

THE WEEKLY PRINT

U.K. Chief Rabbi Mirvis reflects on his historic trip to the UAE; Democratic senators speak out on Shireen Abu Akleh FBI investigation; A rabbi who has dedicated his career to Catholic-Jewish relations will be knighted by the Vatican; How Rufus Gifford, Washington's chief of protocol, leverages the 'power to convene' to help advance foreign policy; Dani Shapiro's 'Signal Fires' flickers between past and present bonds between Jewish families; Survey finds that Jewish organizations have sexual misconduct policies, but many need more training; and The Jewish Social Justice Roundtable is running its first Israel trip, in a bid to address tensions.

NOVEMBER 16, 2022

U.K. Chief Rabbi Mirvis reflects on his historic trip to the UAE

"I was continuously pinching myself — 'is this really happening,'" Mirvis said

By Tamara Zieve

When Britain's Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis saw the Arabic writing on the plane that would fly him from London Heathrow to Abu Dhabi Airport last week, the weight of the moment truly sank in. Not only was it his first time traveling to a country in the Middle East other than Israel, but he was making history as the first U.K. chief rabbi to make an official visit to an Arab country.

"I'd previously flown through Dubai airport and transferred to Australia, but to actually be part of the Arabic culture, to be welcomed by them and be treated in a royal way — they went out of their way to show acceptance and warmth and I certainly welcome that enormously, because that is a sure sign that that's where they want their society to be going in terms of attitude towards the Jewish people," Mirvis told *Jewish Insider* in a phone interview on Tuesday from Bucharest, where he was participating in a Conference of European

Rabbis standing committee meeting.

"I was continuously pinching myself — 'is this really happening,'" Mirvis said. His dream is that visits of this kind will become a new type of normal, and he is confident that it will happen soon.

Mirvis had been hoping to make a trip of this kind "for a good while," and asserted that "if not for COVID, it would have happened some time before."

"I have been cultivating connections and relationships within global Muslim leadership over a number of years," he said. "And certainly the Abraham Accords provided that window of opportunity, not just for me to engage personally with Muslim faith leaders, but well beyond that — to be welcomed very warmly officially to the UAE for the Abu Dhabi Forum for Peace, to participate and be prominently featured in that, plus engagement with the countries political leaders and of course having a chance to meet with the growing Jewish

communities in Abu Dhabi and Dubai."

During the three days he spent in the Gulf, Mirvis delivered an address to the conference, engaged in the activities of the forum, met with Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan and had lunch at the home of Minister of Tolerance Nahyan bin Mubarak Al Nahyan. "It's the only country in the world which has a minister of tolerance," Mirvis noted.

The chief rabbi also held discussions with Sheikh Abdallah bin Bayyah, the founder and president of the Abu Dhabi Forum for Peace, and the Riyadh-based Secretary General of the Muslim World League Muhammad bin Abdul Karim Issa.

"Those engagements were very significant, warm, very welcoming," Mirvis remarked. "And then of course, engaging with members of the Jewish community in Abu Dhabi and Dubai. There was a sense of genuine warmth, a sense of thrill. We are still now going through a period of firsts, so I had

a small role to play in being the first chief rabbi to visit an Arab country and appearing before the forum was definitely a significant first.”

Mirvis heard from both political and faith leaders that there is an earnest desire for the Abraham Accords to spread to other countries in the region.

“Obviously, the big question relates to Saudi Arabia, which would be the ultimate game-changer,” Mirvis said, remarking that it was a common talking point that came up in many of his conversations. “The general feeling was that it is a matter of time, some suggesting sooner and some later.”

Jewish-Muslim interfaith dialogue was the focus of the conversations he held with the Emirati ministers, he said, and how such efforts can be further developed after the Abraham Accords opened a window.

“One of my key messages was that what’s taking place at what I call the top of the pyramid needs to filter down to a grassroots level, that must be a priority for us worldwide,” Mirvis said, noting that he also discussed this topic when he met with Pope Francis in Rome.

