sent a letter to Gibbs calling the hospital's practices "unacceptable and untenable." Three of the signatories — Simcha Felder, Simcha Eichenstein and Kalman Yeger — are Orthodox Jews who represent parts of Borough Park and the adjacent neighborhood of Midwood in the New York State Senate, State Assembly and New York City Council, respectively. The other two signatories were State Assemblymembers Marcela Mitaynes and Robert Carroll.

"We have serious concerns about [the] financial well-being of the hospital," the letter said. "We are aware of nurse shortages at the hospital and fear that it is due to financial mismanagement. If this is not corrected, we believe the hospital will lose patients due to poor care and [exacerbate] the hospital's financial status."

Later in July, *The City*, a local publication, published a long article detailing allegations of malpractice, including a newborn whose severe condition — necessitating emergency surgery — was allegedly misdiagnosed, and a 91-year-old who allegedly endured a lack of care and died a day after undergoing emergency surgery

following six days at the hospital.

News of the \$145 million loss emerged about six weeks later. *The Post* also reported that the hospital had only \$148 million on hand and had defaulted on some debts. An accompanying financial report conducted by PricewaterhouseCoopers, the article said, found that "these conditions raise substantial doubt regarding the Medical Center's ability to continue as a going concern within one year after the date these consolidated financial statements are issued." And the article in *The City* found that the hospital had a budget shortfall of \$33 million in the early months of 2022.

The stream of problems comes alongside poor ratings for Maimonides. The medical center came in at rock bottom among all of the state's 157 hospitals in terms of patient satisfaction in a report dating to last year by the state Department of Health. Medicare.gov has given the hospital an overall rating of two stars out of five.

### **A protest grows in Brooklyn**

In light of these reports, a protest movement seeks to oust the hospital's management and improve its conditions. Called "Save Maimonides," the group was founded earlier this year, is based locally and held a gathering late last month in Borough Park that reportedly drew more than 1,000 people.

The group has been opaque about its finances, telling *eJewishPhilanthropy* only that it's "funded by members of the Brooklyn community." Although Louis Scheiner, a New York philanthropist and nursing home executive, has expressed support for the group, a spokesperson for Save Maimonides said he is not funding it.

Mendy Reiner, the group's co-chair, said the group has received more than 2,000 complaints regarding Maimonides. Reiner, who founded an organization called Renewal that facilitates kidney donations, is pushing for the state's Department of Health to step in and encourage Northwell Health, a large healthcare network in the state, to take over operations at Maimonides. Northwell and Maimonides already have a partnership.

"Within the community, we have top-of-the-line [healthcare] organizations," he told eJP, naming the emergency medical service Hatzalah as an example. "All these organizations help Brooklyn. And here we have a hospital failing us

to the point where the Department of Health has them at 157 out of 157 on patient satisfaction. That's not acceptable. That's outright negligence. It's chutzpah at the highest level."

### **Maimonides stays optimistic**

Maimonides has responded to the complaints by telling eJP that 2021 was "a uniquely challenging year" across the American hospital system. A spokesperson noted, in addition, that it is a safety-net hospital, which means many of its patients either don't have insurance or are on Medicaid, and therefore its profit margins are slimmer. The hospital said its budget gap is narrowing and has expressed confidence that a state government funding program for hospitals that rely on Medicaid, which it became eligible for late last year, will help get it back to a sure footing.

"Maimonides Health saw significant improvement from 2021 to the first half of 2022, thanks largely to a new state funding program that recognizes that safety-net hospitals like Maimonides have suffered from historically inadequate Medicaid reimbursement rates," the spokesperson told eJP. "Maimonides is fully confident in its financial viability and expects its operations to continue on a stable trajectory."

The state Department of Health also told eJP that the new funding program should improve the picture for Maimonides. "New York State is providing significant financial assistance to safety-net hospitals that have a high percentage of Medicaid patients, including Maimonides," a department spokesperson told eJP.

Maimonides' spokesperson also praised the hospital's quality of care, and told eJP that the hospital is "strongly mission-driven." The spokesperson alleged that Save Maimonides employed dishonest tactics and added, "We welcome engagement from all people of good faith who wish to work together to improve healthcare for our communities — but this campaign, which is trying to drive patients away from the hospital, is not the way to achieve anything constructive."

