

## THE WEEKLY PRINT

*Inside the Shabbat dinner at Davos; Daniel Gordis' blunt message at AIPAC's confab; Third time's the charm for Michigan's John James; With Israel committed to expanding hours at its border crossing with Jordan, an upgrade is next; White House, Congress standoff over F-16 sale to Turkey returns to the fore; Spiritual care documentary 'A Still Small Voice' debuts at Sundance; and Nearly three years later, these Jewish programs created for the pandemic are still running.*

JANUARY 18, 2023

## Inside the Shabbat dinner at Davos

*Roughly 175 people attend the invite-only gathering, held at the end of the week-long conference*

By Melissa Weiss

When the World Economic Forum in Davos concludes on Friday, some 175 attendees will wrap the week in a time-honored, millennia-old tradition: Shabbat dinner.

The annual Shabbat dinner held at the conclusion of the weeklong confab for the last 25 years is sponsored by the World Economic Forum and hosted by WEF founder Klaus Schwab and his wife, Hilde. (Schwab, for his part, once said the dinner is his favorite part of the gathering.)

"When it comes to Shabbos, it's at the end of a week of intense meetings and networking and business," Rabbi Avraham Berkowitz, who has traveled to Davos annually for two decades and is involved in the planning for the annual dinner, told JI. "So then people come to the last important meal: It's spiritual, it's purposeful, it's

*Yiddishkeit.*"

Israeli entrepreneur Yossi Vardi is a driving force behind the event, Berkowitz said. Prior to his death, Israeli President Shimon Peres was an annual staple at the dinner. Former Ambassador Stuart Eizenstat gives the *d'var Torah*, a role he took on following the death of Nobel laureate Elie Wiesel.

"From heads of state to leaders of industry, emerging technology companies, Nobel laureates, academics, it's an amazing amalgam of the amazing diversity of the Jewish people and friends of the Jewish people," Berkowitz, who is also the president of AZ Advisors, explained.

While the guest list for the invite-only Shabbat dinner remains under wraps, Berkowitz noted that this year's WEF boasts a host of high-profile Jewish

figures, including Andy Jassy, Eduardo Elsztain, Orit Gadiesh, David Rubinstein, Steve Schwartzman, Jared Kushner, Marc Benioff, Andrew Ross Sorkin, Alex Soros, Rebecca Blumenstein, Adam Grant, Gary Cohn, *Wired's* Gideon Lichfield, Israeli Chief Economist Shira Greenberg, Rabbi Yonatan Neril, Google's Ruth Porat, OurCrowd's Jonathan Medved, Edward Felsenthal and Bank of Israel Governor Amir Yaron.

While the Swiss Alps might not seem on its face to be a classic destination for observant Jewish travelers, the town boasts a long Jewish history, and has become a summer hotspot for Orthodox Jews looking for a getaway, with at least one fully kosher hotel, and a yeshiva that functions year-round for some 200 young men. ♦

# Daniel Gordis' blunt message at AIPAC's confab

*The writer addressed the tensions between Israel and Diaspora Jewry at AIPAC's Political Leadership Conference in Washington last week*

By Melissa Weiss

Author Daniel Gordis, the Koret Distinguished Fellow at Jerusalem's Shalem College, made waves in his closing address at AIPAC's Political Leadership Forum in Washington, D.C., last week. As the last speaker to address attendees at the two-day closed-press convening, Gordis spoke about the challenges facing Israelis and those abroad who support the U.S.-Israel relationship in light of Israel's new right-wing government that, some argue, will change the fabric of Israeli society. Gordis, whose latest book, *Impossible Takes Longer: 75 Years After Its Creation, Has Israel Fulfilled Its Founders' Dreams?*, comes out in April to coincide with the 75th anniversary of Israel's founding, spoke to *Jewish Insider* about his speech to the AIPAC crowd and what he hoped attendees would walk away with.

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

**Jl: You closed out the conference. And it feels like it was almost a sort of a departure from what you've said in the past, like it shifted the tone of the room. I wasn't in the room. Most of our readers were also not in the room. For those of us who weren't there, in sum, what did you convey or want to convey?**

**DG:** OK, so first of all, what AIPAC has always been outstanding at is working on Capitol Hill's support for Israel: legislatively, diplomatically, etc. I think that makes them an unbelievably important institution, and I've worked with them for years and I think that they're still very important in that regard. When we began to talk about this speech, in the weeks running up to it — we being me and them — their concern was that this is a very tough time to be a kind

of, I don't mean liberal in the sense of left-wing, but liberal in the sense of somebody committed to liberal values: human rights, individual rights, freedom of the press, freedom of assembly, religious equality, and all of that. It's a tough time to be somebody who's committed to all of that, and at the same time to go out there and do the 'rah rah try to sell Israel on Capitol Hill thing' because people are feeling very conflicted inside. It's not that one undermines the other. I mean, Israel needs support no matter what. But at the same time, it's just harder, it would be harder for you or for me to go to talk to our friends about why we're in love with this place than it would have been a month ago. I mean, that's just the reality of the world... My understanding from them explicitly was [that] what they wanted was for me to talk to people about how important their work is at this particular moment, even when things are tough for those of us who love Israel. And that's what I did...

I think when you say that I changed the tone of the room, I think I changed the tone to be sure from what people expected. Very typically, I'm sort of the 'rah rah,' you know, I try to be intellectually sophisticated and I try to teach some history perhaps that people didn't know and I try to put a spin on it that makes it, you know, they walk out and learned something. It's important for me always, whether it's a political thing or it's a synagogue event, or it's a JCC or it's a federation or whatever, I want people to walk out having learned something... But I think people expected that I was going to do the typical kind of 'Gordis thing,' which was to leave them on a very big high, and they gotta go out there and do that. And I definitely left them with a very clear message that you need to do this work, that this work is no less critical at any moment now than it's ever been...

But there was this elephant in the room that when they open up *The New York Times* or they open up the *Washington Post* or they read whatever they're reading; they're seeing a lot of smart people who they may agree or disagree with saying something about Israel's democracy ending. And even if you think that person X or person Y is being a little bit over the top — and I even disagreed publicly with [New York Times opinion columnist] Tom Friedman. You know, he wrote a thing, and then I wrote a thing back. I didn't say everything is fine, that Bibi is Thomas Jefferson, right? I mean, I just said it's going to be OK. And I really still do hope and believe and pray that it's going to be OK. But I think it's going to be a tough slog. And what I wanted them to hear was, from an Israeli, this is serious. This is hard. This is scary. Some of us are worried and some of us are panicked. And, by the way, it's not only left or right. I mean, there's Israeli Likud voters who are very unhappy with what's going on... In other words, it's falling to a certain extent on political lines, but it's not falling entirely on political lines. I wanted them to understand that it's OK to be very concerned about what's going on in Israel. It's OK to talk about what's going on in Israel, and in a way of concern and worry, maybe even disappointment, and at the same moment to go out there and do the critically important work that has to be done on Capitol Hill and beyond to make sure that when there are critical issues that face Israel in Congress, that Congress votes the way that those of us who care about Israel would want it to vote. But I think that it was definitely not the usual tone. These are not the usual times.