“I am delighted to report that world faith leaders in general enjoy a very good

and healthy relationship but that the ultimate challenge must be to guarantee that the followers of our faith engage in similar fashion,” Mirvis stressed. “We shouldn’t underestimate the power of the image of faith leaders engaging, it sends out an exceptionally positive message, it is internalized and I have no doubt that it has positive consequences. But at the same time we need to have deeper conversations, we need to tackle some of the more thorny and challenging issues because it’s the only way in which we will genuinely have any chance to shape hearts and minds of the future.”

Having spent the anniversary of Kristallnacht, which marks the date in 1938 when hundreds of synagogues and shops were destroyed by the Nazis, in the UAE, Mirvis reflected on a positive trend in the country: encouraging the growth of its Jewish community and opening more synagogues.

One of those synagogues will stand next to a church and a mosque in the Abrahamic Family House interfaith complex in Abu Dhabi, which is due to open in February, and which will also house an educational center. Mirvis said the center will “certainly enhance the engagement of world faith

leaders and is likely to serve as a pivotal and central stage for interfaith activities to happen in the future.”

“In a world which is veering toward the extremes, it is so refreshing to find a society going out of its way to speak about tolerance and trying its utmost to have a more moderate religious stance,” Mirvis remarked.

This effort for inclusion and tolerance can also be found in the culinary arena. The highlight of Mirvis’s trip to the top of Dubai’s Burj Khalifa, the tallest building in the world, was the experience of having a meal at the site’s “glorious” kosher restaurant on the ground floor.

“We collectively are on a very exciting journey and at the beginning of a wonderful development which, please G-d, will not only benefit our relationships in the UAE and other countries engaged in the Abraham Accords, but right across the region and please G-d we will see some wonderful developments from this.”

Asked whether he already has plans for another trip of this kind, or perhaps a reciprocal visit, Mirvis chuckled, before saying: “watch this space.” ♦

NOVEMBER 16, 2022

Democratic senators speak out on Shireen Abu Akleh FBI investigation

Menendez, Van Hollen tread carefully in response to questions about the investigation’s implications for U.S.-Israel relations

By Marc Rod

Two Senate Democrats responded to reports on Tuesday that the Department of Justice has opened an independent investigation into the killing of Palestinian-American journalist

Shireen Abu Akleh, treading carefully as they addressed questions about the investigation’s implications for U.S.-Israel relations.

The DoJ reportedly notified the Israeli

government of the investigation on Monday. The U.S. security coordinator for Israel and the Palestinian Authority concluded in a July report that the bullet that killed Abu Akleh while she was reporting in

the West Bank in May was likely fired unintentionally from an Israeli position, but did not reach a definitive conclusion. The Israeli government concluded that an Israeli soldier likely fired the shot by mistake.

"If [the administration] made that determination [to open an investigation], then obviously it's a pursuit of whatever the information is to come to a conclusion," Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Bob Menendez (D-NJ) told *Jewish Insider* yesterday.

Menendez criticized the administration's handling of the case earlier this year, urging President Joe Biden to seek "accountability." Speaking to JI on Tuesday, he praised Israel's investigation.

"The Israelis have already done an investigation. I think it's a rather transparent investigation," Menendez said. "I think they have issued their findings with the

Americans, but, of course, as a U.S. citizen, the FBI has every right to conduct its own."

Menendez said it's "for Israel to decide" whether to participate in the inquiry.

Israeli officials have said publicly that they will not cooperate with the new U.S. probe. The administration has not publicly confirmed the investigation and the Justice Department did not respond to a request for comment. The State Department referred an inquiry to the Justice Department.

Sen. Chris Van Hollen (D-MD), who praised the news of the investigation on Monday, told JI that Israel's refusal to cooperate is "a disappointment," but expressed hope that the Justice Department would nonetheless continue its investigation. Van Hollen led the push among Senate Democrats earlier this year for an FBI investigation into the case — a proposal the administration declined at the

time.

Asked whether he sees a path to resolve the situation and achieve accountability without damaging the U.S.-Israel relationship, Menendez responded that "Transparency is the most important thing. All the information, giving it light — that's the best way to get [accountability]."

Van Hollen gave a similar answer.

"You would hope that everybody would like to get to the truth," the Maryland senator said. "So that's the bottom line."

