

THE WEEKLY PRINT

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APRIL 18, 2023

For America's ambassador to Germany, a personal reflection on Yom HaShoah

Ambassador Amy Gutmann's father left Nazi Germany as a young man. Nearly 90 years later, his daughter is back — representing the country that welcomed him

By Gabby Deutch

When Amy Gutmann, the U.S. ambassador to Germany, was a child, her father was always awake nearby and ready to bring her a cup of hot cocoa if she couldn't sleep at night.

Only later did she learn that it was because her father was haunted by nightmares, the consequence of his upbringing in Germany in the years before the Holocaust. He got out not long after the Nazis came to power, but many family members and friends did not.

"He didn't share any of the horrors with me. Just the big picture, which I took to heart," Gutmann said of her father, Kurt, who died when she was a teenager. "He instilled in me how important it is to speak out early and often against antisemitism and not take democracy for granted."

Speaking to *Jewish Insider* on Monday, the eve of Yom HaShoah — Holocaust Remembrance Day — Gutmann reflected on her diplomacy in the country that her father fled 90 years ago and that is now one of America's closest allies in the fight against antisemitism.

"It's something my father would be so proud of," said Gutmann, 73. "Not simply proud of me, but proud of our country, the U.S., in the journey that it has helped Germany take to being in a place where Germany and the U.S. now can stand steadfast and strong as allies, fighting against antisemitism in all its forms. Making sure 'never again' is a reality, being strong and steadfast supporters of the State of Israel and above all, making sure that all forms of antisemitism and hatred and violence are combated."

Gutmann was sworn in as ambassador last year, a week before Russia invaded Ukraine and launched a war that immediately and dramatically altered both European geopolitics and the day-to-day realities of her job.

"We're going to be with Ukraine as long as it takes," she said. She views America's continued support of Ukraine as an extension of her belief in democracy, one of the lessons she learned from her father. Democracy is also a topic Gutmann explored

at length as a political scientist, most recently as the president of the University of Pennsylvania for 18 years.

"I think the lessons of the past are more meaningful than ever before because of the rise of antisemitism, because of [Russian President Vladimir] Putin's attack on Ukraine, because the defense of democracy and combating antisemitism are two of the defining issues of our time."

Gutmann's academic career took her from Harvard and Princeton to Penn, three universities now known for thriving Jewish communities. But growing up in Monroe, N.Y., a small town a couple hours outside of New York City where her parents helped create the first and only synagogue, she was one of just two Jewish children in the local elementary school.

"I felt [like] an outsider who was accepted but never fully integrated into the community," Gutmann recalled. Sometimes this manifested in violent threats, like when a member of the John Birch Society tried to run over her father with a motorcycle, or the

time students hung a noose in the school cloakroom. She also felt the more subtle but still insidious antisemitism of friends who were taught in Sunday school that Jews killed Jesus.

"If you're taught that, even if you don't realize it, you're really being basically taught to be antisemitic," said Gutmann.

So she fought back by teaching her friends Hanukkah songs at Christmastime, and having long debates about religion with high school friends, perhaps an early indicator of her future as a political scientist.

"I was proud of standing up for why it's wonderful to be Jewish," said Gutmann.

During her time as ambassador, Gutmann said, she has tried to prioritize teaching the lessons of the Holocaust to Germans, and to Americans.

The "culture of remembrance," she noted, "is under attack all over the world, as well as in Germany and in the U.S.," said Gutmann, who added that she works to promote that culture. "We want to be leaders in that regard."

Part of that work involves looking at what America did during World War II — and just as importantly, what the U.S. failed to do. Last year she invited the filmmakers of the PBS documentary "The U.S. and the

Holocaust" to speak to Germans about America's inaction during the Holocaust, and the ways that Washington failed to protect Jews in Europe.

"We're actively engaged in the culture of remembrance by showing that we practice a culture of truth telling, and we recognize things that we didn't do. That gives us more of a reason to do more today," she said.