**Jl: How do you feel the reception went?**

**DG:** It was very, very hard to tell. I mean, it was really very hard to tell. I could tell in the middle that they were not getting what they thought they were going to get... It's always a little bit difficult to know how it's going because you can't see their faces, you can't see their body language. But I could tell, there were a couple of lines that normally I think you would have felt like, a big laugh, and there was a little bit of a chuckle. Or there were lines that were very powerfully pro-Israel, I just had to take a breath because you have to breathe or I had to take a drink from my water. And then in a normal situation somebody would kind of clap because people don't like silence. So they'll fill the silence by clapping. And that just didn't happen. It was dead silence. They were silent. They were very attentive from the little bit that I could see and I could see the outlines of some heads. And people were being very respectful and nobody was walking out and nobody was being in any way inappropriate at all. But I think it was hard for them. My sense was that it was hard for them. But life is hard. It's filled with moments where we are torn between two loves, and I think we're torn between two loves right now: a love for the State of Israel and what it does for the Jewish people, and a love for the liberal democratic values that have made democracies great. And right now, if you love the latter, it's a little bit harder to full-throatedly tell people why you love Israel so much. And my basic point was, 'Yes, it's hard and we have to go do it. All of us, every single one of us has to both worry about what's happening inside Israel and try to change what's happening inside Israel to whatever direction each of us wants.' And you know, this is not that justice is all on one side. And certainly, for example, something like the judicial reform, there's no question that there's legitimate views on both sides. And there's lots of intermediate positions between the current reality and, for example, what [Justice Minister] Yariv Levin is proposing that could be. So that wasn't to suggest that if you don't want to keep it exactly the same way, then you're on the wrong side of history. But I do think that if you have let somebody who boasts that he's a homophobic fascist into the government, you're on the wrong side of history. And I think that if you boast that

you've let somebody into the government who says that Jewish law will always trump individual rights, even for those people who do not want to be observant, you're on the wrong side of history. And that's hard. It's hard for all of us. I think those of us who love this place wake up in the morning a little sadder than we did a couple of months ago, or even a month ago, and I wanted them to understand that that's legitimate. That's OK...

I got a lot of lovely, lovely notes from people who were in the audience. And people — some people I know very well and some people I really don't know very much... And people wrote something like, it was very sobering, and it was needed to be said; it was what had to be said.

**JJ:** *Was there anything you didn't say that you wish you had, anything you thought of after? Or something that you would have said differently or more strongly?*

**DG:** No, I don't think so, which is not to say that I think I did a perfect job. I mean, I work hard on these speeches. I don't ever just go up there and just have a basic idea of what I want to say and work on it. I make outlines, I revise the outlines, I think about it for days and days in advance, and I always go through drafts. So there was nothing off-the-cuff about this. You always feel like that phrase could have been turned a little bit better. I'm going to give you an example. I told a story towards the end about my grandfather and me watching [former Egyptian President Anwar] Sadat arrive in Tel Aviv in 1977. And the reason that I told the story was that my grandfather started to cry. And he started to cry, I wanted to say, because he just never expected that. He was born in 1908. He was a fully grown adult rabbi of a huge congregation during the Holocaust. He witnessed the war in 1948. There was no way he could know how that was going to end. He witnessed May 1967. There was every reason to believe it was going to be a bloodbath. He had remembered, you know, October '73, which started out unbelievably frightening. And from October '73 to November '77, is like two minutes, right? I mean, in the scheme of things. It's four years. Here we were, in November 1977, watching

the same Sadat who would attack Israel and almost sliced through, standing at attention on the ground, in what was then called Lod for 'Hatikvah.' And my grandfather started to weep. And I only saw him cry twice in my life, and that was one of the two times. I wanted to tell that story for the reason of: Things can always work out better than we think. In other words, you think it's dark and it is dark. But there have been so many dark moments and we've always managed somehow or another to pull through and I believe we're going to pull through here. That was the intent of telling the story. And then I got off the stage and I was walking back to my room and I got in the car to go to the airport and I thought, 'Oh, that's not what I actually did with that story. I talked about the legitimacy of crying.' In other words, I said my grandfather was crying because there's things that words can't really convey. And when you can't say what you feel in words, you start to cry. And then I said it's legitimate to cry, which was actually kind of interesting that I think my emotions sort of got the best of my preparation at that moment. I hadn't gotten to the point that things are going to work out better than we thought... When I think about my own state of mind, it's instructive to me that a story that I was going to tell, the point of which was meant to be, 'Things can always work out better than it seems they're going to work out' ended up being a story that I told that said, 'It's OK to cry. And it's OK to be heartbroken at certain kinds of moments.' That was not what I meant to say with that particular story. That particular story was hardly the focus of the whole talk. But I don't think it's a mistake. I don't think it's something that I wish I could have done better. It's just sort of instructive to me, like where was my heart and where was my soul when I was giving the talk. I think it's hard for all of us. And you know, you sort of get up there when you're doing a thing and it was towards the end, probably 20-22 minutes in, and you're definitely at cruising altitude. And all of a sudden, I was talking about the legitimacy of crying as opposed to the legitimacy of thinking that it's going to end up OK. I think they're both true. I really do believe it's going to end up OK here. I don't know if it's going to end up OK in five weeks or in five years. And I don't know if it's

going to end up OK with violence or without violence. And I say that not at all cavalierly. I mean, violence would be horrible. But you know, when America was 75 years old, it was 10 years away from the Civil War still.

**Jl:** *I'm excited for your book, but when did you finish writing it?*

**DG:** I finished writing the book right before Pesach.

**Jl:** *Things were very different then.*

**DG:** Very different. And the book is coming out April 11. I mean, it's done done. The pages are done, the index is done. All the i's are dotted, all the T's are crossed, the photographs are in, the cover's finished. It's done. And about two weeks ago, I said to my editor, 'We don't know how this is

going to play out, but April 11, which is [the publication] date, is not that long from now. And we've got to do something now.' We can't rewrite the book... I wrote a two-page afterword, trying to put it in context, to acknowledge what we don't know, to acknowledge how disappointing this turn of events is and then what I did actually in the afterword is I pointed to the election of Andrew Jackson, which I know nobody thinks about him anymore... So the notion [said by a U.S. senator in 1829] that 'the Constitution now lies a heap of ruins.' And [a Virginia congressman's 1829 declaration] that 'The [country] is ruined past redemption.' No, it wasn't. It wasn't and let's just remember that somebody said about America in 1829: 'It's over.' And it wasn't over. And people are going say, like Tom Friedman about Israel, that it's over. It's not over. We just have a lot of work to do. And

to go back to AIPAC, that was the message that I wanted them to feel, like it's OK to feel the despair that that congressman and that senator felt [about Jackson]. It's OK to feel that way. But it's just not true. It's OK to feel it. But it's not OK to believe that it's true. In other words, it's OK to feel 'Oh my god, the whole thing is coming apart,' but we just have to make sure that it doesn't come apart. It's OK to feel like I'm a little bit embarrassed about what's going on in Israel. OK. So suck it up. And we'll make the case for Israel anyway, because it really does matter for the future of the Jewish people and the Western world, I believe. And then when you come home at night, do whatever work you're going to do, do whatever philanthropic work you're going to do and do whatever other stuff you're going to do, to try to support the forces of good inside Israel. ♦