The report also sparked a response from Sen. Ted Cruz (R-TX), who issued a statement on Tuesday calling the alleged investigation an "outrage" and said that "everyone involved," including Attorney General Merrick Garland, "should be fired or impeached." ♦

NOVEMBER 17, 2022

A rabbi who has dedicated his career to Catholic-Jewish relations will be knighted by the Vatican

Rabbi A. James Rudin began working for the AJC in 1968, just three years after the Second Vatican Council concluded.

By Ben Sales

The article first appeared in eJewishPhilanthropy.

In 1988, Jews in Austria and beyond protested when Pope John Paul II visited the country and met with its president, Kurt Waldheim, a former Nazi soldier who had taken part in the deportation of Jews to Auschwitz.

For Rabbi A. James Rudin, then the American Jewish Committee's director

of interreligious affairs, the trip posed a challenge — a setback in what was then a two-decade-long career dedicated to advancing Jewish-Catholic relations.

But despite the painful spectacle — compounded by the pope declining to reference Jews when visiting the Mauthausen concentration camp — Rudin saw a silver lining: He and his allies in the Catholic Church convinced the pope not to visit Mauthausen together with Waldheim —

which would have been, he felt, an especially egregious act. And he felt reassured when he was joined in his lobbying of John Paul II by a close friend: John Cardinal O'Connor, the archbishop of New York.

Five years later, that friendship bore fruit again: O'Connor was "very instrumental," Rudin told *eJewishPhilanthropy*, in persuading the pope to establish diplomatic relations with Israel in 1993.

"Cardinal O'Connor and I worked very

hard to explain to the people at the Vatican... that if he wanted to go, the pope should go alone without the president of Austria accompanying him” to Mauthausen, Rudin, 88, told eJP this month. “So that was part of our work.”

To Rudin, the Austria incident, and what followed, exemplified his mission over a half-century of interfaith work: to shape a new era in Jewish-Catholic relations — pushing through crises and celebrating breakthroughs in a sometimes difficult quest to create greater understanding. On Sunday, in recognition of his work, Rudin is being honored with the Papal Knighthood of the Order of St. Gregory the Great — only the third rabbi in history to receive the designation. He’ll be knighted at Saint Leo University in Florida, where he co-founded the Center for Catholic-Jewish Studies.

“We are all blessed by Rabbi Rudin’s achievements in promoting dialogue and collaboration among communities of different faiths,” Cardinal Sean Patrick O’Malley of Boston, who will bestow the honor on Rudin, said in a statement. “The impact of this work continues to grow as successive generations build on the foundation Rabbi Rudin has established.”

Rudin began working for the AJC in 1968, just three years after the Second Vatican Council concluded, transforming Catholic belief, liturgy and practice. Most significantly for Jews, Vatican II included *Nostra Aetate*, a declaration by the Church affirming that Jews were not responsible for the death of Jesus — overturning centuries of Catholic teaching — and adopting an attitude of “mutual understanding and respect” toward Jews and people of other religions. Some Jewish groups and their Catholic peers welcomed the declaration as an open door toward dialogue and bridge-building.

“There was an excitement, as there would be with any revolution,” Rudin told eJP. “There was a feeling that, at long last, antisemitism and anti-Judaism were being confronted by the Roman Catholic Church... We were very optimistic but we also knew that trying to change the course of history between Jews and Catholics would be very difficult because of these 1,900 years of mutual suspicion.”

Rudin grew up internalizing the value

of coexistence. As a child in Alexandria, Va., he said, he felt that both Jews and Catholics were minorities in a largely Protestant town, “so we were, in a way, all bound together.” Later, after receiving rabbinic ordination at Hebrew Union College, the Reform seminary, he served as a U.S. Air Force chaplain in Japan and Korea — a position that compelled clergy of different religions to share space and resources.

“In the military, at least overseas, we all had to pull together,” he said. “You couldn’t just be off on your own.”