In January, Gutmann hosted Second Gentleman Doug Emhoff in Berlin during Emhoff's antisemitism-focused trip to Europe. Along with Ambassador Deborah Lipstadt, the U.S. special envoy to monitor and combat antisemitism, they met with European leaders in the fight against antisemitism, visited Berlin's somber Holocaust memorials and held an interfaith gathering to talk about combating faith-based hatred. (Interfaith work is a priority for the ambassador, who hosted an interfaith Iftar dinner on Monday.) In 2021, Germany's security services registered more than 3,000 antisemitic acts, the largest number since they started tracking the data.

Emhoff's visit "showed the importance to the Biden administration, to the United States and to Germany to come together, to speak proudly of what it is to be Jewish and to speak with a sense of great responsibility

and obligation of our governments and our whole societies to do what's necessary to make 'never again' the real legacy to our children and our grandchildren," Gutmann said.

She expects the most personally meaningful part of her Holocaust remembrance efforts to come later this spring, and to be much more personal. Last year, Gutmann visited her father's hometown, the small Bavarian city of Feuchtwangen, for the first time.

"I am finalizing plans to go back there and lay the first couple *Stolpersteine*, the first stumbling stones that this town has, in honor of my father and my aunts and uncles and grandparents," said Gutmann, referring to the small memorials that appear across Europe to mark the former homes of Nazi victims.

"It's not just going to be for me, what we do on Yom HaShoah," Gutmann continued, "but what we continue to do as the U.S. mission in Germany, to lay, if you will, the stepping stones to a better future — now I have grandchildren — for our grandchildren and their children." ♦

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DeSantis takes steps to attract center-right Jewish voters

Florida governor's stance on culture war issues could dampen Jewish support he's garnered for school choice bill and upcoming Israel trip

By Matthew Kassel

Gov. Ron DeSantis of Florida is taking steps to attract support from the center-right Jewish community ahead of a widely expected presidential campaign launch, even as he has embraced restrictions on abortion that risk alienating moderate GOP voters.

The 44-year-old Republican recently signed legislation that will significantly expand Florida's school choice program and, later next week, is scheduled to visit Israel to deliver the keynote address at a high-profile event hosted by the Museum of Tolerance Jerusalem.

The bill was applauded by Orthodox Jewish groups that represent a key constituency, and would be a boon to the state's Jewish day school population, which is among the largest in the country. The governor's upcoming speech in Jerusalem, meanwhile, will allow him to flex his pro-

Israel record before potentially jumping into the 2024 GOP contest.

The school choice legislation and the trip to Israel “are both definitely appealing to the Jewish community,” Gabriel Groisman, a board member with the Republican Jewish Coalition and a former mayor of Bal Harbour, Fla., said in an interview with *Jewish Insider* on Monday.

Still, those moves have come in tandem with more polarizing efforts, including a controversial six-week abortion ban that DeSantis quietly signed into law last week. In response to the bill, a major Republican donor, Thomas Peterffy, said over the weekend that he and “a bunch of friends” were withholding their funding to DeSantis over “his stance on abortion” as well as “book banning.”

Last month, DeSantis also raised alarms among traditional Republican hawks and conservative pro-Israel foreign policy experts when he said that protecting Ukraine from Russian aggression is a “territorial dispute” and not a vital interest to the United States. He has since backtracked on those claims, which drew sharp criticism from a potential GOP primary rival, Nikki Haley, who launched her presidential campaign in mid-February.

Haley, a former governor of South Carolina and U.S. ambassador to the United Nations — where she built a reputation as a vociferous supporter of Israel — has drawn support from several major Jewish and pro-Israel leaders, even as campaign finance reports show she lags behind the sizable fundraising haul of former President Donald Trump, whose contributions surged after he was indicted by a Manhattan grand jury earlier this month.

Jay Lefkowitz, a Jewish leader and former Bush administration official who is backing Haley, said DeSantis “understands” that he will need to compete with the former U.N. ambassador for support from moderate conservative Jewish voters if he enters the presidential race.