JANUARY 13, 2023

## Third time's the charm for Michigan's John James

*Newly minted rep, who castigated his hard-right Republican colleagues during the speaker-vote marathon, had suffered two defeats in bid for the Senate*

By Matthew Kassel

Amid the drawn-out, days-long process to elect a new House speaker last week, Rep. John James (R-MI), a freshman from suburban Detroit, stood before Congress to deliver his first floor speech as he exhorted his colleagues to end the stalemate.

In an impassioned address prior to the seventh speaker vote, the newly elected Michigander invoked his personal biography as the Black son of parents who faced discrimination under Jim Crow, upbraided hard-right Republicans for stalling the election and concluded with an enthusiastic endorsement of Rep. Kevin McCarthy (R-CA), who had recruited James

to run for Congress after two failed Senate bids.

"I'm well acquainted with snatching defeat from the jaws of victory," James, 41, said during his 11-minute speech, which received a standing ovation. "Y'all, we need to learn how to win. We need to learn how to take a victory."

His appeal fell short of persuading House Republicans to immediately hand the reins to McCarthy, who secured the speakership two days and eight ballots later. But there was little doubt that James, whose monologue was recognized as one of the few positive moments in an acrimonious deadlock where Republicans nearly came

to blows, had made his presence known just days after arriving in Washington, D.C.

It had been some time coming. The Iraq War veteran and businessman has sought elective office almost continuously since 2017, when he launched his first unsuccessful Senate campaign. Following his second consecutive bid for the upper chamber, James ultimately set his sights on the House and narrowly claimed victory this past November.

"I am looking forward to getting down to work for the people," James said in a statement after he and his House colleagues were finally sworn in last Saturday. "They elected us to speak for them and to turn this



country around.”

A spokesperson for James’ office said the congressman was unavailable for comment on Thursday.

The newly elected congressman became Michigan’s first Black Republican congressman when he assumed office earlier this month, and he has frequently spoken of his experience as a Black conservative who, by dint of his own family history and upbringing, is attuned to issues of racial injustice.

“I grew up listening to NWA and Tupac and now Kendrick Lamar and Donald Glover,” James said in an interview with *Jewish Insider* when he ran against Sen. Gary Peters (D-MI) in 2020, losing by just under two percentage points. “You listen to Sam Cooke talk about ‘change is gonna come’ — well, what kind of change? We’ve been talking about this for generations, and the politicians that we continue to send back to Lansing and Washington have done precious little to fix the situation that we find ourselves in right now as a people.”

His election alongside freshman Rep. Wesley Hunt (R-TX), a fellow Apache pilot and West Point alumnus, helped double the number of Black Republicans in Congress. In a statement to JI, Hunt described James as a “friend” and “conservative fighter” who will “make an excellent congressman for Michigan’s 10th Congressional District,” which covers parts of Macomb and Oakland counties.

The feeling is mutual. In an interview with JI last spring, James said he was eager to serve with his “buddy Wes,” noting that he and Hunt would be the first Black West Point graduates elected to Congress.

“The fact that he and I went to West Point together, we went to flight school together, we went to war together — to go to Congress together, we represent more than just ourselves,” James said. “To make it about red, white and blue, not just Black and white.”

James has described himself as an “independent thinker” who leans conservative, even as members of his own party have embraced extremism in recent years. “I’m running in the Republican Party not because the Republican Party is perfect or because they blow my skirt up,” he told JI a few years ago. “I’m running in

the Republican Party because the platform aligns most closely with my economic and moral values.”

Listing his priorities in the statement to supporters last weekend, James pledged to “end the growth of government” while vowing to cut IRS funding, “secure our energy independence,” “ban the sale of petroleum from our strategic reserves to China” and “address the crisis at the border.”

Though he earned support from former President Donald Trump, it had occasionally seemed as if James was struggling to chart his own path as a moderately tempered Republican candidate in a party where electoral success has at times hinged on loyalty to its de facto leader.

But if James was caught in what one political observer described to JI as a “Republican bind,” that predicament changed somewhat during the midterms as Trump’s sway among GOP voters appeared to slacken.

In the interview with JI last May, before he had clinched the Republican nomination, James was particularly energized as he stood well poised to win the primary and claim the open House seat in Michigan’s Lower Peninsula.

He said he was simply having “more fun” than his previous Senate bid, which had overlapped with the beginning of the pandemic. “I couldn’t look people in the eyes, I couldn’t hug them, I couldn’t reassure them when they were crying,” he said. “I couldn’t do that from behind a Zoom link.”

“I’m having more fun talking and engaging with people, whether it’s on a shop floor or in a park or in a diner,” James said. “There’s no substitute for being able to look someone in the eye and be able to earn their trust.”

Sheldon Yellen, a business executive and pro-Israel activist in Detroit who has long supported James, said the congressman has a “charisma about him that just invites you in.”

“He came up to me one day, I was at a basketball game,” Yellen recalled in an interview with JI. “He comes up from behind me and grabs me and gives me a kiss on the cheek. That’s what we need, someone who puts it on the sleeve. That’s a real guy.”

“I didn’t give him enough money to warrant the kiss, by the way,” he quipped.

The first-term Republican cast himself as a strong supporter of Israel and said he would stand with the country while in Congress. “There must be no public space between the United States of America and Israel,” he told JI. “We need to make sure that Israel maintains its economic and military dominance in the region. That is without question.”

James said he would “support any and all efforts to build on the success of the Abraham Accords” as well as the Israel Relations Normalization Act, which seeks to bolster the agreements that normalized diplomatic relations between Israel and a number of Arab nations.

He also expressed opposition to pursuing nuclear negotiations with Iran, which “can hit Israel with standard munitions,” he averred. “Make no mistake about it.” The Islamic republic is “building ICBMs to hit us,” James told JI, referring to intercontinental ballistic missiles. In that respect, among others, Israel and the U.S. “have shared interests,” he said.

