

THE WEEKLY PRINT

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Israel's 'marathon mom' gets back on track in Africa

Israeli marathon champion Beatie Deutsch, who is currently in Kenya training for the Tokyo Marathon, hopes to inspire more women, especially Orthodox women, to take up – and enjoy – long-distance running

By Ruth Marks Eglash

When Beatie (Bracha) Deutsch ran her first marathon in Tel Aviv seven years ago, she cut an unusual and surprising figure. Hair covered modestly with a scarf and donning a stretchy running skirt, the 4-foot-11 inch Deutsch stood out among the hordes of other runners as one of the few Orthodox Jewish women.

"I did not see a single woman in a skirt running in that marathon," Deutsch, who surprised everyone, and even herself by placing sixth in that race, recalled recently to *Jewish Insider*, speaking from Kenya where she is training. "I also didn't see a lot of women at all running in the marathon... it felt like women were intimidated by the

distance... and I was like, we got to get more women doing this."

While the number of women running marathons in Israel is growing, female participation – and notably Orthodox female participation – in such long distances remains markedly low compared to the men.

With annual races such as the Tel Aviv Marathon, which takes place next week, and the Jerusalem Marathon, set for next month, becoming a staple of the Israeli sporting calendar, and with both the men's and women's national running teams scooping up more and more medals on the world stage, Deutsch, who joined the national team four years ago, said she hopes

to see a change in the sport.

A Haredi mother of five, the runner, who is better known by her nickname, "Marathon Mom," is already serving as an inspiration of sorts for other religiously observant women – and women in general – who are interested in taking up running.

"I can't take credit for everyone, but many, many, many women and girls have now started running," Deutsch said proudly.

"This is something that I'm kind of passionate about," Deutsch, who daily shares motivational clips with her nearly 30,000 followers on Instagram, continued. "It does not matter where you are, what you're doing, or what you're up to in life, you can do a marathon if you want."

"You could be a mom and run a marathon, you could choose any distance to run and all you need to know is how important it is to get out there and do it for yourself," the former New Jersey native added. "It's so empowering to pick a distance and you train for it, get to the race and execute it."

"For me," Deutsch said, "that was the biggest message I learned from my first marathon. I was just so amazed by the fact that I did it, that I could do that distance because I never in my life thought I could."

Since that first marathon, Deutsch, whose story as an Orthodox female runner has drawn international headlines, has been defying the odds. A year after running that first Tel Aviv Marathon in 2016, she ran the race again, but this time she was seven months pregnant. A year after that, 10 months postpartum, Deutsch beat out all other Israeli female runners to win the Jerusalem Marathon.

In total, she has run 10 official marathons, including also winning the 2019 and 2020 marathons in Tiberias, as well as taking part in countless half-marathons and other races all over the world.

Now, Deutsch, 33, is in the midst of preparing for her next big race, the Tokyo Marathon on March 5. This time, she is ratcheting up her regimen a notch by training with other world-class distance runners in the professional sports village near the Kenyan town of Iten.

"Basically, all endurance athletes will train before big races at a high altitude," Deutsch told JI in a phone interview from the East African nation. "Most of the Israeli marathon runners are Ethiopian, so they go to Ethiopia, but I decided on Kenya because there is more English spoken here and it is better set up for foreigners."

"If you train at altitude or higher elevation then when you come back down, you're stronger, and running feels a lot easier," she explained.

According to Deutsch, most professional runners spend at least five or six weeks at the village, tackling ultra-long distances in the morning, soothing in ice baths in the afternoon and completing the day with shorter five- or six-kilometer runs "just to shake out the legs."

"For me, it wasn't easy leaving my family for three weeks, but it seemed like I was at

the right point to do it," admitted Deutsch, whose children range in age from 13 to 5. "My kids are a little bit older now and my husband felt comfortable with me leaving, so I took the opportunity."

Despite her shortened stay, Deutsch is in good company on the dusty trails in Kenya. Israeli marathon champion Lonah Chemtai Salpeter, who is considered one of the fastest female long-distance runners in the world, after winning the World Championship in Eugene, Ore., last July and finishing second in the New York Marathon in November, was born in Kenya and also trains at the village. And Deutsch, who has one week left in the camp, proudly documented her run with Kenyan-born Olympic silver medalist Paul Chelimo, who runs for the U.S. team, on Instagram.

"It's an amazing opportunity for me that I don't normally get to have," Deutsch confessed. "I run when I am at home obviously, but I have less recovery time because I am still really busy with my family and the kids, there's so much to take care of and I just don't seem to get enough sleep."

"This is what most professional athletes do," she continued. "It's nice to have this period of time where I can be very focused on the training, and I think it will set me up for success in my next marathon."

Deutsch's upcoming run in Japan will be her first in more than a year after suffering injuries that forced her to miss out on what she calls "the two biggest opportunities in my career."

After failing to achieve her desired running time in the Seville Marathon last year and believing she had failed to qualify for the World Championship, a disappointed Deutsch returned to Israel and participated in the Tel Aviv Half Marathon race to "cheer herself up."

It was a mistake, she said, because running two competitive races so close together caused a serious injury, rendering her unable to join the Israeli team at the World Championships and, a few months later, at the European Championships, which saw the men's team win a gold medal.

What made the blow even harder for Deutsch was that for the first time in her short career, both international races were held during the week and not on Shabbat, meaning that she could participate. In

2020, Deutsch qualified for the marathon at the Tokyo Olympics, but was unable to participate because the event was held on a Saturday.

"It was a lot of processing, emotionally and mentally and it was also physically challenging to finally get back to myself," Deutsch said of her year trying to recover. "I really only felt like I was running the way I used to a week before I left for Kenya, so coming here has been quite nerve-racking."

"I had to really tell myself to just focus on the process," said Deutsch. "Not to think about the outcome or the results but to really get to the source of just loving and appreciating myself, no matter what I do running-wise."

As Deutsch gets back on track, she shared with JI the frustration of being a professional track and field athlete in Israel and the struggle for sponsorships and contracts to support her career. In 2021, Deutsch was featured in a local Adidas campaign titled Impossible is Nothing, but such opportunities are rare, she said.

"I don't get any sponsorship, other than a stipend from the Israel Olympic Committee and my [running] league," Deutsch said. "Most of my income comes from doing speaking engagements and the occasional social media collaboration, but I still have to hustle, even though running is a huge sport in Israel."

"I also have a niche and think I would be a great brand ambassador," said Deutsch, who uses her influence to fund-raise for Beit Daniella, a center just outside Jerusalem that treats and rehabilitates teens with mental health struggles. "Unfortunately, there's just not enough money in the sport in Israel."

Despite the lack of funding, the injuries and the joys of motherhood fivefold, Deutsch said she has no intention to stop running for a living.

"My next big goal is the 2024 Olympics in Paris and after that, I have my eyes on the 2028 Olympics in Los Angeles," she concluded. "My family is very religious, they all come from the Orthodox community, and they struggle to comprehend the whole running thing, but I tell them that I don't have any plans to retire soon – I plan to keep this going for as long as I can." ♦

Under shadow of Charlottesville, Virginia AG sets up antisemitism task force

Attorney General Jason Miyares says the 'people's protector' has a duty to protect Virginia Jews from antisemitism

By Gabby Deutch

Virginia Attorney General Jason Miyares last week announced the creation of a statewide task force that will monitor and combat antisemitism in Virginia, citing the deadly 2017 Charlottesville “Unite the Right” rally as the guiding influence behind the move.

More than five years after neo-Nazis marched in the streets of the college town with tiki torches, chanting “Jews will not replace us,” the now-infamous rally still casts a long shadow over American politics. Antisemitism and hate crimes against Jews have continued to rise. President Joe Biden has said he decided to run for president following the violence of that August 2017 day.