Rudin retired from his position at the AJC in 2000. Where interfaith work particularly remains to be done, he said, is in dispelling stereotypes from rank-and-file Jews and Catholics, especially in light of rising antisemitism. Although the United States is becoming more secular, Rudin said, nonreligious people who grew up in a Catholic milieu may still be susceptible to traditional Catholic anti-Jewish prejudice. The same may be true, he said, for secular Jews.

“In the atmosphere and the teaching, and in the 2,000 years of tradition, there has been built-in animosity toward Jews and Judaism,” he said. “Even if a person doesn’t go to church... that doesn’t mean they don’t have in their heads certain feelings they’ve inherited... It doesn’t really matter whether [someone] goes to church or goes to synagogue. They’ve inherited in the culture, unfortunately, certain opinions, tropes, and that’s what we have to deal with.”

Rudin’s knighthood comes at a time of resurgent conservative Catholicism in the United States. The U.S. Catholic bishops’ conference just elected a conservative, Oklahoma City Archbishop Paul Coakley, as one of its top officials. And celebration of the Latin Mass has spiked in the United States — a choice Pope Francis said may indicate opposition to Vatican II more broadly. But Rudin said such debates are for Catholics to resolve internally.

“This struggle that’s going on inside the Catholic Church, of course that’s for Catholics to settle,” he said. “I hope it does not slow down or impede... the relationships we’ve built. It’s like building a bridge... It can get knocked down. Bridges have to be sturdy enough.”

He added, “Catholics and Jews who have

this long, long, long, often bitter history — if they can begin the process of reconciliation, begin the process of mutual respect, of listening to each other, understanding each other... if we can do it, then it’s a model, I think, for other groups.” ♦

How Rufus Gifford, Washington's chief of protocol, leverages the 'power to convene' to help advance foreign policy

The former ambassador to Denmark discusses his current job and how he's used 'soft power' to help America on the global stage

By **Tori Bergel**

To Ambassador Rufus Gifford, chief of protocol for the U.S., the most important aspect of foreign policy is human relations. Building bridges between countries, he says, is the “backbone” of diplomacy, a mission he’s oriented his career around.

“In essence, we’re the primary liaison between foreign governments and the Biden administration,” Gifford said of his current position during a recent interview with Jewish Insider’s “Limited Liability Podcast” co-hosts Rich Goldberg and Jarrod Bernstein. “We try to create an environment in which diplomacy can thrive.”

Gifford likes to get creative when it comes to throwing events, utilizing some of the presidency’s more VIP venues, including the Blair House, the president’s official guest house, which Gifford also oversees.

“The power to convene, the power to bring people together in these remarkable venues, there’s so much value in that, and it’s something that I think we overlook or we don’t think about enough. So when I think about the spectacular venues, and for those of you who have not been to Blair House, it is...one of the most beautiful, beautiful buildings that the U.S. government owns, and as far as I’m concerned, that should be shared,” Gifford told JI. “So we’re going to try to think about this a little differently, try to open it up and share it with our foreign guests, and use it as an opportunity to really advance Biden administration foreign policy by utilizing that sort of the soft power that comes inherently in many ways with doing an event at Blair House.”

That power of convening extends to a range of communities. On Oct. 12, Gifford

helped to put on the first-ever Sukkot celebration at Blair House, complete with an on-site sukkah.

“We had this idea to partner with the special envoy to combat antisemitism [Deborah Lipstadt] and her office to...not just try to preach to the converted [about the work she and her team are doing] — which I think is oftentimes such the mistake that we make in government, is that we’re oftentimes just talking to the same people that agree with us anyway — so how can we think about this a little bit different? But how can we also do it in a way that’s a little bit softer, how can we celebrate over a meal? How can we enjoy ourselves while having a substantive conversation? And that’s where this all came from,” Gifford explained. “So we built the sukkah outside, we got Doug Emhoff, the second gentleman, to come, in addition to the special envoy to combat antisemitism, the ambassador-at-large for religious freedom at State [Rashad Hussain], as well as most [of] the ambassadors we invited were potentially not the ones you’d expect. It wasn’t just the Israeli ambassador, who of course was there with his spouse, but also mostly Arab state ambassadors, and many of whom had never been to an event like this, had never stood under a sukkah before.”