The war in Ukraine, he added, has underscored the broader importance of backing imperiled allies. “What we see in Ukraine is just the beginning of communist ambitions,” James argued. “We need to make sure that we work with our allies to assist them to deal with the Russian threat — and that, of course, matches what we should be doing with Israel.”

“The guy is all-in,” said Yellen. “He’s pro-Israel. And he has a choice, just like everybody. He doesn’t have to take that position. He takes it, and I think he takes it proudly.”

In conversation with JI last May, James said he would be “an outspoken critic” of the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement targeting Israel as well as an “outspoken critic of antisemitism” and “a friend to pro-Israel and pro-Jewish causes.”

“I support any and all efforts to combat bigotry, hatred and in particular antisemitism,” James said. “I have the support of many Jewish leaders in our community, and I’m excited to continue to learn and see how I can be an asset and benefit. I’m looking forward to a long, positive relationship.”

The same day he delivered his floor speech late last week, Sen. Debbie Stabenow

(D-MI) — whom James had challenged in 2018 — announced that she would not seek reelection next cycle, setting the stage for a potentially crowded race to succeed her. Among the names floated as possible candidates was James. He has not commented on whether he will run for the seat.

It isn't hard to imagine that, after five years campaigning for federal office, the new congressman might prefer to avoid such speculation and focus on his job, at least for the moment.

"I've only been here for a couple of days, but I've heard a lot of D.C. politicians tell me about how broken D.C. is," James said

in his address to Congress last Thursday. "I don't need D.C. politicians to tell me how broken D.C. is. The American people have already told us how broken D.C. is by giving Republicans the majority so we can fix this mess." ♦

JANUARY 17, 2023

## With Israel committed to expanding hours at its border crossing with Jordan, an upgrade is next

*U.S. Ambassador Tom Nides said the effort is 'about making life a little bit better for people'*

By Ruth Marks Eglash

It's a weekday morning in early January and the Allenby Bridge Border Terminal is relatively quiet. A parade of heavily loaded trucks heads toward Jordan via the cargo side of the crossing, while a handful of buses and taxis ferry waiting travelers with oversized bags and suitcases to and from the dusty, antiquated arrivals and departures halls.

Long ago, agreements forged between Israel and Jordan, and Israel and the Palestinian Authority, designated this border crossing primarily for Palestinians, though foreign tourists and diplomats may also pass through here. Yet Israeli laws rule and Israeli manpower secures, manages and maintains the sensitive passageway, the only exit for Palestinians living in the West Bank to reach Jordan and the world beyond.

In winter, there is less traffic, but in the summer months, especially during the holy month of Ramadan, the crossing, which is also referred to as the King Hussein Bridge, turns into a jostling, bustling and overcrowded nightmare for journey-makers. The outdated facilities and stifling heat of the Jordan Valley, mixed with political and cultural tensions, makes transiting through

the terminal uncomfortable and sometimes painful.

Images of long lines, the elderly standing for hours or impatient and bawling children, as well as some complaints of mistreatment, prompted U.S. Ambassador to Israel Tom Nides to make improving conditions at the crossing a priority. His starting goal: to see it operating 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

"It's about decency, it's about respect, it's about doing something that makes people's lives marginally a little bit better," the envoy, who began his posting in November 2021, told *Jewish Insider* last week. "You know, you can do some things that have nothing to do with compromising security, that is why I've been pushing this so hard."

"No one wants to stand in line for so long," Nides added. "Can you imagine being in a car or a bus and just waiting, waiting, waiting for hours when it can be solved so easily by expanding hours and improving the quality of the experience? And that's what I've been trying to do."

Last November, a year after his arrival and following months of pressure by both the ambassador and U.S. Special Envoy to the Palestinian Authority Hady Amr, Israel

finally launched a weeklong pilot program to bring on more staff and keep the crossing open for 24 hours a day.

While Israel is unlikely – and, according to the Israel Airport Authority which manages the site, even believe it is unnecessary – to keep the crossing open 24 hours a day, seven days a week, beginning April 2 Allenby's operating hours will greatly expand. The border will allow passage continually Sundays through Thursdays, with daytime hours on Fridays and Saturdays. (Today the crossing operates from 8 a.m.-11:30 p.m. Sunday through Thursday and 8 a.m.-3:30 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays.)

According to data shared with JI, the overall flow of traffic through the terminal has been increasing rapidly since the early 2000s, reaching more than 2.8 million passengers a year in 2019. Through two years of the pandemic, however, the number of people transiting through dropped significantly to a trickle and the terminal opened for only a few hours each day.

Following the easing of travel restrictions towards the end of 2021, the rush of returning travelers caught those manning the crossing off-guard, Alex Chen, director of the Allenby

Border Crossing, explained to JI.

“What happened here after [the height of the COVID-19 pandemic] was no different to what happened in other airports and border crossings all over the world, it was part of the same phenomenon,” Chen said, confirming that the crossing would soon begin operating 24 hours a day, five days a week. He added that he was already in the process of reassembling and rehiring staff.

Finding workers in a remote location such as the Jordan Valley is difficult, Chen noted. Employees come to work at the site from a vast area stretching as far as Beit Shean in the north and Jerusalem in the west. Many of the towns and localities within reasonable distance from the crossing are religiously observant, he said, meaning it’s even more difficult to find staff to work through the Jewish Sabbath.

Nides told JI that he recognized the manpower difficulties and highlighted that it was not just about expanding hours. “It’s about making it more convenient and easier to manage once people get there,” he said.

“Listen, I understand that this is not

Middle East peace, but I do believe that incremental things like this do have impact and that’s why, since I’ve gotten here, I’ve been working on stuff like the East Jerusalem hospital, 4G [cell phone service] and the Allenby Bridge,” Nides said. “It’s about making life a little bit better for people.”

With his first goal achieved, Nides said he would now focus on finding funding for already-approved Israeli plans to renovate and upgrade the outdated transit facility, which were put on hold, with funds diverted, during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Chen shared with JI plans for the new terminal building – an expansive and modern facility that will allow for less-intrusive security arrangements, upgraded and fast-moving biometric passport checks and an overall more comfortable experience for passengers, including a duty-free store.

Such improvements will constitute a big change to Allenby, which has not been renovated since it first opened for civilian use following the signing of the Israel-Jordanian peace agreement in 1994, the same year that

some additional parts of the Oslo Accords were finalized and incorporated into the arrangements.

The check-in counters and passport booths currently in use are not user-friendly or accessible for many people with disabilities. In addition, allocation of space in the old-fashioned halls does not take into account the proportions of those transiting through — the area for a small number of VIP travelers and foreign tourists is only slightly smaller than the space allocated for Palestinian travelers, who make up the bulk – some 80 percent – of those passing through.