“Virginia is particularly sensitive after, I think, one of the most shameful, darkest chapters in modern Virginia history,” Miyares said of the Charlottesville incident, in a Monday interview with *Jewish Insider*. “Virginia made national news for all the wrong reasons then.”

The Old Dominion is now at the forefront of growing national efforts to fight antisemitism. The Virginia legislature is currently considering four antisemitism-related bills introduced by Gov. Glenn Youngkin, a Republican who signed an executive order on his first day in office in January 2022 creating a commission to examine antisemitism in the commonwealth. The commission’s report, which was released in December, included a detailed list of 21 recommendations policymakers could adopt to make the state better equipped to fight antisemitism. The task force was its first and most immediate suggestion.

“As attorney general, I like to say we’re the people’s protector,” said Miyares, a

Republican. One of the key objectives of the task force, which will be housed in the attorney general’s office, is to educate the public and state officials, particularly law enforcement, about the threat of antisemitism.

“The idea is having a coordinated response,” explained Miyares. “The best way to fight bad information is good information, and having that level of coordination both on law enforcement and education, so everyone knows this is a broad problem. It’s not just siloed in our colleges, it’s not just siloed in raised threat levels at our synagogues. It’s not just siloed on insane conspiracy theories on the internet.”

In December, Miyares sent a letter to college and university presidents and trustees in Virginia, urging them to be aware of and appropriately respond to antisemitism on their campuses. Since then, administrators at three major state universities — James Madison University, George Mason University and Christopher Newport University — have contacted his office to report antisemitic incidents, Miyares said.

“The more information that is shown on the subject, the more victims feel comfortable coming forward,” he said. “One thing, from talking to some of my friends that have been the victims or have witnessed it, is a feeling like they’re alone, and they feel like there’s nobody in a position of power to help or to assist or even be concerned.”

Federal data shows that more than half of all religiously motivated hate crimes in the U.S. target Jews, who make up 2% of the country’s population. It’s important, Miyares argued, that law enforcement officers who might be responding to an accusation of an antisemitic hate crime are aware of the facts.

Virginia is home to more than 150,000 Jews.

However, many law enforcement officers come from parts of Virginia, “particularly rural areas, that don’t have a very visible Jewish community,” he said. One proposal is to require officers in the Virginia State Police to visit the state Holocaust memorial in Richmond during their training.

“We know from history that people don’t know the history. I hate to be cynical, but I just think that there are a lot of individuals that aren’t familiar with the Holocaust, as mind-boggling as that may be,” Miyares noted. A 2020 survey from the Claims Conference found that 63% of Americans between the ages of 18 and 39 did not know that 6 million Jews died in the Holocaust.

“They have no idea that there was this horror that happened, and it happened in one of the most highly educated societies in Europe up to that time, and so it can happen anywhere,” said Miyares. “It’s so critically important that those that are in law enforcement understand that.”

In March, Miyares and Colorado Attorney General Phil Weiser, a Democrat, will lead a bipartisan delegation of U.S. attorneys general to Auschwitz and then to Israel. Weiser’s mother and grandparents are Holocaust survivors.

“We thought it was important to start off with seeing the face of antisemitism, the horror of it at its absolute worst, and then the symbolism of then going from Poland to what is the amazing miracle that is the modern state of Israel,” Miyares said, adding that Israel must be part of conversations about antisemitism. “Israel is held to a standard that no other country seems to be held to.” His trip to Israel will include conversations about combating the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement.

Art Sandler, the former president of the United Jewish Federation of Tidewater and the vice chair of Youngkin's antisemitism commission, told JI he was surprised to realize the "the lack of knowledge and understanding at the state level, in the various departments from education to law enforcement, of antisemitism."

Sandler, a Democrat who has been involved in Virginia politics for decades, said the strong focus on antisemitism from state officials is new. Politically active Virginia Jews have in the past focused state advocacy efforts on developing a stronger trade relationship between Virginia and Israel, "not the civil rights violation of antisemitism," Sandler observed. "That Jew-hatred, that's the phenomenon, if you go back to Charlottesville, 'Jews will not replace us.' It was shocking."

The members of the task force, which will comprise public officials and private citizens, have not yet been selected. But Miyares pledged "to actively seek out voices from those that are on the left-hand side of the political spectrum, because candidly it makes us better at our job. I would be failing, I think, at our job, if the only voices on our task force are people that think like I do."

In the state legislature, Youngkin's proposed antisemitism legislation faces partisan roadblocks. Divided between a Republican-controlled House of Delegates and a Democrat-controlled State Senate, compromise is a necessity — but Democrats are not eager to work with the Republican governor.

"Anything that one side wants, the other side, is going to have a hard time swallowing, and neither side is doing a particularly great job of reaching across the aisle to find common ground," said Vicki Fishman, director of government and community relations at the Jewish Community Relations Council of Greater Washington.

Earlier this month, the House of Delegates approved a bill, with significant but not unanimous Democratic support, that would affirm the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's working definition of antisemitism. The Senate had opposed the measure, but is expected to consider it again now that the most recent version of the legislation clarifies that the adoption of the definition is "non-legally binding."

"It added those words into the legislation so that it would be clear that this was not a codification for the purposes of prosecution, but this was the adoption of a non-legally binding standard — a guide and a tool to help us understand and do education and training about antisemitism," Fishman explained. Some activists and political figures on the left have opposed the IHRA definition, arguing that it targets pro-Palestinian advocates.

"The argument is that we try and deny free speech, which I don't think is a fair description," said William Kilberg, a Northern Virginia attorney and Republican activist who served on Youngkin's antisemitism commission. "If what [Democrats] are trying to do is embarrass the governor — he's become a national figure in the Republican Party, they want to make sure he doesn't have any legislative victories — I think this is the wrong way to go about it."

Virginia's Democrat-controlled state Senate also voted last month against a bill that would, on state contracts of more than \$100,000, prohibit Virginia from contracting with companies that boycott Israel. "The real goal was that taxpayer money in Virginia should not be used to subsidize the BDS movement," Fishman said, but noted that an earlier version of the bill was less narrowly tailored, and sparked concern from Democrats.

A fact sheet from the community relations arms of the Jewish communities in Richmond, Washington, Newport News and Virginia Beach aims to address Democrats' concerns by saying that the businesses "would be free to be as critical of Israel as they want" but could not "actively discriminate against Israeli citizens or businesses and still be awarded a state contract."

That bill passed the House in February with no Democratic support. The Senate is not expected to vote on it again this legislative session.

Two other bills supported by Jewish advocates in Virginia have faced an easier journey in the legislature. A resolution establishing May as Jewish American Heritage Month in Virginia and explaining the history of Jews in Virginia soared through the legislature. Another bill would update state hate crimes statutes to include

the concept of ethnicity because, Fishman explained, antisemitism is not always religiously motivated.

"Hatred against Jews is sometimes based on religious grounds, and it's sometimes based in ethnic, racial or cultural grounds," Fishman explained. The Virginia legislative session continues through the end of the month.

A couple hours north of Richmond, similar conversations about the best ways to fight antisemitism are taking place at the national level. In December, the White House announced the formation of an interagency task force to counter antisemitism, Islamophobia and related forms of bias and discrimination. Its first imperative is to create a national antisemitism strategy.

"I would be delighted if they wanted to collaborate," said Miyares, although he has not yet been in touch with anyone at the White House. ♦

George Santos claimed to be ‘halachically Jewish’ during election campaign

Santos made the claim while courting donations from pro-Israel activists at a fundraising event in South Florida, according to two attendees who were present for the discussion

By Matthew Kassel

A month before his election to Congress last November, Rep. George Santos (R-NY), the scandal-plagued New York Republican, falsely referred to himself as “halachically Jewish” while courting donations from pro-Israel activists at a fundraising event in South Florida, according to two attendees who were present for the discussion.