“Pro-Israel American Jews would certainly have two good options with DeSantis and Haley,” Lefkowitz, who staunchly opposes Trump, told *JL*. “The primary distinguishing feature is that Haley has actually demonstrated her incredibly strong or uncompromising or unwavering

commitment to Israel on the front lines — and actions often speak louder than words.”

A spokesman for DeSantis did not respond to a request for comment. As a congressman, DeSantis was an outspoken advocate of the Jewish state. In 2019, he promised to be “the most pro-Israel governor in America.”

“None of this is new coming from the governor,” said Groisman, who is frequently in touch with DeSantis and plans to support his presidential campaign. “He’s been a staunch supporter of the Jewish community and Israel ever since his first term in Congress.”

While DeSantis has disappointed some traditional conservatives in recent weeks by flirting with an isolationist foreign policy approach, the governor has also offered signs that he’s not straying far from his hawkish record. For instance, he is now reportedly planning to hire his former congressional chief of staff, Dustin Carmack, as a senior adviser on national security issues.

Carmack, who works at the Heritage Foundation, has expressed clear support for backing Ukraine in its war with Russia. He previously studied as a Rotary ambassadorial scholar at Tel Aviv University in Israel, where he received a master’s degree in Middle Eastern history, Hebrew and Arabic, according to an online biography.

While the Jewish vote “isn’t particularly significant in most Republican primaries,” said Frank Luntz, a political pundit and Republican pollster, “the ‘Donor Presidential Primary’ matters a lot, particularly with the passing of Sheldon Adelson,” the late GOP mega-donor.

“It makes perfect sense that DeSantis would seek to appeal to the Jewish community, as a significant share of donors either live or vacation in Florida,” Luntz added in an email to *JL* on Monday. “His challenge will be the abortion issue, as most Jewish donors are strongly pro-choice.”

A Jewish Republican fundraiser, who requested anonymity to speak freely, agreed with that view, suggesting that DeSantis’ abortion bill had been misguided. “Is he really appealing to center-right Jews when he’s talking about no abortion after six weeks?”

Regarding the school choice bill and the Israel visit, the fundraiser said, somewhat

cynically, that such efforts are “just foundation-building for the presidential race, adding, “You’ve got X number of boxes you’ve got to check off, and one of them is ‘Jewish community.’”

In a statement to *JL*, meanwhile, Matt Brooks, the chief executive of the Republican Jewish Coalition, called DeSantis “a steadfast and stalwart friend of the Jewish community and the State of Israel.”

“The Florida Jewish community appreciates that friendship, and a historic, record-setting 45% of Jews voted for him in his recent reelection,” Brooks added. “We know Governor DeSantis will receive a very warm welcome in Israel when he visits later this month.” ♦

Aliza Licht knows how to stay ‘on brand’

The branding expert and former Donna Karan exec’s new book charts her journey from corporate PR to entrepreneur and takes the lessons learned to teach readers how to curate their own personal brands

By **Tori Bergel**

In a world where it seems as if everyone is busy crafting a personal “brand” for themselves, Aliza Licht is something of a branding connoisseur.

In 2015, Licht penned her debut book, *Leave Your Mark: Land Your Dream Job. Kill It in Your Career. Rock Social Media.*, a mentorship guide for young professionals looking to jump-start their dream careers. Licht used the book’s success as a stepping stone to create her multimedia brand and consultancy, LEAVE YOUR MARK LLC — of which she is founder and president — solidifying herself as a global mentor.

Licht’s newest book, *On Brand: Shape Your Narrative. Share Your Vision. Shift Their Perception.*, released on Tuesday, is an extension of sorts to *Leave Your Mark*, but with a focus on public perception and making sure that the image you’re presenting to the world matches how you want to be seen. It’s a book for those wanting to reach the next step in their careers or looking to pivot into something completely new — just as Licht herself did when she first started LEAVE YOUR MARK.