“It’s not a lot of money to upgrade and I have every intention of working with COGAT, [the Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories], the defense ministry, the airports authority and the different [Israeli government] departments to get that money together,” Nides said about kickstarting the renovations. “I believe we will get the money.” ♦

JANUARY 19, 2023

## White House, Congress standoff over F-16 sale to Turkey returns to the fore

*Sen. Bob Menendez is vowing to block the arms sale to the NATO ally; he’s supported by a bipartisan group of lawmakers, as well as the American Jewish Committee*

By Marc Rod

The news last week that the White House plans to seek congressional approval to sell \$20 billion worth of F-16 fighter jets to Turkey renewed a standoff between the administration and key congressional leaders.

Turkey first requested to purchase the

planes, as well as equipment to upgrade their existing F-16 fleet, in October 2021. But lawmakers on both sides of the aisle — most notably Sen. Bob Menendez (D-NJ), chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, who can unilaterally place an informal hold on the sale — have attempted

to put up obstacles to the deal and otherwise pushed back against it. Opponents of the sale also have the support of some leaders in the U.S. Jewish community.

Sources of concern about the sale are numerous, many of which Menendez outlined in a speech late last year: Turkish

fighter jets have routinely violated Greek airspace; Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan threatened missile attacks on Athens; Turkey has increased its ties with Russia and Iran; Turkey has attacked U.S.-allied Kurds in Syria; and territorial disputes over Cyprus are ongoing.

“As I have repeatedly made clear, I strongly oppose the Biden administration’s proposed sale of new F-16 aircraft to Turkey,” Menendez said in a statement last week. “President Erdogan continues to undermine international law, disregard human rights and democratic norms, and engage in alarming and destabilizing behavior in Turkey and against neighboring NATO allies. Until Erdogan ceases his threats, improves his human rights record at home – including by releasing journalists and political opposition – and begins to act like a trusted ally should, I will not approve this sale.”

Turkey has also slow-walked the accession of Finland and Sweden to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization — an issue other lawmakers, such as Sen. Chris Van Hollen (D-MD), have framed as a condition for the F-16 sales.

And Turkey previously purchased Russian S-400 surface-to-air missile systems, leading the U.S. to expel it from the F-35 fighter jet program, due to concerns that the S-400s could allow Russia to compromise the next-generation fighter aircraft.

Other opponents of the sale have included House members from both parties and various ideological bents — including Reps. Josh Gottheimer (D-NJ), Chris Smith (R-NJ) Brad Sherman (D-CA), Brian Fitzpatrick (R-PA), Grace Meng (D-NY), Ted Lieu (D-CA), Nicole Malliotakis (R-NY), David Cicilline (D-RI) and Jan Schakowsky (D-IL) — as well as the American Jewish Committee, which joined Greek lobby groups to urge support last year for an amendment erecting roadblocks to the sale. The amendment was not ultimately included in last year’s defense policy bill.

A Jewish community leader, who requested anonymity to speak freely on the sensitive issue, told *Jewish Insider* this week that — in spite of Turkey’s steps toward restoring normal relations with Israel and the nation’s geo-strategic importance — its

ongoing tensions with NATO, Greece and Cyprus, its democratic backsliding and its harboring of Muslim Brotherhood and Hamas officials continue to pose concerns for some in the Jewish community.

“It’s understandable that organizations that care deeply about Western values, care deeply about the democracy in and across the region and care deeply about the sovereignty of its neighbors would want to see changes in Turkish government behavior before agreeing to the substantial upgrading of the military capabilities of Turkey,” the leader said. “This is not about Israel’s strategic interests so much as the behavior of a country that is an unreliable NATO partner and poses threats to other NATO allies.”

The individual added that he has not heard from within the Jewish community or Israel that the F-16 sale could have security implications for Israel or the Middle East, a view echoed by other experts who spoke to JI.

“As someone who’s very pro-Israel, I don’t have any concerns vis-a-vis Israel in terms of this sale going through,” Bradley Bowman, the senior director of the Center on Military and Political Power at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, told JI, noting that Israel already possesses more-advanced F-35s and other advanced military capabilities.

The administration’s informal notification to Congress about the F-16 sale was accompanied by an announcement that it will sell F-35s to Greece. Soner Cagaptay, the director of The Washington Institute for Near East Policy’s Turkish Research Program, told JI that the administration likely hoped the Greek deal would alleviate concerns by essentially guaranteeing a qualitative military edge to Greece in the Eastern Mediterranean.

“The problem with this ‘deal’ is that nobody objects to Greece getting F-35s,” Cagaptay continued. “So it’s not as if this is a sweetener to Menendez. Greece gets F-35s whether or not Turkey gets F-16s.”

If the administration decides to do so, it can push ahead with the sale over Menendez’s hold. Both chambers of Congress would have to pass a joint resolution of disapproval to block it, but Congress has never managed to secure

the two-thirds majorities in each chamber necessary to override a presidential veto and actually block any foreign arms sale. Cagaptay predicted it would not be able to do so in this case either.

A senior U.S. official told *Reuters* that the administration would be unlikely to try to override Menendez.

Bowman said that, despite the aspects of Turkey’s behavior that have raised concerns, there are potential benefits to allowing the sale to proceed, rather than pushing Turkey toward another potential supplier for the necessary upgrades to its fighter fleet.

“When allies and partners buy weapons from us, that accrues — many times — 20-, 30-plus year benefits for us,” Bowman explained. “It creates all kinds of interoperability benefits, readiness benefits, diplomatic and other benefits that accrue to us. And so I would rather have those benefits come to us than to Russia or China, or even France.”

Bowman also noted that the sale could help pull Turkey back from its increasing ties with Russia.

As of now, the administration and Turkey appear set to push ahead toward pursuing the sale — although it has not said when it will send a formal notification of the sale to Congress. Secretary of State Tony Blinken met yesterday in Washington with Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, during which the two sides discussed “strengthening the U.S.-Türkiye defense partnership,” including the F-16 sale, according to a joint statement.

The meeting also included discussions on Swedish and Finnish inclusion in NATO, “the importance of preserving stability and channels for communication” in the Eastern Mediterranean and military action in Syria. Following the meeting, Çavuşoğlu told reporters that he urged Blinken not to link the F-16 sale to the NATO accession issue.

Cagaptay predicted little movement on the F-16 sale until after Turkey’s elections in May, after which he said Turkey’s leadership — whether that be Erdogan or his opposition — will likely be more willing to ratify Sweden and Finland’s accession to NATO. He said that a possible announcement that Blinken will visit Turkey would signal that the administration plans to continue seriously pursuing the sale. ♦



# Spiritual care documentary ‘A Still Small Voice’ debuts at Sundance

*Luke Lorentzen and Kellen Quinn’s latest film, which received backing from Jewish Story Partners, follows a Jewish hospital chaplain as she completes her residency during the start of the pandemic*

By **Tori Bergel**

COVID-19 numbers were spiking, ventilators were in short supply, nurses and doctors were understaffed and overworked, people were dying without loved ones to soothe them in their final moments. 2021, the first full year of a still-lingering global pandemic, would quickly become the deadliest in U.S. history, with big city hospitals like Mount Sinai in New York bearing the brunt of the burden. But through the hallways infused with suffering walked a small cohort of staff, tending to patients by offering an ear or a prayer in lieu of medicine.