It was hardly the first time that Santos had made dubious claims to Jewish ancestry. The 34-year-old congressman, who was raised Catholic, has alternately said he is “Jewish,” “Jew-ish,” “half Jewish” “a proud American Jew” a “Latino Jew” and a non-observant Jew, among other descriptors, even as genealogical records have shown he holds no familial connection to Judaism.

But his invocation of Jewish law, or *halacha*, to establish a misleading connection to Jewish heritage through his Brazilian-born mother, whose ancestors were Catholic, adds yet another layer to the convoluted and often contradictory web of deceptions surrounding his purported Jewish roots.

The embattled representative, who fabricated most of his personal and professional background, delivered the remark during an early October event at Mo’s Bagels & Deli in the heavily Jewish Miami suburb of Aventura, according to Andy Fiske, a co-chair of U.S.-Israel PAC, which hosted the meeting.

“He said, ‘I’m halachically Jewish,’” Fiske, who lives in South Florida, told *Jewish Insider* on Monday, recalling that Santos had “made it seem like” his mother was Jewish. “He just made a big deal out of that.”

A second person who attended the event confirmed that Santos had used that phrase

to describe himself, but asked to remain anonymous.

The comment, which has not previously been reported, was positively received as a clever nod to Jewish heritage, Fiske said. That was most likely because, at the time, participants had little reason to doubt Santos’ claim, which remained unchallenged until weeks after the midterm election, when several of his lies were first uncovered.

“He got a chuckle out of the crowd,” Fiske, who is Jewish himself, told *JI*. “It’s sort of funny. It’s sort of like when somebody who’s not Jewish makes a Yiddish comment and you get a little chuckle. It was like that type of thing. It was like, ‘Hey, and by the way, I’m halachically Jewish.’ He was charismatic. He was bantering with the crowd.”

Santos arrived at the event an hour and a half late but quickly charmed the room as he discussed his campaign and took questions from participants, Fiske said. “I found him to be very warm and friendly,” he told *JI*, adding: “He knows how to work a crowd.”

Members of the pro-Israel PAC, which mostly backs Republican candidates, were particularly eager to hear from a rare Jewish Republican running for Congress, according to Fiske, as Rep. Lee Zeldin (R-NY) was then poised to vacate his seat. “It’s nice to have a Jewish Republican member, because I like to see diversity,” Fiske said. “It was nice to have a guy that doesn’t fit the Republican model.”

Now, however, Fiske holds a different perspective. “He said all the right things, where everyone was like, ‘Yeah, this guy’s good,’” he said of Santos, who has cast himself as a stalwart supporter of Israel. “But it was disappointing later to find out

that a lot of this stuff is not true.”

While Fiske emphasized that “being Jewish isn’t a prerequisite” for candidates seeking support from U.S.-Israel PAC, he acknowledged that “it helps sometimes,” if only because a shared Jewish identity can engender a unique sense of common understanding.

Santos, he suggested, had exploited that bond while soliciting contributions from the PAC, which donated \$5,000 to his campaign on Oct. 7, the same day as the event in Aventura.

“By him saying that he’s Jewish, he sort of understands ‘I’m part of the *mishpacha*’ or ‘part of the family,’” Fiske explained. “It’s kind of disingenuous.”

More broadly, Fiske expressed confusion over Santos’ decision to misrepresent himself. “Why say something that’s not true?” he asked. “We’re going to like you anyway because you seem like a good guy and you’re good on our issues. Like, don’t make up stuff that’s not true because you want us to like you more. That’s a character flaw. I guess it’s disappointing that he feels he has to say things that aren’t true. It’s a real insecurity.”

A spokesperson for Santos’ office did not respond to a request for comment from *JI* on Monday.

While in office, Santos has continued to claim “Jewish ancestry” on his mother’s side, though he has yet to produce any evidence to corroborate his assertions.

Until recently, the congressman had said his grandparents escaped Jewish persecution in Europe during World War II. But genealogists have since refuted that story, showing instead that his maternal ancestors were born in Brazil before the war

—and were all baptized, married and buried according to Catholic rites and traditions.

Santos' definition of Judaism, meanwhile, has shifted dramatically over the past few years. Though he recently described himself as "halachically Jewish," he once promoted a completely different interpretation of Jewish identity.

"I believe we are all Jewish, at the end, because Jesus Christ is Jewish," Santos argued in January 2020, during a short stint co-hosting a conservative talk show on Queens Public Television. "And if you believe in Jesus, and we're all brothers in Christ, I mean."

In the same exchange, uncovered last month, Santos also identified as Catholic and said he was "not trying to claim Jewish heritage," while stating that his maternal grandfather, Paulo Horta Devolder, who was Brazilian, "grew up Jewish" in Soviet Ukraine but later converted to Catholicism as the Nazis rose to power.

In addition to misrepresenting his Jewish background, Santos has made unverifiable claims about visiting Israel. In a brief interview shortly after the election, he told JI that he had been to Israel four times, vaguely describing the trips as "probably the most exciting experiences" of his life.

As a House candidate, Santos distributed a Middle East position paper, shared with U.S.-Israel PAC and other pro-Israel groups, in which he claimed to "have been to Israel numerous times from educational, business and leisurely trips."

During the event at Mo's Bagels & Deli last fall, Santos also told the audience that he had visited Israel "but wasn't specific about it," Fiske said. "He mentioned that he was there in Israel and that he's going to go again as a freshman."

His spokesperson did not respond to a request for corroboration from JI.

A spokesperson for Israel's Population and Immigration Authority declined to confirm whether Santos had been to Israel, citing "privacy matters."

Fiske said it is highly unlikely that U.S.-Israel PAC will continue to back Santos in future races, even as he expressed approval of the congressman's approach to Middle East policy. "We probably wouldn't be jumping to support him," Fiske said, calling Santos, who is now facing multiple investigations related to his deceptions, "an embarrassment to the party" and "an embarrassment to himself."

Despite the harsh appraisal, Fiske, who was initially reluctant to speak on the record with JI, said he had been "apprehensive" about publicly criticizing a Republican member of Congress whose views on Israel largely align with his own. "I didn't want to portray like we're not appreciative of his support," he explained.

Stephen Fiske, Andy's twin brother, who co-chairs U.S.-Israel PAC but was not present for the October event, said in a recent text exchange with JI that Santos had "certainly met" the group's "guidelines and probably still does."

Still, he maintained that Santos "should

leave Congress" amid mounting scrutiny over "his fabrication of facts and general prevarications," adding: "Suffice it to say, our membership is disappointed by these revelations."

The Republican Jewish Coalition, which also supported Santos, has likewise said that the newly elected congressman "will not be welcome at any future" events because he "misrepresented his heritage."

Established in 1980, U.S.-Israel PAC, previously known as the Florida Congressional Committee PAC, met with several House and Senate candidates from both parties last cycle, according to its website, which still mistakenly lists Santos as a Jewish Republican nominee for New York's 3rd Congressional District.

The single-issue group, which will hold an event with Rep. Elise Stefanik (R-NY), the No. 3 House Republican, on Friday, is dedicated to "providing financial support for" federal candidates "based solely on their continuing support for" the U.S.-Israel relationship, its website says.

But Fiske, reflecting on his experience meeting with Santos, suggested that the congressman's case might necessitate another basic set of conditions. "We like to support people who have integrity and are honest about their past," he said. ♦

Forty percent of American Jews feel less secure than a year ago, AJC survey finds

Study finds that around a third of Jews feel uncomfortable at school or in the workplace, and the Jewish community is divided on how well the government is responding

By Marc Rod

More than four in 10 American Jews felt less secure in 2022 than the year before — a 10-point jump from 2021 — with rising antisemitism resulting in a “frightening impact” on the comfort levels of members of the Jewish community. That was a key takeaway from a survey released Monday morning by the American Jewish Committee, which measured attitudes on antisemitism both within and outside the Jewish community.