### **What happens next?**

Whether Northwell has the ability, capacity or willingness to absorb a hospital the size of Maimonides, and how long that process would take, are unclear. Northwell declined an eJP request for comment. But even if such a merger

were to happen, precedent suggests the timeline could be lengthy. Maimonides began partnering with New York Community Hospital in 2018, and the acquisition process took more than six months. The Department of Health told eJP that “The Department is not aware of or involved in efforts by any other hospital system to acquire Maimonides.”

The path forward is unclear — in part because Save Maimonides has broken with Felder. In August, Felder denounced the movement to the *Post*, saying, “The movement is not kosher. It’s absolutely a smear campaign.”

Felder declined an eJP request for comment. But another supporter of Save Maimonides, David Lichtenstein, addressed Felder’s comments at the Save Maimonides event last

month, saying that the hospital’s dismal rankings mean it has earned the group’s criticism.

“Does anybody here feel that they’re so [pitiful] that you deserve the 157th hospital?” said Lichtenstein, CEO of the Lightstone Group, a real estate company. “In the 157th row? That’s where, really, you want to sit? Like, in the bleachers? That’s what I would ask Simcha Felder.”

He added, “Our Jewish legal obligation is to look out for our brothers.”

Two other local officials, U.S. Rep. Yvette Clarke and State Sen. Kevin Parker, have both sent letters to the state Department of Health asking it to investigate Maimonides, according to the *Brooklyn Paper*. Clarke wrote, “Maimonides has essentially become stigmatized by New

Yorkers who require medical services and much needed medical attention as a ‘last resort’ medical center due to the unacceptable quality of care provided.”

Yeger and Eichenstein likewise did not respond to eJP requests for comment, though Yeger has been publicly critical of the hospital. Last month, he tweeted a *Post* article reporting on patient complaints at Maimonides, and in July objected to a Maimonides Instagram post that featured a man dressed up as a Hasidic Jew. The hospital deleted the post and apologized.

“Maimonides the person would be disgusted with Maimonides the hospital,” he wrote on Twitter. “@MaimoHealth should change its name if it can’t live by his values.” ♦

SEPTEMBER 8, 2022

## The social media exec pitching the metaverse to the world

*Meta ad chief Nicola Mendelsohn’s job is to pitch the company’s platforms to businesses around the world — and to her own Jewish community*

By Gabby Deutch

For many Jews, their relationship with their rabbis usually starts — and ends — at the doors of the synagogue.

Not so for Nicola Mendelsohn. The stalwart of the British Jewish community built close personal ties with Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis and his predecessor, Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks. Their outside-of-synagogue hangouts looked a little different than a study session or a Shabbat dinner: Mendelsohn, Meta’s ad chief, once took Sacks and Mirvis on a climbing trip. In the metaverse.

“If you reach up, it feels like you’re moving, and the imagery is going down. And in the same way as in real life, when you look up and down,” Mendelsohn told *Jewish Insider* in a recent Zoom interview from Herzliya Pituach, the coastal Israeli neighborhood where her family has a home. “It has exactly that same sort of feeling. And if you start to move around in the same way that you do in the real world, then you have that experience as well.” You don’t even need to grab onto anything, because Meta has developed “fantastic hand-tracking,” in Mendelsohn’s words.

As the vice president of Meta’s global sales group, Mendelsohn oversees the company’s advertising business, a massive portfolio that makes her the biggest booster of Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram and the company’s burgeoning metaverse-focused products like Oculus to businesses around the world — and to skeptics in her own communities who haven’t yet bought into the immersive augmented reality that Mendelsohn thinks everyone will soon be using.

“There are so many extraordinary Jewish places of interest in history around the world that so few people ever get to see, and yet the metaverse can now — will be able to unlock all those types of experiences for people, which I find very exciting,” said Mendelsohn, who came to Facebook after 20 years in the advertising industry.

What if, she explained, someone organized a metaverse tour of the synagogues of Europe? “Look to your left, look to your right, you’ll either have people you know, or people that you’re going into a group that you don’t know, and you’ll be able to converse together. You’ll be

able to listen to an informed expert,” she added. “You’ll be able to see these extraordinary things, and then be able to reflect on them afterwards.”