Few vocations are as selfless as those that focus on comforting the dying, ameliorating their final days and helping their loved ones navigate the first stages of grief. Amid palliative care physicians and hospice specialists, another medical professional exists, one who caters to the spiritual and emotional more so than the physical, but is just as crucial to their patients: the hospital chaplain.

These individuals, men and women who offer pastoral care to those dealing with trauma, end-of-life diagnoses and other distressing events, offer immense relief to their patients on any day, but none so much as during the first year of the pandemic. Mati Engel felt the force of this need firsthand — her residency in the spiritual care department at Mount Sinai from 2020 to 2021 is the subject of Luke Lorentzen’s documentary, “A Still Small Voice,” debuting this week at the Sundance Film Festival in Park City, Utah.

Engel, a third-generation Holocaust survivor, describes herself as a “practicing performance artist, theologian and spiritual care practitioner” on her personal website.

For 93 minutes, “A Still Small Voice” follows Engel — who goes by Margaret to patients — and her supervisor, Rev. David Fleenor, from patient bedsides and fraught phone calls with families of the recently deceased to group processing sessions with other chaplains and solo reflections.

The documentary was not intended as an ode to those worst hit by the pandemic. Lorentzen, alongside producer Kellen Quinn, was introduced to the concept of hospital chaplaincy by his sister while traveling for the pair’s last film, “Midnight Family,” which was released in 2019.

“Claire had come to a screening and was just sharing that she was beginning to do chaplaincy work at a hospital in D.C., and I think there were a few pieces about how she spoke about it that really intrigued me,” Lorentzen told *Jewish Insider*.

What stuck out to him most was the group processing aspect of the job, where after seeing patients the chaplains would come together and dissect their experiences. “Just from a filmmaking perspective, it sort of provided this structure of action and reflection that intrigued me,” Lorentzen added.

The duo, who together founded the independent production company Hedgehog Films, wouldn’t do anything with the idea until the first peaks of the coronavirus.

“Not because it felt like a film that was responding to the pandemic, but for one reason or another, it felt like something that could be shot through the pandemic,” Lorentzen said.

Eventually landing on Mount Sinai as the documentary’s backbone, Lorentzen felt a connection to Engel’s approach to the job,

and chose her as the film’s center.

“The way she approached the work was with a sort of rigor and intensity that really moved me and fascinated me, and she sort of had this ability to both do chaplaincy at a really high level, while also grappling with certain learnings and learning goals that gave the story all of these different dimensions,” Lorentzen recalled.

“On a more, sort of, religious side of things, the sort of questions that she asks in the film about God’s care or God’s presence resonated with me. I’m not somebody who comes from a religious background and did not begin making this film with a sort of specific religious intention, and the way that Mati lives these big questions of religion’s function or purpose in providing nourishment or hope, felt accessible to me and exciting,” he added.

Engel grew up in a religious family in Boro Park, according to her website, but has since allowed herself to “explore and feel at home in multiple and diverse communal settings.” Hospital chaplains are unique in that they offer care to patients of all faiths and denominations, not just within their own religions — shown explicitly at one point in the film when Engel is tasked with performing a baptism. Quinn is Jewish while Lorentzen is not, but neither of their faiths was a signifying factor in the creation of “A Still Small Voice.” The goal, as Lorentzen expressed, was to “explore the craft of spiritual care, the learnings of doing this work,” and understanding the “different layers of what makes the job hard.” Engel declined an interview request.

Filming began in September of 2020 and ended in July of 2021 — in total, the crew spent around 150 days on-site with Engel

and her cohort around the hospital. Funding for the project came in part from Jewish Story Partners, a foundation that awards grants to independent films that showcase the diversity of the Jewish experience. The foundation's core funder is Jewish filmmaker Steven Spielberg's Righteous Persons Foundation.

Jewish Story Partners looks for applicants that show "excellence," according to JSP co-executive director Roberta Grossman, who herself is an award-winning filmmaker, "A great story and people who know how to tell it."

Lorentzen and Quinn first got connected with JSP before it was created, having met co-executive director Caroline Libresco when she still worked at Sundance.

"I believe when she began working at Jewish Story Partners, we were one of the sets of filmmaking teams that she and her team reached out to," Quinn said. "At the time, we were just beginning the project and it wasn't clear that Mati would be actually really at the center of it, but we knew that Mount Sinai was historically a Jewish institution and that we had two Jewish chaplain residents in the cohort, so it immediately seemed like a project that they might be interested in, and then I would say in Caroline's words, became even more of a Jewish film through the process of making it."

JSP was formed in April 2021 with money left over from the Foundation for Jewish Culture, an arts nonprofit that had shuttered in 2014 after 30 years. "A Still Small Voice" — at the time known as "Untitled Spiritual Care Documentary" — was among the foundation's first cycle of grantees in spring 2021. The film recently received a reprise grant within the fall 2022 cycle.

"The filmmakers [behind 'A Still Small Voice'] have a really fantastic track record," Grossman said. "In this case, they picked, obviously, a very emotional topic of chaplains entering people's lives at moments of crisis and offering dialogue or hope, somehow bracketed by ideas of faith, and those are obviously very universal subjects — very important, not often talked about. And we felt that the story was in very capable hands with the filmmakers, and that the story they were telling was very meaningful and powerful."

Filmmaking does not end once the cameras stop rolling, and for a documentary showing real people at some of their lowest moments, Lorentzen and Quinn were careful not to make light of that sensitivity outside of the hospital as well.

"A real significant but also very meaningful challenge was to build on what Luke and Mati had developed...around really deciding who was appropriate to film with and then how to apply that and bring that into the edit, where the people on screen were no longer right there," Quinn said. "We had to really think carefully about a way for Luke to be doing his creative work, which involves being very focused and deeply immersed in the material, but also remember that these are real people's lives, and find a way to go back to them in a way that respected them, gave them true agency, but also balanced the concerns and the needs of the creative process."

The documentary was a learning experience for the filmmaking team, who left the process with more than just a larger understanding of the medical profession.

"This film, just in terms of process, taught me a lot," Lorentzen stated. "It's my second feature, and I think, had a lot of questions as I was beginning the film...and within that sort of, bucket of process, is sort of a question of collaboration, and sort of coming up with a way of making films... learning more deeply and more thoughtfully how to tell true stories with real people. And this film, really pushing those questions in a way that was at times very challenging, but also very central to what I care about as a filmmaker."

"I think the sort of practice and world of chaplaincy demands a thoughtfulness that was exciting to try and match or learn from," Lorentzen added.