The survey of 1,507 American Jews, which was conducted between Sept. 28 and Nov. 3, 2022, indicated the widespread impact of antisemitism on the American Jewish community. AJC also surveyed 1,004 members of the American public at large between Oct. 10 and Oct. 18.

The first survey found that 26% of Jewish respondents were personally the target of antisemitic incidents in 2022, including antisemitic attacks, antisemitic remarks in person and antisemitic remarks online; 23% are affiliated with an institution that has been targeted by antisemitism in the past five years; and 87% have seen antisemitic content online.

Thirty-three percent of respondents said they’d experienced anti-Jewish bias or discomfort in the workplace, while 36% of students, recent graduates and their parents said that they had experienced issues on campus.

“The importance of this overall survey is to help us move past our focus on the rising antisemitism. We’re aware of rising antisemitism, but we really want people to understand the impact that that is having on the Jewish community and, in particular, on younger Jews,” AJC CEO Ted Deutch told reporters last week in a preview of the

survey’s findings. “The survey shows that the antisemitism that we’ve seen has a real and frightening impact on the attitudes of American Jews, on the comfort of American Jews in American society, at their workplace and in their educational institutions.”

The study also found that American Jews are divided on how well the government is responding to antisemitism. Forty-eight percent said they approved of the job President Joe Biden has done — down from 54% in 2021 — and 34% said they disapproved. But a majority, 56%, said they disapproved of the way Congress has responded, with just 22% approving, down from 28% the year prior. Forty percent of respondents were satisfied with how their state and local governments are responding. The survey was conducted prior to the announcement of the White House task force on antisemitism and Islamophobia.

“It’s a question of the urgency of taking action,” Deutch said, of the overall survey. “There’s been a call for more action by the federal government for some time. Now, there is an effort, thankfully, to create a national action plan. This highlights why that’s necessary.”

Thirty-eight percent of respondents reported having changed their behavior — modifying where they go, what they wear or carry or what they post online — in response to fear of antisemitism, and half said that institutions with which they are affiliated have increased security in recent years.

In the American population at large, 36% of respondents reported having personally seen an antisemitic incident — the vast majority of which occurred online. Sixty-eight percent of Americans said that antisemitism is a problem, compared to 89%

of Jews who said the same. Jewish and non-Jewish Americans in general disagree on whether antisemitism is increasing — 80% of the Jewish individuals surveyed believe it is increasing, compared to 47% of the general population.

Around 90% of Jewish and non-Jewish respondents agreed that saying “Israel has no right to exist” is antisemitic.

“Unfortunately, the overwhelming majority of Americans agree [antisemitism is] a problem,” Deutch said. “So we need to work together to solve it.”

He added that the results indicate that AJC and the Jewish community need to be working more closely with the business community to make sure that Jews feel comfortable in the workplace, as well as on college campuses — not only to respond to antisemitic incidents but also to “make sure... there’s a greater understanding of what antisemitism does to the Jewish community on campus.”

Deutch said the results relating to antisemitism on social media show that platforms’ policies “either [are] not being followed well enough or they’re not tough enough.”

“There are a lot of things that need to happen that I hope will be part of [AJC’s] national action plan,” he concluded. ♦

The Super Bowl parties making a difference

Meir Kay created Super Soul Party to give people experiencing homelessness a place to relax, come together and watch the game

By **Tori Bergel**

The article first appeared in eJewishPhilanthropy.

A few weeks before the New England Patriots beat the Atlanta Falcons in Super Bowl LI, Meir Kalmanson, better known as Meir Kay, was walking through New York City when he noticed a man on the sidewalk holding a cardboard sign. “I don’t want food, I don’t want a drink, I just want to be seen,” it said, so Kay invited the man for a meal and the two got to know each other.

With the experience top of mind and nearing game day, Kay began to think of all the people without friends or family during what has become an unofficial American holiday. When Super Bowl Sunday arrived, Kay showed up to his friend’s rooftop house party alongside half a dozen homeless individuals he had invited from around the neighborhood.

“It was amazing,” he recalled to *eJewishPhilanthropy*. “It wasn’t about watching the game or even having a hot meal, which is important, of course, to have that, but it was the interaction, the connection, the eye contact...how these guys [walked] in and how they left, as a whole, was a massive obvious shift.”

“They were just there, interacting, you couldn’t really tell who was unhoused and who was housed. It was just people together enjoying life,” Kay added.

He posted a video of the party on YouTube; it quickly went viral. A professional filmmaker at heart, Kay started his channel, which has amassed 324,000 followers since its creation in 2008, to spread joy and kindness. The following year, Kay began fielding calls from people wanting to get involved with his next event.

“They wanted to bring it to their own town, and honestly, I can’t say it was my

intention. I was like, ‘OK cool, I did this thing, it was nice and amazing, but...’ But I realized there was this demand, people wanted to help and there was a need for this,” Kay said.

By 2019, he had filed to become an official nonprofit, and Super Soul Party was born.

Over the next six years, Super Soul Party would expand, with events in 36 cities by 2022. The parties included much-needed resources for people experiencing homelessness, such as mental health counseling, hot food and clothing drives. They also switched from street outreach to working directly with homeless shelters, so that more guests could go to and from the events.

Kay, who grew up in a family affiliated with the Chabad Lubavitch movement — and even got his rabbinical degree while studying in Singapore — sees Super Soul Party as an extension of his faith.

“The golden rule in Judaism is to love thy neighbor as yourself,” Kay said. “I don’t necessarily push any type of rhetoric on anybody, that’s not the goal, I think it’s about simplifying the idea that we’re all brothers and sisters, children of God, and showing up with a smile and connecting on that human soul level. I think that’s godly and I think that’s what Jews are about, you know, *tikkun olam* and loving one another. It doesn’t get more Jewish than that.”

This year, in addition to the organization’s typical fundraising, Super Soul Party formed partnerships with four outside organizations — Hanes For Good, the clothing company’s philanthropic branch; Elitra Health, In Search of More and 7th Heaven Chocolate. Kay chose to cap festivities at eight cities in order to restructure the nonprofit toward sustainability and allow room for more events throughout the year.

“We’re restructuring it in a way that we’re fundraising, we’re getting those resources,

so I could hire a backend of people so we could grow the nonprofit a little bit more slowly and we can also have more impact, not just once a year, but throughout the year too,” Kay said.

Despite the smaller scale, the party was not diminished. On Sunday evening in New York City, about 200 people, around 100 of whom were experiencing homelessness, showed up at the Sixth Street Community Synagogue — a fortuitous name for such an event — to watch the Kansas City Chiefs take on the Philadelphia Eagles.

Walking through the door, there were tables set up along the right side of the room filled with clothing and “dignity bags” containing personal essentials including toothbrushes, tampons and deodorant. In the corner by the entrance, a barber station gave haircuts to anyone who wanted. A buffet of mini hot dogs, chicken and Chinese food — all kosher — sat at the front with volunteers in Super Soul Party t-shirts helping throughout the various stations. People chatted and ate at a handful of round tables or else sat in one of the many rows of folding chairs arranged before a large projected screen across the back wall.

Volunteers and guests mingled, and many seemed to recognize each other from years past as they greeted each other with a handshake or a hug.