What about a virtual synagogue, with virtual prayer services? What if a teen has a bar mitzvah “twin” in another part of the world, and they celebrate the coming-of-age ceremony together? “Given how important the communal acts of coming together for people in the Jewish community are, then I think there’ll be some fantastic experiences,” she said.

And what if the metaverse could bring together people with rare diseases — like Mendelsohn, who is living with an incurable cancer — for immersive experiences and support groups, and put them in the same room as a philanthropist looking to fund a possible cure?

“When we start to imagine what it could look like, I think it’s important not to think about just what happens in the real world. But what could happen, what could exist in totally different ways as well?” she asked.

Mendelsohn’s remit at Meta is “enormously large,” said David Fischer, who spent 11



years as Facebook's chief revenue officer. "She is responsible, ultimately, for building relationships with businesses [and] executives around the world, and ultimately figuring out how Meta's tools can help those businesses grow — and in the process of doing that, serve the people on Meta's platforms, and ultimately, then, serving Meta by helping to grow its revenue and its business," explained Fischer.

Meta was a very different company when Mendelsohn, 51, joined nine years ago as vice president for Europe, Middle East and Asia. Back then, Facebook was still the business's primary product, although CEO Mark Zuckerberg had recently acquired the nascent photo-sharing app Instagram. He had not yet added WhatsApp, the messaging service now used by over 2 billion people worldwide, to Facebook's litany of services. The metaverse — the project that is now so critical to the company's operations that it changed its name last year to Meta — was perhaps best known as a science-fiction concept.

In Mendelsohn's first years at what was then Facebook, the Cambridge Analytica scandal that would alert many users to the company's suspect data-collection habits was still years away, and Facebook instead enjoyed a largely positive reputation; in 2011, an Egyptian baby born during the Arab Spring had been named "Facebook" in honor of the social network's role in the protest movement. Researchers had not yet begun to uncover the ways extremism and misinformation flourish on Meta's products.

The metaverse is not immune from those problems. Roblox, a popular virtual reality video game, came under fire earlier this year for offering users an experience at "Camp Concentration," a metaverse version of Nazi death camps. (Roblox has no association with Meta.)

"We absolutely don't want that on our platforms," Mendelsohn said, citing the company's figures that it has spent \$16 billion on platform safety in recent years. "I do think there can sometimes be a misunderstanding about this. We want people, when they come onto our platforms, to be having a good time, to be connecting with their friends, to be connecting with their families."

In recent years, the company has faced scrutiny from government officials, journalists and nonprofits for not doing enough to confront problems like hate speech and extremist content — and for developing algorithms that promote that content. "The suggestion that 'We have

spent so much money, and we've hired so many people, and therefore we're good,' I mean, that's not a sufficient answer," said Jonathan Greenblatt, CEO of the Anti-Defamation League, which in recent years has made a push for greater scrutiny of social media platforms. "The product should be redesigned to ensure that it creates an experience, which, again, I think, is safe for everyone, let alone society."

As an advertising executive, Mendelsohn isn't in charge of making those changes herself — but she needs to be able to speak about them to business owners in a persuasive way that could assuage their concerns about brand safety.

"All of them deserve answers to their questions and need to understand who they're partnering with," explained Fischer. "But that also creates a huge need to make sure that you're focused not just on the narrower business relationship, but the broader sense of what each partner and what each company is working on [and] stands for. And that means being prepared to answer questions about any of these issues, particularly [as there is] more attention and questions that are being asked out there, be it in the press, be it by governments. Nicola and her teams need to be prepared and in my experience are prepared to answer questions."

After stepping into her new position last fall, Mendelsohn relocated to New York City earlier this year. For the first time in her life, the Shabbat-observant executive is putting down roots far from the tight-knit British Jewish community in which she was raised, and in which she raised her four children.

Her first full day as a resident of New York City was a Friday. Awash in the array of synagogues and Judaica shops and kosher bakeries that dot the streets of Manhattan, Mendelsohn went to the gift shop of the Jewish Museum for candlesticks and a challah cover. The family is still settling on a synagogue.

"There's so many shuls that it's actually a bit overwhelming, and because of COVID — we were regular shul-goers in the world before COVID — we haven't actually landed on a shul yet," Mendelsohn said. "I'm definitely open for recommendations in the Midtown area."

Mendelsohn grew up in Manchester, the daughter of kosher caterers. She didn't attend a Jewish school, and in the winter months would leave early on Fridays to be home in time for Shabbat, a practice she continues at Meta.