“And we had this conversation and we had this debate and it wasn’t about necessarily just getting a public diplomacy message out there, that was part [of it], but it was also about advancing a larger Biden administration narrative about the rise of antisemitism in the world, both frankly at home and abroad, and what we can do as the global community to fight it,” he added.

“It was a very thoughtful and positive event, and we got to eat some delicious food and learn a little bit about a holiday that, over the course of my life I had had one meal, one Sukkot meal, but I learned a little something and I think we advanced American foreign policy at the same time and that’s pretty damn exciting.”

Gifford’s team also put on the first-ever Pride event at Blair House and, like with Sukkot, made sure the guest list included dignitaries on both sides of the conversation.

“We didn’t just invite, you know, the Brits and the Canadians and the Dutch and the Scandinavians, [we] invited countries from around the world who may not be all the way there as it relates to LGBT equality,” Gifford said. “We want to try to advance this, these arguments, we want to try to push them and we want to try to get people to think about them differently.”

“Those are the kinds of things that I want to do, and I want to do them in a way that does not feel sterile, it does not feel stale, and we can actually create a little bit of joy in the process,” he added.

Luckily for Gifford, stale and sterile have never been in his nature. During former President Barack Obama’s second term, Gifford was named the U.S. ambassador to Denmark, and, in a unique strategy to further foreign policy, became the subject of a Danish reality TV show — Gifford prefers the term “documentary series” — “I am the Ambassador.”

“It is easily the most unexpected thing that has happened to me over the course of my professional life,” Gifford attested.

“When I arrived in Denmark, which was the end of 2013, what I learned really

quickly is that there was a whole generation of Europeans, and largely sort of left-leaning Europeans, that had lost interest or trust in the transatlantic relationship led by the United States,” he said. “What I really wanted to try to do is engage a new generation of Europeans and try to talk about American diplomacy in a way that they would listen and not just preach to the choir.”

The show, Gifford added, humanized his

role in a way that helped the Danes feel more comfortable with him.

“I believe it helped advance American foreign policy at the time, because of our ability to connect with the public and make people in general fond of the work that we were doing in Copenhagen,” Gifford said.

Similarly, in his current role as chief of protocol, Gifford believes in the importance of finding and creating those joyful moments

that bring people together even if they don’t directly help to advance American foreign policy.

“I believe this is partly a mandate of mine in this job, so I will continue to try to find those little moments over the course of this. It might not be a reality TV show, but I think you can do it in different ways.” ♦

NOVEMBER 17, 2022

Dani Shapiro’s ‘Signal Fires’ flickers between past and present bonds between Jewish families

The memoirist’s return to fiction after a 15-year hiatus explores the relationships between two families tied together by tragedy

By Madison Hahamy

Dani Shapiro’s newest book, *Signal Fires*, was almost never written.

It languished in an office closet for 15 years, until pandemic-induced boredom led Shapiro to clean out her office and find the manuscript, which then contained around 100 pages. Now, the novel that almost never existed, Shapiro’s first work of fiction in 15 years, is a national bestseller.

It’s fitting that Shapiro rediscovered *Signal Fires* during the pandemic. The book, which flits between members of two interconnected families in the aftermath of a 1985 car crash, is filled with 2020-specific references, from face masks and Zoom school to moments of applause for health workers — while also emphasizing the importance of human connection.

“We experience time as marching

inexorably forward, but we’re not living that way. We’re dragging our pasts along with us,” she said of the decision to include both the recent reality of the pandemic and the flashbacks into the childhoods of the various characters. “We’re imagining the future. We’re always in this kind of place of multiplicity.”

Shapiro, who moved to rural Connecticut from New York City before rediscovering the *Signal Fires* manuscript, also sees her family’s relocation as helping to tease out the spirituality of the work, which she says is not about “God as in the guy with the beard and the sky kind of way, but in a way that really sort of permeates our ethics and our actions and the way that we live our lives.”

The move from city to country allowed Shapiro to see a clear night sky for the first time, she said, which led to the cosmos

becoming an essential part of the book — they captivate 11-year-old Waldo Shankman, whose interest in astronomy is what first links him to Ben Wilf, the patriarch of the Wilf family. The two characters and their connection, Shapiro said, are the center of the story.