“To me, it’s all in our name. We’re all super souls, and we’re just here to party. I think you take away the religion, the race, the ethnicity of a person, at the end of the day, you connect on so many levels beyond just finances and how you live.” Ben Kreisberg, a Super Soul volunteer who’s been with the organization since its second year, told *eJP*. “[This event] makes you feel humanized. Sometimes as people living in a big city like New York, it’s very easy to get caught up in our lives and forget [the needs of others], so

this is a chance to come back and say, 'Look, we're here, we're one people.'"

When the players were on the field, a chorus of good-natured cheering and booing surrounded the room; during commercial breaks, conversations started anew. Kay recalled that last year, a dance party erupted during the halftime show.

"It's a beautiful thing to be part of and witness, the laughter and conversations and connections. It's really what life's really

about," Kay said.

The Chiefs won in the end, but the game's outcome wasn't what mattered. Super Soul Party is about humanity, friendship, connection, not just one day, but all year round.

"I hope that we continue to have a greater impact; that we're able to make a dent in this really big problem with homelessness and do our part to help break down stigmas, shine a light on this population that feels invisible,

and to help those who feel invisible, to help those who are facing homelessness, to allow them to see themselves as worthy enough and dignified human beings so that they can feel empowered to go ahead and build the life that they want," Kay said.

If you want to get involved with Super Soul Party, more information can be found at supersoulparty.org. ♦

FEBRUARY 15, 2023

Three years that foretold the modern Jewish state

Oren Kessler's debut book charts the origins of the Arab revolt of 1936-39, the battles and the debates that shaped the contours of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict

By Melissa Weiss

Israel will celebrate the 75th anniversary of its founding this spring, marking the date in 1948 that David Ben-Gurion announced the creation of the State of Israel in the waning hours of the British Mandate. The following year and a half would see thousands killed as the nascent Jewish state fought for its existence. But while the war for independence officially began in May 1948, the die had been cast a decade earlier.

That's the argument that journalist and analyst Oren Kessler makes in his new book, *Palestine 1936: The Great Revolt and the Roots of the Middle East Conflict*, which chronicles the three-year period in which, Kessler says, 'the '48 war was won by the Zionists and lost by the Arabs of Palestine.'

Palestine 1936, which is out today from Rowman & Littlefield, centers on the period between 1936-1939, around the historical events and figures that gave rise to — and in some cases, tried to stem — the Arab

Revolt, in which some 500 Jews, more than 250 Britons and between 5,000-8,000 Arabs were killed as European Jewish immigration to then-Mandatory Palestine and Arab aspirations of statehood found each other in direct conflict.

The book covers an era often neglected by historians writing about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, in part due to a lack of source material. Kessler studied recently unclassified documents detailing the secret hearings between successive British commissions and advocates for the creation of the Jewish state, as well as more publicly available documents.

This interview has been edited and condensed for clarity.

Jewish Insider: How did you decide to pick this specific three-year time period out of all of the time periods?

Oren Kessler: I had been looking for a topic to write a book about, and I decided what the world needs is another book on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict! But fairly quickly, I realized that this is a very saturated field, and it seemed as if every aspect of this land and this conflict had been written about from 15 different angles. Until I lit upon this particular topic and time period and chapter in the history of this land and this conflict, which struck me as extremely formative and important and seriously under-explored and under-investigated. It seemed to me, and it's still my belief, that there is a major gap in the literature and one that can shed a lot of light onto our current situation. And one that's filled with a lot of really fascinating, compelling characters on all three sides: Jewish, Arab and British, some of whom are very well known to us — [such as] Winston Churchill, David Ben-Gurion, and Hajj Amin al-Husseini, the grand mufti [of Jerusalem] — [and] others who are not so well-known, but I think ought to be. And

that's the gap that I sought to fill.

Jl: Something that struck me early on was that this topic had not been written about until several decades ago. What was the research process like?

OK: I do want to give credit to historians and writers who came before me. It's not that nobody had written about this, but that this time period of this revolt and everything that surrounded it has typically been given a few pages in wider histories of the conflict, or at most a chapter. And certainly until I wrote this book, I can confidently claim that no general history has been devoted to this topic in English. As you mentioned, the first academic work devoted to this in English came about in the '80s, and in recent years, there have been a couple more. But in English there has been no general history, although in Hebrew there have been a couple.

Some of the most key documents on this period were only declassified a few years ago. So there was a wide archival record since the '70s, but some of the most sensitive, important documentation was classified much longer. For example, the secret testimonies from the Peel Commission of 1937. This was a royal commission sent by the British to respond after the first six months of the revolt. And this is the commission that famously first proposed partitioning the land between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean into two states, Jewish and Arab. This is the first time that partition was floated by world powers in any serious way. This is the first time the words 'Jewish state' appeared on the diplomatic agenda. So the secret testimonies from this very important commission were classified for 80 years, from 1937 to 2017. And they were declassified very quietly, there was no announcement. I am indebted to Dr. Steven Wagner for discovering these testimonies and for generously providing them to me. The people giving these testimonies, whether British officials or prominent Zionists, [their testimony is] extremely illuminating in terms of how the British and the Jews looked at this brewing national conflict between the Zionist movement and the Palestinian Arab national movement, and how they reached this fairly revolutionary proposal of dividing the land and of creating a Jewish state. This

was not necessarily the plan. This was quite a drastic change. And seeing these private testimonies was really fascinating.

Jl: It's really illuminating. As you said, it was British testimony and Zionist testimony. There's an entire voice missing.

OK: The Arab side initially boycotted the commission, because the grand mufti of Jerusalem told them to. He insisted that they were going to boycott the commission entirely. And so at the very last minute, at which the commission was about to leave the country, the grand mufti realized that they were sabotaging their own case, that the British were hearing all of the Jewish arguments and explanations and receiving all of the reports from the Jews. [The mufti realized] that the British side was hearing only the Jewish side of things and the mufti belatedly agreed that he and other Arabs — as long as he approved them — would testify. So in the last week of the commission, the Arabs did testify in a public setting. But the Arab side insisted that all of their testimony be public, that anything they had to say could be said publicly. So in that way, the secret testimonies only include the Brits and the Jews.

Jl: One thing that came through quite clearly in the book is that there is no side taken. You gave equal voice to the Arabs, to the Brits, to the Jews, and it didn't feel like you were advocating for one side over the other.

OK: I didn't want to write a polemical book. I didn't want it to feel like advocacy for one point of view or another. I wanted to do an old-school work of history. I did want to write it as engagingly as possible and to have sort of a journalistic feel to it almost, and I wanted it to be a book about people. But in a sense, I wanted to let all sides kind of say their piece and to say it in the best way that they could, and then let the reader draw the conclusions that he or she will. I think that's the work of a historian or even of a journalist, if they're doing their job properly. I wanted to present a story that was as faithful as it could be to the documentary record as I found it. Inevitably, when you're

writing history, you have to pick and choose what you quote and what you don't and what you mention and what you don't. But as long as I felt I was being faithful to what I thought was a reasonable, fair version of the archival record writ large, I felt like I was doing my job.

Jl: Like you said, this book is very much about people. Can you talk a little bit about some of the more interesting characters? Obviously, Chaim Weizmann, David Ben-Gurion played a role, but there are a lot of lesser-known historical figures who were very interesting and that most people don't know a lot about.

OK: I tried to tell these stories, through a handful of people, of characters on each side. The Jewish characters that I've chosen will be pretty well-known to many of your readers, probably. There's David Ben-Gurion, who even at this time was the uncontested leader of the Jews of Palestine/Eretz Yisrael. Chaim Weizmann is just a fascinating character. This is a man who was, of course, the head of the World Zionist Organization. This is a man who many Israelis remember as the first president of the country, but really that was the epilogue to his career. This man, as I write in the book, was the face and muscle of Zionism for three decades, from the Balfour Declaration to the founding of the state, and a very charming man. He managed to charm almost every British person that he met and converted many of them to the Zionist cause, many of them despite themselves.