In 2009, before “influencers,” Instagram and TikTok, Licht worked for clothing giant Donna Karan as the senior vice president of global communications. In secret, she was also the mind behind DKNY PR GIRL, the brand’s anonymous Twitter presence giving followers an inside look into the world of fashion. After two years of mystique, Licht revealed herself as the face behind the handle, a move that sent shockwaves across the internet and became the catalyst for her first book deal. When the excitement surrounding DKNY PR GIRL and *Leave Your Mark* had died down, and with management steering Donna Karan in a different direction, Licht decided it was time to resign after 17 years.

On Brand covers Licht’s journey into creating her own personal brand and offers up advice to readers who are looking to do the same.

This interview has been edited and condensed for clarity.

Jewish Insider: To start off, who is *On Brand* for?

Aliza Licht: So we live in this world today where people work in hybrid environments in virtual environments, and, you know, maybe back when I did create DKNY PR GIRL, having a personal brand was more of a choice. You know, DKNY PR GIRL was really one of the first examples of what we would later call ‘an influencer’, we didn’t know that word at the time. But today, I believe in this economic uncertainty, at a time when thousands of layoffs are happening each day, banks are closing, there’s so much chaos in the working world, I think it’s every single person’s responsibility to understand the message they’re putting out there. So really asking yourself, ‘OK, what do I want to be known for? What do I think people are consuming when they get to know me?’ and making sure that perception matches that. So I don’t care if you are in college and you’re thinking ahead with this book, you could be a middle manager who’s thinking about their career and their rise, you could be an executive who’s crushing it in your career, who wants to take that next step to become a thought leader. At the end of the day, I believe every single person has some version of a personal brand, because it starts with what makes you you. So this whole concept is just understanding what you want to be known for and making sure other people see you that way.

Jl: What made you want to focus specifically on the personal brand?

Licht: I think this goes back to really the times we’re in right now, and I believe that a strong personal brand means that your name gets dropped in rooms you’re not in and that people think of you for opportunities that other people haven’t even heard of yet. So, that is why, especially now, people who are coming up in the workforce, who are never going to go to an office, they’re never going to be able to create that in-person, understanding how to earn social capital, how to present on Zoom, how to have executive presence, how to build authentic relationships, all of these things are essential to being successful. So in *On Brand*, I really treat the idea of personal branding as much about the ‘in real life’ as it is if you want to do something online.

Jl: How does *On Brand* differ from *Leave Your Mark*, and how does it advance the narrative that you started with your first book?

Licht: *Leave Your Mark* was my way of grabbing coffee with every single person who DM’d me on Twitter saying, ‘How do I break into fashion? How do I become a publicist?’ So, it is really, I always lovingly say, it’s like ‘The Devil Wears Prada’ meets career advice, because it’s like my story growing up in fashion with what I’ve learned, but really centered around landing your dream job and teaching the reader how work works. So I would say it’s a younger book, perfect for college-age, perfect for right out of college, there’s definitely thousands of people who are way older than that who read it and got something out of it, but I see *Leave Your*

Mark as like a career mentorship in the form of a book. *On Brand* is different, *On Brand* is more mature, a bit more serious in concept. It's not to say that someone who is in school right now or graduating or right out of school wouldn't get a lot out of it, but the way that I positioned *On Brand*, is for people who are already on their way in their career journeys and want to really think about building equity in their own name. A lot of people rely on the brands that they work for. If you work for a really well-known brand, it's very easy to slip into what I coined, 'last name syndrome' in *Leave Your Mark*, which means I was Aliza from DKNY or I was DKNY PR GIRL and I was introduced that way, but that's not my name. So the idea of being a working person, but understanding that your name means something and should be able to stand on its own, is essential, because we are accumulating skills in all of our jobs, doesn't matter if you're a corporate person, a solopreneur, any type of worker in general, or even if you're just starting, but we need to make sure that we're thinking and putting as much effort into what our name means as we do the companies that we work for, or the companies that we're trying to build.

Jl: One thing I found really interesting when reading the book is the emphasis you put on understanding how others perceive you. It's not enough to one day decide how you want to be seen by the world, you've already put something out there and given people a perception of you, and they might not take to the change you're trying to put down.