“The sense that they were important to each other was just something that I wanted to explore. Like why were they important to each other, what was the nature of their friendship and what would it be over time?” she added.

The book is also influenced by the author’s own Jewish identity. Shapiro, who grew up in an Orthodox household, had previously written a *New York Times* bestselling novel, *Inheritance*, about learning that her biological father was actually a non-Jewish sperm donor. Growing up, Shapiro’s

blonde hair and blue eyes meant that she often heard from others that she “didn’t look Jewish,” comments that oftentimes led to her focus her writing on her Jewish identity. “I wanted people to know that I was Jewish before they could say something that I might not want to hear,” she added.

Signal Fires is different.

“To me, it is a very Jewish book that doesn’t announce itself as such,” Shapiro said. “It really was a feeling of wanting the Jewishness to simply be embedded in this family.”

Though the book is not centered around any explicitly Jewish event, it still contains many references to Judaism as both a religion and a culture. Both families, for example, are Jewish, and Shapiro writes about Ben Wilf’s childhood in a Jewish, immigrant neighborhood in Brooklyn. Sarah, one of the siblings, struggles with *lashon hara* — idle gossip — and joins a

synagogue. Shabbat dinners are a frequent occurrence. The characters are also constantly thinking through and struggling with the idea of wholeness and with how to repair the world, ideas that Shapiro considers inherently Jewish.

Shapiro also chose to not discuss incidents of antisemitism in the book, though she says that antisemitism was a constant feature of her childhood due to growing up in a majority “blue blood WASPy” neighborhood, as well as her not conventionally Jewish phenotype.

“You can’t inject something as massive as antisemitism into the delicate structure of a novel unless you’re ready to absolutely make it about that,” she said. “I mean, it’s something I think about every day, but it wasn’t something that felt like it belonged in this story of these characters at these moments in their lives.”

Even so, Shapiro says that the embedded

Jewishness is political in and of itself, referencing a recent question from a Jewish reader who asked why the families are eating *treyf*, or not kosher.

“And I haven’t answered that question yet because she was basically saying, ‘What are people going to think?’ And I’m like, ‘What are people going to think?’”

That question, of how Jewish people belong to a world outside of a Jewish context, is at the heart of *Signal Fires*, even if the book does not, as Shapiro said, announce itself as such.

“Jewishness is threaded through every idea that I have, everything that I am,” she said. “The way that I talk, the way that I think, the songs that go through my mind, the way that I feel on the holidays. I saw these characters as very much being like that.” ♦

NOVEMBER 16, 2022

Survey finds that Jewish organizations have sexual misconduct policies, but many need more training

Less than 60% of organizations that responded to the SRE Network say the people tasked with investigating complaints are properly qualified to do so.

By Ben Sales

The article first appeared in [eJewishPhilanthropy](#).

A large chunk of Jewish organizations that are members of a network dedicated to combating sexual misconduct feel they don’t do a good enough job communicating their reporting and

response procedures to staff. And nearly half feel that the people tasked with investigating complaints at their organizations are not sufficiently trained.

Those are two takeaways from a just-published survey by the SRE Network, whose name stands for Safety, Respect, Equity, an organization that combats gender-

based harassment and discrimination at Jewish workplaces. The network has a budget of \$3 million and nearly 160 member organizations — schools, camps, synagogues and other institutions — 136 of which filled out the survey. SRE provided *eJewishPhilanthropy* with an early look at the results.

The survey asked executives or board chairs at the organizations, 107 of which had six or more employees, to rate their organizations on the presence of policies regarding sexual misconduct, fair pay and anti-discrimination; how those policies work; and how and whether they're communicated to the staff. The respondents gave their organizations two points if they answered "yes" to a question, one point for "somewhat" and zero for "no."

Nearly all large organizational respondents said that they have established policies and reporting and response mechanisms for complaints of discrimination and harassment. The vast majority of organizations say they have multiple channels for filing complaints, and regularly survey their employees regarding the workplace climate.