And then on the Arab side, you can't write the story without focusing on the Grand Mufti Hajj Amin al-Husseini. I think it's safe to say that his role in this period as in the entire Mandate and beyond is a negative one. It's one that cost the Palestinians dearly, then and now. And I also chose a few lesser-known people on the Arab side — people like Musa Alami, who was a Cambridge man and who worked in the mandate administration for many years, and who was a committed Arab nationalist but also had many Jewish friends. He met often with David Ben-Gurion and they enjoyed a lot of mutual respect. And [he] even kept in touch with Ben-Gurion, even into the '70s until Ben-

Gurion died. And the meetings that he had with Ben-Gurion are fascinating in terms of just understanding where both sides were at the time and the arguments that they were raising. He's just a really complex character. I also focus quite a bit on George Antonius, who was an intellectual and who wrote a book called *The Arab Awakening* in 1938, which introduced the world to this concept of Arab nationalism, which wasn't really known at the time. And he was another Cambridge man and a marginal or liminal figure in the sense that he wasn't entirely at home in the Arab world and he wasn't entirely home in the British world or the Western world, but was kind of in between, which I found very interesting.

And on the British side, there's a cast of reliably eccentric and engaging British characters, from Winston Churchill to Orde Wingate, who is a fascinating and strange Christian Zionist, but also an Arabist who spoke very good Arabic. He was one of very few members of the British administration here who made any attempt to learn Hebrew. And he put together the Special Night Squads, which was the seed of Zionist special forces and included men like Moshe Dayan and Yigal Allon, who became the future leaders of the IDF, the future officer corps. This is a period and a chapter that's just full of compelling characters, and I wanted to bring that out.

JI: There's a lot that I learned from the book. I didn't realize how much of what we see today in Israel has carried over from 80 years ago, 90 years ago, such as the British way of dealing with punishment, specifically collective punishment. It's something that's really interesting to see, especially now, especially with the rise in tensions and violence.

OK: At first the British had to absorb quite a bit of criticism that they were quite lax in cracking down on the revolt. There were actually two phases of the revolt — the second began after the Peel Commission, with the assassination of a British governor of Galilee named Lewis Andrews. When the revolt started up again, the British came in with very heavy-handed techniques, particularly after the Munich crisis was

averted in Europe and Britain suddenly felt that they were able to send large numbers of troops to Palestine. So throughout 1938, the peak of the revolt, we see a lot of counter-insurgency, counter-terror methods that we will be very familiar with today, such as house demolitions. This is really the first time that home demolitions are practiced on any significant scale in this country — the British demolished 2,000 homes throughout the revolt. There was also administrative detention, namely detaining suspects without charge. These are methods that were legal by British standards because the British had implemented various emergency regulations that allowed them to do these things. And as you mentioned, collective punishment was also widely practiced. For example, if a bomb was laid on a highway, the British would go to the village closest to that location. They would bring out the *mukhtar*, the village chief, and they would ask him who was responsible for it, and if he couldn't tell them, then they would start using what were known as, 'Turkish methods.' So that could involve interrogation, that could involve physical interrogation, that could involve demolishing homes in the village indiscriminately. There are a few well-known cases of atrocities being committed, in which the British essentially killed Arab civilians without any direct knowledge of them having been involved in attacks. There are a couple of fairly egregious incidents, particularly in two villages called Halhul and Bassa. A lot of these emergency regulations still remain on the books today in Israel. Israel, of course, inherited many British Mandate laws, much of the legal system, and many of the more heavy-handed measures that the IDF sometimes takes actually are rooted in both the practices of the British Army at this time and even the legal basis for them.

JI: I want to go back to the source material for a second, because it wasn't just the testimonials that are included. What was it like to go through all of that material? It must have been so fascinating and overwhelming.

OK: There were certainly fascinating moments and discoveries and there were a lot of eureka moments of saying, 'I cannot

believe this person said that.' And that goes for Jews, Arabs and Brits. The Brits are always quotable and they never disappoint with a quotable nugget, oftentimes one that's offensive towards Jews, Arabs or both. But nonetheless highly quotable.

JI: I'm remembering how they described the Arabs and the Jews.

OK: I think probably a lot of Israelis will be curious to know, 'What did the Brits think of the Jews? What do they think of the Arabs?' It's interesting to get an outsider's perspective. My sense was that on the whole, the British in this country tended to admire the Jews, but like the Arabs. There was a lot of admiration for the massive strides that the Jews had made, and even critics of Zionism would often concede that the strides that the Jews were able to make in the '20s and '30s were just astonishing, just in terms of settlement and economics. This country was transformed in those decades, from a real backwater into a corner of the developed world very quickly. And so there was a lot of admiration for that, and yet, the Brits tended to find the Jews to be in a little too much of a hurry. They tended to find the Jews to be not always very well-mannered. They tended to find the Jews demanding and entitled. Of course, I'm generalizing here, but I encountered these sentiments time and again. And the Arabs, unfortunately, there was certainly oftentimes an attitude of paternalism and a feeling that the Arabs are kind of helpless, and that they need British help and that they're no match for the Jews, financially or even in terms of their education and that they need to be protected from what is a very fast-moving, dynamic, ambitious and motivated Zionist project. The Brits liked the fact that in their words, the Arabs 'take their time with things' and that they're deferential, whereas the Jews were not particularly deferential, and had their own ideas and opinions about everything. I do think that for members of the British colonial service, they weren't used to a 'colonial population' or a subject population that was in their view European. They didn't quite know what to make of them. They were used to...the British Empire on one side, and the natives on the other side. And a large number of the British

administration and the British Army and even police who were deployed here had experience in India, for example. And it was very clear in India that there were the British and there were the Indians. And here, they were encountering members of the Jewish leadership who may have had Ph.D.s, or they may have been German speakers, or they may have been scientists. Oftentimes even members of the Jewish proletariat here were very well-educated, and the British weren't quite sure what to do with that or what to make of that.

Jl: It was so interesting how the people you feature in the book are constantly warning, in the 1930s, that the lives of 6 million Jews — the number of Jews who would go on to die in the Holocaust — were at risk.

OK: It is chilling. There's testimony from Chaim Weizmann to the Peel Commission in which he's almost banging the table saying, 'Six million Jews need a home.' This figure just kept reappearing of 6 million — it's really quite eerie to read. People like Weizmann felt in their bones that the cataclysm was about to come. And [Ze'ev] Jabotinsky, we haven't mentioned Jabotinsky, but probably more than anyone, he could feel that the apocalypse was about to come and that the Jews needed immediate sanctuary. So in a sense it is chilling to read all of these very accurate predictions from what are the final years before the Holocaust, and then it is quite sad to read the bureaucratic wrangling on the British side, about how many Jews they can let in, and it's a very small number. They had their own reasons for it, of course. They talk quite openly about 'appeasing' Arab and Muslim opinion in the world, because they simply felt they couldn't afford to have the Muslims of the empire against them, particularly in India. And this is something we rarely think about, the fact that the British were determined to 'appease' the Muslims of India, and therefore the Jews of Europe couldn't come to the Land of Israel. It's kind of a mind-boggling thing, but from a perspective of Jewish history it's one of the most consequential decisions ever made. And it was very interesting to read the memoirs of Malcolm MacDonald, who was colonial secretary at the time, who

basically made this decision, and to see how he grappled with the fact that his decision doomed hundreds of thousands of people to the gas chambers.

Jl: Where does this period in time stand in relation to the other 'big' moments in Israel's history?