Licht: Yeah, or, like, you think of yourself one way and that is not what people think of you. So, early in the book, there is an exercise as you know, where you're asked to think of, 'how would your colleagues describe you?' or 'how would your friends and family describe you?' and 'what do you think your superpower is?' and then you're asked to distribute that survey to people and have it come back in. In preparation for this book I did that, and I'm happy to say the answers married together, and that really is the magic. How you think about yourself should be how others think of you if you're shaping your narrative correctly. But the problem

is, most people don't think about their narrative, they don't think about actually making sure other people understand the value they add.

Jl: It can be really scary to ask those questions. You talk a lot about the fear of showcasing what you can do and what you can bring to the table, so many people might not even realize they're not putting down the exact narrative they think they are, because they're too afraid to.

Licht: Yes, I mean, you raise a great point. And, listen, I hate the word brag, I really do, and this book is not about teaching people to brag, what it is trying to do is teach you to strategically position yourself. And that can show up in a lot of different ways. For people who are really uncomfortable talking about maybe something great that happened or an accomplishment, why not lean on trusted colleagues to say, 'hey, you know what, I would love my manager to know this, but I feel really weird talking about it, would you be able to mention it?' and then return the favor. Or put your results in a deck that you present to your manager, for example. But, I think if you're waiting around for people to notice you're really good at your job or what you do, that's a huge mistake, because people are thinking about themselves.

Jl: I also love the emphasis you put on not waiting for someone to shine a light on you, but to 'make your own spotlight,' but you cautioned not to inadvertently become the villain by overpuffing yourself up.

Licht: I think that, again, it goes back to strategic positioning and also elegantly sharing. So my rule is, for every one time that I'm going to talk about myself, or I'm going to share something super exciting that's happening, I'm going to make it my business to support at least five other people publicly and share, amplify what they're doing, because I think talking about yourself all the time is really boring, and people start to root against you. And I think the other thing that's really a great tactic, which I talk about in this book, is the idea that you can create your personal brand and become

very well known for something or be top of mind for the work that you do, if you're putting something out there that's going to benefit others. There's a lot of ways to do it. It doesn't have to be in a way that's just like, me, me, me, me, me, me, me, no one wants to follow that.

Jl: You talk about how the personal and the professional brand are often the same thing, but is there any way to have that work life balance or do you always have to be aware that you're 'on?'

Licht: Such a great question. Well, the more senior that you are in whatever you do, whether in a corporation or as an entrepreneur, the more there is no room to make mistakes — and I do think we live in a world where you're one 15-second video away from trouble. And we've seen it happen so many times, we've seen people get fired for a tweet, we've seen people get college acceptance letters rescinded for a text message. So, this is where I believe that people need to be thinking about what they're saying. And they need to think about it not just on social media, they need to in their DMs, on text message, on email. How you're showing up matters, and you're leaving an impression on every single person you come in contact with. And yes, if you mess up it can affect your livelihood, I mean we see what Cancel Culture does to very famous people. So that's one of the reasons in this book I put in an entire chapter on reputation management, PR 101, and how to survive canceled culture, because if I'm going to tell you how to build a personal brand, I need to help you if you get in trouble, and hopefully avoid it.

Jl: Touching upon that chapter on cancel culture, barring doing something that's truly unforgivable, is there a way for someone who made a mistake to get back to where they were and rebrand fully?

Licht: It really depends on what the person has done. Public apologies, especially well known people, we know that we all analyze the sincerity of the apology and what steps the person has taken, whether to educate themselves or really

show that they really didn't understand the topic or really didn't understand the history of a conversation and really want to better themselves. You know, we see this a lot with antisemitism, we see a lot of people who have overtly been antisemitic, especially sports figures online, end up at Yad Vashem on a tour, learning about the Holocaust. By the way, I think that's a great thing and I think it's important, like if you are a public person, to show that you are taking an action to actually learn more. Can you come back? Sometimes you can. And I think that regardless of who you are, you need to definitely take a break to show that you are actually sorry. I think when people just sort of snap back like a rubber band, they're like, 'oh, sorry,' and then they move on to their sort of regularly scheduled programming, we can all see that like, OK, they didn't take

this that seriously. So there is definitely a moratorium on activities.