Quinn drew on the sentiment, touching upon the importance of care-offering as a whole.

"The ways in which chaplaincy can be a model for human interactions in general really emerged for me," Quinn said. "The value of patience and really trusting that by giving time to processes and to questions, one is more likely to come up with a good resolution or good answer. And I think [film] work is so often built around deadlines, pressures to figure things out, a sort of sense

of urgency, it's very easy to live in a sort of heightened state of like, everything is urgent and must be dealt with right now in making movies. And sometimes that really is true, but I think we were able to really build patience and kind of [take] a breath into how we made the film, and that's something that feels super valuable to me and I hope comes through in some form or other for audiences."

Most of all, the duo hopes audiences will be as transformed by the film as they were when putting it together.

"As part of the residency, they do something called 'small process group,' where...a feeling is shared and the group is invited to join that feeling," Lorentzen said. "I sort of think of the film as maybe like building on that, of David and Mati sort of putting a very open, raw feeling out there for others to join."

"The process of making the film had that effect on me, like making me a little bit less protective, a little more open, and feeling invited to sort of share life as it unfolds more freely, and finding that very healing. And [I'm] hoping the film can sort of kickstart some of that," he added.

*A Still Small Voice debuts Saturday, Jan. 21, as part of the Sundance Film Festival's 2023 U.S. Documentary Competition. ♦*

# Nearly three years later, these Jewish programs created for the pandemic are still running

*But Jewish organizations have found that some audiences still prefer meeting online, while certain needs borne of the pandemic have stuck around longer than expected*

By Lev Gringauz

*The article first appeared in eJewishPhilanthropy.*

In May 2020, as internships, Jewish summer camps and trips to Israel were abruptly canceled due to the COVID-19 pandemic, thousands of Jewish college students stared down a summer with nothing to do.

Scrambling to keep these young adults engaged, the Jewish Federations of North America (JFNA) threw together the Jewish Changemakers fellowship. For several hours a day over the course of three weeks, participants learned over Zoom about global Jewish communities, how to advocate for causes important to them, and how to develop professional skills such as conflict management – receiving a \$500 stipend and filling some of the dead space of summer.

One of several programs created out of the chaos of spring 2020 to address the sudden needs of a socially distanced Jewish world, Changemakers seemed like it might have an expiration date, with much of Jewish life — and the world more broadly — leaving Zoom behind and returning to in-person experiences. But Jewish organizations have found that some audiences still prefer meeting online, while certain needs borne of the pandemic have stuck around longer than expected.

As a result, instead of phasing out, these emergency programs have taken root for the long term. Nearly three years after COVID-19 rapidly transformed daily life in the United States, digital offerings are part of the new Jewish normal.

“We needed to make tweaks and we needed to make shifts, but because this was a program that was generated when it was

generated, it is actually the right intervention to meet the needs of this generation,” Julia Malkin Reger, the managing director for Changemakers, told *eJewishPhilanthropy*. The program, which has an annual budget of \$1.5 million, has engaged over 2,000 people since 2020, and plans to engage another 1,000 over the course of this year.

The big difference compared to 2020, Malkin Reger said, is that the program’s organizers are now “able to take a breath and assess our audience and what their needs are.”

For Jewish organizations, retooling these programs means accepting that online connections are no longer a begrudging necessity of 2020, but a value-add in their own right. That’s as true for institutions that suddenly jumped to virtual as it is for initiatives that were already operating online before the pandemic.

“We have a sense that on some level, the flow of every year for us will include large-scale gatherings of people in synchronous time online,” said Lex Rofeberg, a rabbi who serves as senior Jewish educator at Judaism Unbound, a podcast and online educational community. “We did not have that sense before. That is now a feature, not a bug.”

## A core part of operating

The transition to virtual interactions has also persisted among organizations that long predated COVID-19. Before the pandemic, Jewish Child and Family Services of Chicago didn’t provide a telehealth option for any of its services, such as support groups and therapy. The technology “had been around,” said Pam Austin, senior director of marketing and communications

for JCFS, “but we were providing services in person and that was working.”

Taking those services online in 2020 was a knee-jerk response to the pandemic. But once dragged into online programming, some Jewish organizations have discovered its lasting value. Austin points to telehealth’s ease of access, particularly for younger people.

“Say there’s a teenager who was getting therapy, and he used to have to leave school early, go to his therapist’s office, then go home and do his homework,” she said. Without needing to commute, the teen now has more time for school and still gets the therapy they need online.

Meanwhile, Commonpoint Queens, a New York City Jewish Community Center, is having success in virtual programming for older adults. Younger audiences, including families, have mostly gone back to in-person, the center has found, but many older adults are still social distancing for safety.

Fifteen of 17 exercise classes for older adults are now hybrid, with the remaining two meeting entirely in person. Cultural arts programming, like book talks and history seminars, which often found an audience among older people, have also stayed online. The change means letting go of both the conveniences and limits of a physical building.

For older Jews visiting a Commonpoint Queens facility before the pandemic, “it was easy for them to go from their crocheting class to go sit in an auditorium and listen to [an] author or participate in the art class,” said Jared Mintz, vice president of communications for Commonpoint Queens.

But being in-person meant being limited to inviting authors who were visiting or

living in New York City. Now virtual, it's easier for those programs to host speakers from across the country and the world. Working online has also meant more collaboration, with Commonpoint Queens organizing programming together with the Marcus Jewish Community Center of Atlanta and The Smithsonian Institution.

For Commonpoint Queens and JCFS, programming online has become routine. Commonpoint Queens has even organized rallies against hate that included both a Zoom demonstration and an in-person meet-up.

"It's funny to have this conversation and have a moment to reflect on these things because we don't think about it, it's just like, on to the next thing and on to the next way that we can help people," Mintz said. "But we really have created better connectivity, I think, than we had pre-pandemic."

Even for Jewish programs that were already online when the pandemic hit, there's more strategy and sophistication around digital programming. In the early days of lockdowns and social distancing, Judaism Unbound quickly organized a platform called JewishLive for Jewish organizations to stream their programming in one place.

While the project, dubbed a "virtual JCC," had some success, there was something unappealing about the approach. Programming "took place in Zoom and people — for most of the classes, they could come," said Rofeberg. "But we were [also] streaming [offerings] to Facebook, where a viewer was... watching, they weren't participating in the same way they would be participating in a class."

Over time, JewishLive became less of a necessity as organizations learned how to stream and manage their online content themselves. For Judaism Unbound, it made sense to phase out the platform, learn the lessons from having run it, and launch something new in the fall of 2021: The UnYeshiva, an online learning space.

This time, instead of simply streaming content, the UnYeshiva is built around Zoom courses meant to engage participants, offered on a more consistent 12-week schedule alongside three-week mini-courses. The platform is fully for Judaism Unbound content, not a streaming service

for all Jewish organizations. And UnYeshiva classes cost money — ranging from \$72 to \$126 for the three-week courses and \$299 to \$499 for 12 weeks. The UnYeshiva has an annual budget of \$160,000, covering roughly 30 classes in 2022-23, and will soon be offering a certificate program for people who take several classes.