But only 55% say that they regularly communicate reporting and response procedures to their staff. Similar percentages say that their hiring and promotion policies are sufficiently accessible and that they train their employees on the organization's reporting mechanism.

Just under 60% say the people tasked with investigating complaints are sufficiently qualified to do so. SRE's executive director, Elana Wien, told eJP that many Jewish groups don't have human resources departments, and that the network felt that lack of training was widespread enough to warrant a special program for its member organizations to ameliorate the issue.

"The person within an organization who's tasked with looking into complaints around discrimination and harassment — it's very rare that they actually are trained in that area," Wien told eJP. "So it's unusual for them to receive training at their organization, but it's also rare for them to have been trained prior to coming to the organization."

She added, "It's important to have these policies that your whole workforce understands. But if an individual experiences something and comes forward to try to report that to the appropriate person internally, and that person isn't trained, then that's obviously not going to be effective."

Despite those shortcomings, Wien said she came away from the report with a positive impression. The survey shows, she

said, that establishing clear policies around harassment and discrimination has become part of the culture of the Jewish nonprofit sector.

In addition to more than 85% of respondents saying their organizations have a policy, a robust reporting mechanism and an investigation process, Wien pointed to the recent employee survey by Leading Edge, which found that 83% of respondents said their organization has a sexual harassment policy, and 93% know what to do if it is violated.

"They're taking concrete action steps to make improvements," she said regarding the organizational leaders who filled out the SRE survey. "This is not just about lip service. It's actually making tangible improvements within these workplaces."

Although the survey is essentially asking the heads of organizations to evaluate their own compliance with SRE's standards, a spokesperson for SRE noted that most of the questions ask for objective responses, such as whether a policy is in place or if trainings occur. And Shira Berkovits, a behavioral psychologist and CEO of Sacred Spaces, a Jewish group that combats sexual abuse, said self-assessments are still useful because they lead respondents to hold themselves to account, though they shouldn't be the only way groups evaluate their processes.

"Self-reporting, or self-monitoring, is considered its own form of intervention to create behavioral change," she told eJP, adding that such surveys "can be incredibly valuable in that they create a frequency with which organizations are pausing to do this internal self-assessment... and to take a look and review: 'Where are we on these measures?'"

The fact that, across questions, most organizations had an equivalent or higher rating than in last year's survey is a particularly good sign, Wien said, given the workplace disruptions of the COVID-19 era. The Leading Edge survey found that most employees do not work full-time at an office with their colleagues, and that one-third of respondents have been working at their organizations for less than two years.

"A lot of organizations right now are understaffed, they have a lot of openings, there's a lot of shifting happening," she said. "One might think in that context an

organizational leader is going to prioritize filling the gaps in terms of delivering service, and [would] kind of put these issues to the side. The fact that this is what's getting reflected in the survey shows that this is continuing to be a key priority." ♦

The Jewish Social Justice Roundtable is running its first Israel trip, in a bid to address tensions

The goal is to introduce the Jewish social justice activists to their Israeli and Palestinian counterparts on the ground and familiarize them with progressive activism in the region.

By Ben Sales

The article first appeared in eJewishPhilanthropy.

For some progressive American Jewish groups that are focused on domestic issues, the go-to approach to Israel in recent years has been to say as little as possible. But as discussions about Israel in progressive circles have become increasingly fraught, discourse about the Jewish state has sometimes drawn in even those who sought to avoid it.

In June, the service group Avodah drew backlash when it hired, then fired, a social media staffer who posted harsh anti-Zionist tweets that were deemed by some to be antisemitic. Last year, hundreds of Avodah alumni called on it to boycott Israel, and dozens of non-Orthodox rabbinical students signed a letter accusing Israel of apartheid. And a year ago, the Sunrise Movement said it would boycott a rally for voting rights “due to the participation of a number of Zionist organizations” including the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, the National Council of Jewish Women and the Jewish Council on Public Affairs.

More broadly, accusations of anti-Zionism and antisemitism have surrounded large progressive movements from the Women’s March to Black Lives Matter.