JJ: To conclude, what do you want your readers to take out of this book?

Licht: I want people to understand their place in the world. I want them to peel back the layers on their aspirations, to think about their North Star goal, to be self-reflective on how they're speaking, what they're aligning with, the energy they're giving off, and making sure that that audit, that self audit, is actually what they intend to, and then connecting the dots back to the people around them and the impression they're making. I truly believe this is critical work for every single person, almost as their own personal journey. If people read this book, I would be shocked if they didn't think of

themselves in a new way, because the work is self reflective, and I'm giving advice, and I'm giving strategy, and I'm giving tactics, but I can't create your personal brand. I can share everything I know, I can share why you should do it, why you should think about it, but you have to do the work. And that is why the mental gymnastics sections are there, because I want you to feel empowered to take these baby steps throughout the book and just start thinking it through. I mean, they're fun exercises, they make you think about yourself, they make you think about how you're showing up. So, there's a million, sort of, personas and case studies, certainly in the rebranding section, but I really hope people are just self-reflective and just take away that they should just think about the impression they're making throughout their journey in their life. ♦

APRIL 17, 2023

After 30 years, Azerbaijan sends its first envoy to Israel

As Israel's Foreign Minister Eli Cohen heads to Baku, Ambassador Mukhtar Mammadov tells Jewish Insider that opening an embassy in Tel Aviv marks a new page for relations between the two countries

By Ruth Marks Eglash

Azerbaijan's first-ever ambassador to Israel, Mukhtar Mammadov, has only been in his new role for several weeks, yet he talks and acts as if he's been an envoy to the Jewish state for years.

From his brand-new offices, overlooking the sparkling waters of the Mediterranean Sea in central Tel Aviv, Mammadov, 40, describes with a passion both his country's ancient Jewish community — believed to have arrived following the destruction of Jerusalem's First Temple in 586 BC and which remains 30,000-strong today — and Azerbaijan's decades-old alliance with Israel, which, due to a range of strategic geopolitical

factors, appears to be deepening.

"We do not consider opening an embassy now as an end goal, but the turning of a new page in our relations with Israel," Mammadov, who previously served as the deputy minister of science and education, told *Jewish Insider* in one of his first interviews since arriving.

"Having an embassy here will further enhance our cooperation with Israel and together we will work towards more official visits, more tourism, more trade and more new projects," he stated.

Israel and Azerbaijan have had diplomatic ties — both overt and covert — for

more than 30 years, establishing relations just months after the Shi'ite Muslim-majority country gained independence from the Soviet Union in 1991. Israel has maintained an embassy in Baku, Azerbaijan's capital, for decades, yet this is the first time Azerbaijan has decided to dispatch its own envoy to the Jewish state, marking an upgrade in its relations.

The warming of ties between the two states is multifold and for both countries is as much strategic as it is economic. For Azerbaijan, embroiled in a decades-long conflict with neighboring Armenia, which was occupying its territory known widely

as Nagorno Karabakh, Israel has been a source of support on the world stage, as well as providing billions of dollars' worth of advanced weaponry, according to reports. For Israel, Azerbaijan, which also borders Iran to the east, offers invaluable close access to its greatest enemy. Reports indicate that Azerbaijan might have allowed Israel in the past to use its territory as a staging ground for undercover attacks on its Iranian foe.

In addition, Azerbaijan crucially supplies Israel with what Mammadov refers to as the country's "black gold," or in other words, oil.

"Azerbaijan has been providing the State of Israel with up to 40% of its oil demand, and we now want to go beyond that," Mammadov said in the interview. "I truly believe that there are much more opportunities between Azerbaijan and Israel in the field of trade, economics, agriculture, technology and other fields."

Eldad Ben Aharon, a researcher at the Peace Research Institute Frankfurt (PRIF) and an expert on Israel-Azerbaijan relations, explained that over the past 30 years, "both countries have shown great commitment to this alliance."