More than 500 people have taken UnYeshiva classes since the initiative launched. "We have people who have taken multiple of our courses, we have people who have had digital relationships with others in the classes they took, who are continuing to build off of what they learned towards launching their own initiatives," Rofeberg said.

The increased thought put into digital programming after 2020 is also reflected in ShavuotLive, Judaism Unbound's 24-hour learning experience to celebrate the Jewish late spring festival. Before the pandemic, Judaism Unbound hosted Shavuot educational material on its website, but those offerings mostly consisted of resources for individuals. It was only after 2020 that the organization saw the potential Shavuot held as an occasion for an interactive Zoom experience, creating a deeper sense of community for participants.

"We, as an organization, already knew that Jewish learning online was possible," Rofeberg said. "But the degree to which it's possible, the degree to which you can become very close with people who you've never interacted with at a shared longitude and latitude, but only have interacted with through social media, through Zoom — that's exciting."

### **From ad hoc to professionalized**

Meanwhile, some makeshift pandemic initiatives have continued to evolve past the era of social distancing.

The Israel Educational Travel Alliance (IETA) was one of the many 2020-era Jewish programs hastily put together over Whatsapp and centered on Zoom meetings. Now a coalition of roughly 90 Jewish and non-Jewish Israel trip providers, including Honeymoon Israel and Birthright, the alliance was conceived as a way to better navigate rapidly changing border policies worldwide, and brainstorm ways to deal

with a sudden loss in funding and the ability to travel.

But even as international tourism has resumed, the travel and hospitality industry has continued to struggle and the need for the alliance has outgrown its emergency origins. JFNA brought the alliance under its wing and hired Tal Gozani, the former chief program officer at the Israeli-American Council, as executive director in early 2022.

"As we were coming [to] the other side of COVID, there was a real need to continue to help the field recover from the havoc that COVID wrought," Gozani said. "But also there was this recognition that there's so much potential in really having a more formalized, professional community for the space."

Part of the shift to professionalization for programs like the IETA means committing to long-term planning. Gozani has spent the past year spearheading a survey of the Israel travel industry and how it affects the economy, which is planned for release in early February. Also in February will come the alliance's first leadership summit with both funders and heads of travel agencies.

The survey and summit are part of a renewed push to get the Israeli government to help the travel industry. Trip costs per participant have increased by 30-50% from before the pandemic, Gozani said, and there is a shortage of hospitality workers and tour guides. Birthright, which runs free 10-day trips to Israel for young Jewish adults, said rising costs were part of the reason it is cutting back on trips in 2023.

"A huge chunk of [tour guides] left the field at the beginning of COVID because there was no work," Gozani said. "So either you have ones that are just newer and not as experienced, or you just don't have enough. In both cases, it's directly impacting the experience."

Part of addressing that issue means advocating for the Israeli government to introduce incentives for tour guides to enter and stay in the field, Gozani said. The long-term goal stands in contrast to the alliance's priorities earlier in the pandemic, such as pushing for Israel's then-strict border policies to allow in more organized trips.

The alliance "was very much ad hoc at the beginning, and just trying to get through day by day," Gozani said. "Now, we have the



opportunity to be more strategic.”

For Changemakers, Malkin Reger was hired in late 2021 as the managing director to take the fellowship “from a pandemic response program into an endemic program,” she said. Part of that is focusing on data by researching Gen Z’s needs and deciding whether to stay online or transition to in-person programming.

When the fellowship started, it included a mix of younger millennials and older Gen Z participants. Now, participants are entirely Gen Z. Malkin Reger’s research showed that young adults today value national networking that can give them a foothold in their career path, in part because they expect to move between cities and regions for work. As a result, today’s young adults want online programs that can more easily connect them to others.

But the program still needed to be streamlined for a world that had moved on from socially distanced summers. Rather than a three-week summer program with several hours of programming a day, starting in February the fellowship will operate on a nine-week model, with an expected three hours of engagement per week. Sessions will be run year-round, and demand less commitment on a weekly basis, so they can better fit into college and work schedules.

And rather than trying to connect Jews worldwide, as Changemakers did in the summers of 2020, 2021, and 2022, the fellowship will focus on North American young adults in order to have as much impact as possible. An iteration of the program this past fall was limited to participants from the United States and Canada.

“We realized that if we’re really trying to build a leadership pipeline, Jewish Federations of North America obviously have an amazing global reach. But North America is in our name,” Malkin Reger said. “So if we really want to be able to shepherd people through their leadership career, it has to be where we actually have those immediate relationships and touch points.”

Malkin Reger also found that alumni of the fellowship whom she met at JFNA’s 2022 General Assembly confirmed her research. She recalls them appreciating the opportunity to connect with their peers nationwide, then saying, “You cannot stop doing this virtually.”

### **Will it last?**

Even as online programming becomes part of the new normal, Jewish organizations can’t predict whether digital offerings will keep sticking around. The ease of access is significant, they say, but there are challenges. A partner in the Jewish Community Response and Impact Fund, a coalition of leading Jewish funders established at the beginning of the pandemic that allocated tens of millions of dollars, told eJP in a statement that the fund is considering what its future will look like.

“JCRIF was established as an emergency response to the pandemic,” Mark Charendoff, president of the Maimonides Fund, one of the partners in JCRIF, said in the statement. “Now that the emergency is over, the funders are considering whether to continue some joint efforts which might include funding, convening, or reflecting

on lessons learned. Those discussions are ongoing.”

Mintz, of Commonpoint Queens, said despite the success of online culture and arts programs, engagement has gone down compared to pre-pandemic times.

“But that just drives us to be more innovative and figure out more ways to be more engaging, and to really understand consumer appetite,” he said. The organization isn’t “thinking about phasing [online programming] out — we’re thinking about ways to do this smarter.”

Much of a program’s success, however, still depends on the audiences being served. For example, while Gen Z wants Changemakers to be online now, preferences could change as they get more used to in-person offerings, Malkin Reger said.

“I think that they really want it, but it still feels very foreign in a lot of ways,” she said. “And it can feel a little risky, both emotionally and physically. So we’re gonna grow and shift with them, as they continue to grow and shift as a demographic.”

Meanwhile, Rofeberg sees the widespread adoption of online programming as an era-defining shift in Jewish life, one that, while accelerated in 2020, has been growing for decades. More changes might come, he said, but digital Jewish programming is here to stay.

“I believe it is very likely, or at least possible, that the entirety of our era of Judaism will boil down to, ‘Oh, that was the time period when a lot of stuff became digital,’” he said. “That will be the main headline 1,000 years from now.” ♦