OK: When we look at this period, which seems so long ago, and we look at today, the ripple effects and the repercussions and the legacy of this revolt I think are very striking. In many ways, both visible and invisible, the revolt rages on, both for Israelis and Palestinians. For Palestinians, the heroes of the revolt still very much live on in their pantheon. People like Izz ad-Din al-Qassam, the militant preacher whose death at British hands sparked the revolt — Hamas' armed wing and rockets still carry his name. There are Palestinian folk songs that still celebrate this revolt. There are Palestinian schools named after militants from this revolt. Even in the last Gaza war in 2021, when there was a daylong strike across the West Bank — and many Arabs within Israel participated — social media was all abuzz with comparisons to 1936 and the six-month strike in 1936. And interestingly, even on the Jewish side, Bezalel Smotrich, our incoming finance minister, during that same war and the violence in the mixed cities in Israel, put up a tweet saying something like, 'These riots take us back to the days of the Arab revolt. Back then it was a lax British government not letting the Jews take matters into their own hands and now, a weak Jewish government is operating with its hands tied.' (Of course, he was in the opposition at that time.)

The focus of the book is the Arab Revolt, but I think this is as much a Jewish story as an Arab story. This is a period in which the Jews were transformed militarily, economically, politically and psychologically. This is the moment at which the mainstream Zionist leadership recognized that despite their best efforts to convince the Arabs of Palestine that they weren't coming to displace anyone — that they were bringing blessings upon everyone, that there was room here for two peoples — they realized that the Arab opposition was such that the fate of this country would have to be determined and

maintained by force. I think that was a realization that they were fairly perturbed to discover, but quickly had to make peace with as it were, had to recognize that that was the reality and that they had to adjust accordingly. And by 1939, when the British implement their infamous white paper, which essentially shut the doors to the Land of Israel to the doomed Jews of Europe, once that point was reached, the Jews had created the military, economic, political, territorial basis and springboard for establishing the state nearly 10 years later.

And on the Palestinian Arab side, it's the mirror image of that. Whereas the Jews had seized this opportunity to make tremendous gains in their own state-building enterprise, the Palestinians were completely gutted. The social fabric was completely torn, one in five men had been detained. Probably 5,000, maybe even 8,000, Arabs had been killed — many of them, most of them even, at Arab hands (and this is also a precursor to the infighting in the [two] intifadas). Massive amounts of weapons had been confiscated by the British, huge numbers of Palestinian refugees had fled the country to neighboring countries. The political leadership had fled — above all, the mufti. So this is a society that's almost destroyed on the eve of the Second World War. Of course, the typical historical narrative, certainly the Palestinian narrative, is that everything fell apart and the huge defeat came in 1948. But what I argue in this book is that, in a way, the '48 war was won by the Zionists and lost by the Arabs of Palestine a decade beforehand, and that '48 was, in that sense, an epilogue to the war that had been decided 10 years earlier. ♦

Jewish and Israeli humanitarian organizations join earthquake relief efforts

Many of the Jewish relief organizations plan to keep staff on the ground in Turkey beyond the rescue-and-recovery period, to assist those affected by the earthquakes

By Madison Hahamy

The article first appeared in eJewishPhilanthropy.

The woman had been trapped for two days under the rubble of an apartment building, and a search-and-rescue unit from United Hatzalah, an EMS service working in coordination with the Israeli government, helped pull her to safety. It was a small ripple of joy in a sea of despair. Because of a shortage of medical personnel in the area, members of the Hatzalah unit also traveled with the woman to the hospital.

IsraAid, the largest humanitarian organization in Israel, has a team of nine people on the ground in two locations in quake-ravaged Turkey, helping with everything from trauma counseling to providing winter clothing as subzero temperatures grip the region.

And the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, which has longstanding and deep roots in Eastern Europe, is focused, for now, on attending to people's most basic needs — hot soup, water, blankets. The organization's planning for quake survivors' longer-term needs is still some time off.

In the hours and days since a massive, 7.8-magnitude earthquake struck southern Turkey last Monday, dozens of Jewish and Israeli organizations — along with aid agencies from all over the world — have dispatched teams to help with relief efforts as the death toll climbs above 24,000.

"Israel's proximity to Turkey is undoubtedly one reason so many of our Israeli partners were able to get to the scene so quickly after the devastating disaster," Naomi Lipstein, the communications manager for Olam, a network of Jewish

and Israeli aid organizations, told *eJewishPhilanthropy*. Olam, together with the Society for International Development (SID) Israel the Israeli branch of the U.S.-based international aid group, convene a network of humanitarian groups and have collated a list of a dozen organizations that are currently providing aid in the relief effort in Turkey — some of which are directly on the ground — including IsraAid, the JDC and United Hatzalah of Israel. The two umbrella organizations also opened a WhatsApp group with about 60 people either directly working in Turkey or connected to people on the ground, helping to join them with translators, drivers and more. Such a group, Lipstein said, allows for collaboration between organizations. For example, IsraAid arrived in Turkey with United Hatzalah.

But, Lipstein added, Jewish values, beyond basic human obligation, and not simple proximity, drive many OLAM organizations to rush to help. "As Jews, when we are lucky enough to have the capacity to extend our giving beyond our community, we must fulfill our moral responsibility and do exactly that," she said.

The organizations on the ground fill a variety of roles — United Hatzalah, for example, primarily provides medical and psychological treatment to earthquake survivors, and helps with search-and-rescue efforts. Rachel Zubata, the deputy commander of United Hatzalah's emergency relief mission to Turkey, called the relief mission "a beacon of unity, with the sole purpose of providing aid to those in need."

Though United Hatzalah is Israel-based, the nonprofit often assists with international disasters. Zubata, for example, helped relocate thousands of Ukrainian

refugees to Israel in 2022.

In Turkey, the group's efforts are much needed. The rescue of the trapped woman, Zubata said, "is just one example that highlighted in my eyes the importance of our team's presence and cooperation with other teams at the disaster sites," (According to a United Hatzalah statement on Sunday, the nonprofit's search-and-rescue effort in southern Turkey was abruptly halted due to what was described as a "significant security threat." A plane donated by Dr. Miriam Adelson flew the team back to Israel, according to the statement.)

Sheba Medical Center, the largest medical center in Israel, is another Israel-based organization that has dispatched teams to provide medical humanitarian relief, recently operating in Ukraine and Kenya. In Turkey, there are around eight medical reserve officers assisting in the Israeli Defense Force's humanitarian effort — in the next month, the IDF plans to rotate out and Sheba will begin running the Israeli humanitarian operation, according to Yoel Hareven, head of Sheba Global.

Brian Abrahams, the CEO of American Friends of Sheba Medical Center — the fundraising arm of Sheba Medical Center — noted that Sheba's sees its "mandate in the world" as being part of humanitarian relief efforts. This mandate, he added, has only increased over the past few years due to the coronavirus pandemic, war, and an influx of natural disasters.

JDC, a Jewish humanitarian organization, has worked specifically with Turkey's Jewish community and population more broadly to assist with previous earthquake and other disaster responses. In response to last week's catastrophe, they immediately sent a team to the disaster zone

to help distribute blankets, food, and direct survivors to shelter.

Leora Wine, JDC's director of disaster response, arrived in Turkey 33 hours after the earthquake initially struck. The initial response, she said, is focused on attending to people's most basic needs — the "bottom of the bottom" of the Maslow pyramid — and making sure that people afraid to sleep in their homes have hot soup, water, blankets and a general feeling of safety. She noted that these efforts are often communal and not just relegated to foreign humanitarian organizations— everyone who is able to help does what they can.

But JDC also focuses on long-term needs, making sure that it partners with local organizations so they can build capacity to sustain themselves long-term and prepare for the next disaster. In 2019, for example, the group worked with survivors of Hurricane Dorian, which devastated the Bahamas, to help them develop hydroponic food techniques and other forms of disaster preparedness. Wine noted that these on-

the-ground efforts are especially important since those with the means to leave often do so, meaning that the ones still there are the ones who need the most assistance.