Now, *eJewishPhilanthropy* has learned, the Jewish Social Justice Roundtable, a coalition of 80 U.S. Jewish groups, is leading its first-ever member delegation to Israel, beginning last night and lasting for eight days. The goal is to introduce the Jewish

social justice activists to their Israeli and Palestinian counterparts on the ground and familiarize them with progressive activism in the region so that they’re better equipped to respond next time they become embroiled in a controversy about Israel.

“This trip is really about moving from avoidance to engagement,” Abby Levine, the roundtable’s CEO, told eJP. “The Jewish social justice field has for many years avoided the issues around Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories because it’s so divisive, and because there’s so much risk involved, and because it hasn’t been the primary focus of our Jewish social justice organizations [which] focus on a domestic justice agenda.”

The roundtable’s leadership would not reveal key details of the trip — including the organizations participating, the funders or the exact itinerary. But Levine did tell eJP that the trip has 28 participants representing 23 organizations — more than a quarter of the roundtable’s affiliates. The CEOs of a few organizations have said they’re on the trip, including Sheila Katz of the National Council of Jewish Women, Idit Klein of the Jewish LGBTQ organization Keshet and Rabbi Jill Jacobs of the liberal rabbinic human rights organization T’ruah.

Many participants have been to Israel before and engage regularly with the country, but for a handful, this is their first trip. The trip costs \$260,000 in total and is funded by private donors. The roundtable’s total annual budget is roughly \$1 million.

The New Israel Fund, which supports

progressive activism in Israel, is helping organize the trip, and participants will be visiting Israeli and Palestinian groups in Israel and the West Bank. The group will meet with activists ranging from Haredi feminists in the Jerusalem neighborhood of Mea Shearim to Mizrahi activists to Palestinian businesspeople. The itinerary in Israel will be centered geographically around Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. Levine did not say which Palestinian areas the group would be visiting.

“We’re trying to kind of add that layer of understanding that there is a sector of justice seekers and justice leaders here in Israel and in Palestine who are pushing back against those harmful narratives,” Libby Lenkinski, NIF’s vice president for public engagement, who is taking part in the trip, told eJP. Part of the goal, she added, is to “just make those connections so that when these things happen, we can actually call up the person that we met that does labor organizing in Tel Aviv, or the Palestinian peace activist who started an organic farm.”

One thing the trip will not be doing, Levine said, is making proactive efforts to engage with supporters of the incoming Israeli government, which will almost certainly be headed by Benjamin Netanyahu and include Jewish Power, a far-right party. The trip was planned before the election took place.

“The purpose is for changemakers in the U.S. to meet with their peers... and [to hear] how social change activists here are thinking about making change for racial justice and

economic justice and in terms of the conflict while also being citizens of this land,” she said. “Our folks who are coming on this trip live in a country where millions of people voted for Donald Trump as president and we don’t necessarily focus our energies in thinking about that whole world.”

Gidi Grinstein, the founder and president of Reut USA, which also focuses on fostering Israeli-Palestinian social entrepreneurship, said that a potential benefit of American Jewish social justice leaders meeting their Israeli counterparts could be seeing how efforts for social change in Israel often cut across demographics and political camps. Grinstein, who is not involved with the trip, said meeting with right-wingers as well as

left-wingers is crucial to getting a complete picture of the sector.

“When people come out here, what they will see is, the politics have obviously veered very much to the right, but on the ground, the partnerships and the collaborations are crisscrossing Israeli society,” he said. “All of them are working across the different demographic sectors.”

He later added, “If they’re not seeing anybody who supports Bibi Netanyahu, that would be a mistake... It will deny the social entrepreneurs who are coming from the United States the ability to see that there are social activists across the political spectrum... that societal ingenuity and entrepreneurship is not the domain of the

left, not in Israel, not in America. It’s equally spread across society.”

Lenkinski said the trip is also not meant as a direct rebuttal to proponents of the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement against Israel, known as BDS. But she hopes it will help participants feel more confident in understanding and engaging with Israeli politics, and figuring out what in that political discourse is acceptable to them.

“They’re also a real place where real people live,” she said regarding Israel and the West Bank. “Real social justice leaders and activists are breaking taboos, fighting for justice all the time.” ♦