"We had a couple of teachers that would always insist on starting the new topics on

a Friday afternoon," she said on a podcast interview in August. "With hindsight, I think there was probably some antisemitism that I experienced at school."

In London, where Mendelsohn had lived for her entire adult life, she was active at her family's synagogue. Mendelsohn's husband, Lord Jonathan Mendelsohn, a member of the House of Lords, brought Jewish themes to his work, too; he once served as chairman of Labour Friends of Israel. Together, they serve as co-presidents of Norwood, a Jewish charity that supports vulnerable children in the U.K.

"It's just wonderful, just seeing a generation develop in the way that she has done," said Lord Michael Levy, a *macher* in the British Jewish community who has held several senior positions in the Labour Party, including nine years as former Prime Minister Tony Blair's special envoy to the Middle East. Levy has known the Mendelsohns since they were young, and he recalled that the couple stayed briefly at his home in Israel nearly 30 years ago, before they continued on to Jerusalem, where they got engaged.

At Meta, Mendelsohn has built ties with Jewish employees several notches below her in seniority through a Jewish employee affinity group. It "can be anything from posting a Hanukkah photo and wishing Happy Hanukkah or Sukkot, to something much more substantial," said Jordana Cutler, Meta's public policy director for Israel and the Jewish diaspora. "If there's an antisemitic attack in a city where we have employees, Nicola is one of the first to reach out to ensure people are OK."

In Mendelsohn's previous position overseeing Europe, Middle East and Asia, she made frequent trips to Israel. A few months into the new gig, she announced — on a trip where she also met with former Israeli President Shimon Peres — that Facebook would open its first research and development center outside of the U.S. in Israel. "I announced, I was like, 'Within the year I'm going to open the office in Israel,'" she recalled. "To see the offices on Rothschild, and in Sarona [Market], being an absolute beating heart of the tech scene here now, and that connection with all those unicorn companies that weren't unicorn companies when I met them nine years ago, they were fledgling ideas, visions, and to see that growth, that's been particularly extraordinary."

It helps that Mendelsohn can throw in some "todahs" and "shaloms" to earn the trust

of Israelis. “I would say that Israelis really relate to that, when people know the country and understand it. She has words of Hebrew that she sprinkles in,” said Cutler.

Over the past five years, Mendelsohn has been living with an incurable cancer called follicular lymphoma, described by the Cleveland Clinic as a “slow-growing condition that’s considered a chronic illness.”

“The diagnosis was a complete shock. I was fit and healthy and I didn’t even feel ill,” Mendelsohn wrote in *Marie Claire* in 2019. “It isn’t like other cancers, where you immediately go into a grueling treatment regime. It’s a slow-growing cancer, so patients can go for long periods without treatment and can have long gaps between treatments too.”

She has long been active philanthropically, and in the wake of her diagnosis, she started the Follicular Lymphoma Foundation to

raise money to research a cure for the poorly understood disease.

“What became clear as I went on my own learning journey, and this was a learning journey as a patient, was as a disease, it was one that not many people knew about, and that didn’t have a lot of funding behind it,” Mendelsohn explained. “The key things are you need a bit of awareness, and you need the cash in order to kind of push it on.”

The foundation hopes to be a major player in American medical research on the disease. Next month, it will announce the recipients of a grant program that will award \$500,000 to institutions studying follicular lymphoma. A fourth-quarter fundraising campaign last year raised \$2.5 million from 6,000 donors, according to information provided by the foundation.

Mendelsohn, always ready to boost her business, argued that philanthropy can have a

place in the metaverse, too. Through a Facebook group, she has connected with more than 9,000 other people living with follicular lymphoma. What if they could get together in the metaverse?

“If we wanted to be able to have a hangout, and come together, we would be able to do that in a much more immersive way,” she noted. “Then imagine if there’s a philanthropist that’s interested in this cause. They could come and they could actually see and talk and feel that experience of what it is like to be able to live with a disease like that, and then what could be done as a result.”

Nothing like that exists yet. “I’m just shooting from the breeze,” Mendelsohn admitted. But that’s her job: Convincing businesses, big and small, urban and rural, foreign and domestic, that things will go better for them if they advertise on Meta’s platforms. Meta clearly agrees. ♦