"When there's a disaster, everybody comes at the beginning," Wine added. "Look at those who stick around. That's what's important to know."

IsraAid has worked in over 60 countries. Similar to JDC, they focus both on immediate relief and long-term recovery and resilience. According to Yotam Polizer, the group's CEO, the teams he dispatches will often spend five to seven years in one location, rather than just a few months. In Turkey, the organization has a team of nine people on the ground in two different locations, which includes trauma specialists, water engineers, and people with operations and logistics experience who are helping to provide immediate relief in the form of heating and winter clothing. At the same time, they are training local people to build capacity while also partnering with local organizations to help make the work sustainable.

"This crisis in terms of Turkey, in terms of climate disaster, is the worst we've seen in years," Polizer said, noting the widespread disaster and inaccessibility of many places. "People go to areas more accessible or highlighted on mainstream media, but if you go two miles down the road, there's a small village equally devastated or more that has received zero support."

Even so, Polizer also noted the "beautiful side of these terrible tragedies," which is the opportunity to build bridges and see the good in humanity.

"What I know is that it's very hard, very cold, and you see bodies all over. Really all over the streets, everywhere. There's this feeling of helplessness in the face of something so big. At the same time," he added, "you see all the good in mankind. See how so many people support each other, how the whole world is coming together regardless of religious politics to support people in crisis." ♦

FEBRUARY 13, 2023

Turning barren desert soil into fertile wine country

Israel's Negev winemakers pioneer growing techniques that could be adopted widely across the Middle East as the earth gets hotter and drier

By Linda Gradstein

The article first appeared in The Circuit.

Assaf Galai stands at the end of a row of cabernet sauvignon vines that are hibernating during Israel's short winter. He remembers what it looked like when he moved to this Negev desert village more than 20 years ago.

"When we bought this land there was

nothing here – no pavements, no roads, no sewage," the 58-year-old vintner told *The Circuit*. "It was a ruined territory with villages that were bankrupt. People here said this is not an area for growing wine and it won't succeed. For me it was like a natural casino, and I thought I had a 50-50 chance of winning."

Galai's is an estate winery, meaning that

he grows all of the grapes he uses to make his 10,000 bottles of prize-winning wines in Nir Akiva, 60 miles (100 km) south of Tel Aviv. His flagship wine, Casa Negev, a blend of 70% merlot and 30% cabernet sauvignon, won gold medals last year at Israel's Terravino Mediterranean International Wine & Spirit Challenge. Another best-seller is the blanc de noirs, a white wine made

with black grapes, in this case cabernet sauvignon.

What makes his wines unique, said Galai, is the “terroir,” that amalgam of soil, climate and weather conditions that make each wine-growing area in the world different. Roughly 60% of Israel is desert. “It’s poor land but it gives the wine a nice quality. You can actually taste the dusty desert flavors in the wine,” Galai said his winery’s terroir is “loess,” a geological term that means it’s made up of windblown dust and silt – in this case about 17% limestone.

The great difference in temperature between night and day in the desert is good for the grapes, and the lack of rainfall means that fungus, which can be a problem in other wine-growing areas, does not pose issues here.

The Galai estate is part of a group of almost 40 wineries and vineyards that are working together to expand wine tourism in the Negev, which houses only 10% percent of Israel’s population. Others include the Midbar, Pinto, Nana Estate, Neot Semadar and Sde Boker wineries. The effort is being spearheaded by the Merage Foundation Israel, a family fund that has been involved in developing the Negev since 2005.

Israel’s emergence as a maker of fine wines has developed over the past 30 years, starting with the Golan Heights Winery, built on land Israel captured from Syria in the 1967 Six-Day War. While Israeli wines were once dismissed as sweet and syrupy because they were largely produced for sacramental purposes, today there are more than 300 wineries in Israel, 65 of which won medals at the 2020 Decanter World Wine Awards held in London’s Canary Wharf.

The Negev winemakers represent “a new wave of pioneers,” Nicole Hod, Merage’s executive director, told *The Circuit*. “There is a powerful story here of archaeology, sociology and tourism. The Nabateans grew wine here 2,000 years ago.”

In the eastern part of the Negev near the city of Arad, the Yatir winery is also making prize-winning wines. Yatir is owned by one of Israel’s largest wineries, Carmel, and was established in 2000. Today it produces 150,000 bottles, a third of which are exported.

Among the Yatir wines, Har Amasa is a well-reviewed blend of petit Verdot,

cabernet sauvignon, syrah, malbec and tannat that is aged for a year in small oak barrels.

The 2014 Har Amasa was “surprisingly fresh and rather elegant,” international critic Mark Squires said in his tasting notes for *Wine Advocate*. “Right now, this looks like a winner, and I’m leaning up. It does have a few things to prove in the cellar. At worst, it is a solid wine with some distinction and sophistication in demeanor.”

Yatir’s wines are kosher while Galai’s are not. Certifying a wine as kosher means it has been supervised by observant Jews from the time the grapes are crushed until the wine is bottled. It also means that winemakers who are not observant like Assaf Galai are not allowed to possess the keys to their own wineries. Wines that are exported are almost always kosher as the market abroad is mostly religious Jews.

The Yatir grapes are grown in a forest that was originally planted in the 1960s to stop the desert from encroaching on fertile land. There are remains of ancient wine presses in the area, meaning wine was made here thousands of years ago.

“We don’t get much rain and [when] the vine suffers a little, you get the best wine,” Yatir’s export manager, Etti Edri, told *The Circuit*.

The Merage Foundation has launched a new website as part of an effort to create a Negev wine “appellation,” a legally defined and protected geographical area that originated in 18th century Europe and identifies where the grapes for a wine are grown. Wineries in the Judean Hills outside Jerusalem established an appellation in 2020. Elsewhere in the Middle East, Lebanon has an established wine industry, best known for Chateau Musar, a winery north of Beirut that grows its grapes in the Beqaa Valley. Muslim prohibitions on drinking alcohol has limited the development of wine production in the region, though Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia have active wine industries.

Hod Stroh said she also intends to lay out a Negev wine route so that tourists can plot a wine route and drive through the desert from winery to winery.

The new Negev website lists events happening in the region as well as background information on the area. The

website launched in January, comes as a successful annual “Darom Adom” festival – meaning the “Red South” – kicks off, celebrating the carpet of crimson anemone buttercup flowers that bloom in early spring in the Negev.

Hod Stroh said the Darom Adom model appeals mostly to Israeli tourists who come to see the flowers, perhaps have a meal and then head home. She said she hopes the wine tourism will be different, with people staying overnight in several upscale hotels like the Six Senses Shaharut, where a room costs \$860 a night, in Hevel-Eilot or Beresheet for \$390 a night in Mitzpeh Ramon.

For both international tourists and local Israelis to spend more time in the Negev, there have to be more restaurants and more hotel rooms.

“In order for tourists to come and spend the night we need to strengthen the Negev from a culinary perspective,” Hod Stroh said. “There are not a lot of good restaurants in the Negev, but it’s a chicken-and-egg problem.”

Guy Haran, the owner of Vinspiration, which leads wine tours around the world, said the Negev can be a good example of how to grow wine in a time of growing global concern about climate change.

“As the world becomes warmer and drier, we need to find ways to grow wine in changing conditions, and everyone looks to the Negev,” Haran told *The Circuit*.

Haran led a Merage-funded trip to Barolo, in the Italian Piedmont, to show the winemakers how a wine region was created in Italy. “My end goal is to get Israel to become a wine destination for people from around the world,” Haran said. “Israeli wine has made amazing strides, and wine tourism can be the anchor for cultural tourism.” ♦