"Azerbaijan has clear interests in Israel's knowledge in agriculture solutions, nanotechnology and arms production," he told JI, highlighting that while initially the ties had focused on oil and arms trading, more recently there was an increase in Israeli private sector companies working to rehabilitate the Nagorno-Karabakh region, which Azerbaijan recaptured in a 2020 war.

"These days, 144 Israeli companies are working on projects in Azerbaijan, which is an unprecedented number," Ben Aharon said. "From the Israeli perspective, there has been a bipartisan commitment to keep this alliance with Azerbaijan in all coalitions from Prime Ministers Ehud Barak and Ariel Sharon to Ehud Olmert, Benjamin Netanyahu, and Naftali Bennett; it is strategically important to Israel's security."

On Tuesday, Israel's Minister of Foreign Affairs Eli Cohen will head to the Eurasian nation with a large delegation of Israeli officials and business leaders, as part of the Israel-Azerbaijan Joint Intergovernmental Commission.

Mammadov said it was an opportunity for the two countries "to take stock of the state of affairs and future perspectives

and cooperation in various sectors from economic trade, energy, transportation, high tech, agriculture and education... such visits are important for both Azerbaijan and Israel."

During his time in Baku, Cohen is slated to meet with Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev and Foreign Minister Jeyhun Bayramov, who visited Israel last month. Alongside the discussions on furthering economic cooperation, Cohen is expected to raise more urgent matters such as those pertaining to Iran, its race to obtain nuclear capabilities and its recent rapprochement with Saudi Arabia. Also likely to be discussed is the military cooperation between the two countries, as tensions between Azerbaijan and Armenia continue to simmer following the 2020 war.

"The joint commission covers the bilateral cooperation in various sectors between the countries and not international matters globally or regionally, so relations or issues with regard to other countries is not on the agenda," said Mammadov, maintaining that Azerbaijan strives for "good, friendly and constructive" relations with all its neighbors, particularly with Iran due to the fact that roughly 30 million ethnic Azeris live there.

Despite this, the ambassador described recent tensions with Iran following a deadly shooting attack on the Azerbaijani embassy in Tehran earlier this year.

"We had to evacuate all our embassy staff from Tehran because we are not confident about their safety," he said of the Jan. 27 attack, which left one person dead and two injured. Azerbaijani demands for Iran to fully investigate the incident and punish those responsible, have seen no "tangible results," Mammadov said.

"Lately, there have been accusations by the Iranian side towards Azerbaijan," said Mammadov – Iran has accused Azerbaijan in the past of fomenting separatist sentiment inside its territory and views the country's ties with Israel with suspicion. "But it is our policy not to interfere in the internal matters of other countries, and we expect the same treatment from other countries not to intervene in our internal matters."

In light of the diplomatic deadlock with Iran, Mammadov, who was previously stationed in Belgium, indicated that the

upgrading of ties with Israel was also related to Baku's efforts to improve its standing with other states, particularly Washington.

Currently, Azerbaijan chairs the Non-Alignment Movement (NAM), a forum of 120 countries not formally aligned with or against any major power bloc and the second largest grouping of states outside of the United Nations. This, Mammadov explained, allows it to work with many other countries. In addition, he said, "Developing good relations with the United States is something that has been on our agenda since our independence and we're keen on enhancing those relations further."

"We have been in a difficult geopolitical situation for the last 30-plus years due to the conflict with neighboring Armenia," Mammadov explained. "Many people lost their lives, there was damage to the economy, to the country, to our future generations, so we don't want any new wars, new conflicts, or new deaths in the region.... We believe it's time for us to move to a more positive page and to invest more in education, in development, in high-tech, because the future is there."

That is why, he added, "we want to see less escalation in the region, and we want to build proper normal neighborly relations with Armenia, despite all the memories and the history, all the atrocities committed by the Armenian side and all the destruction of our cultural heritage or lands."

Referring to the 2020 war, Mammadov said his country deeply appreciated the support offered by Israel – some reports suggested Israel supplied Azerbaijan with kamikaze drones that are believed to have given it a decisive victory – and that both Israel and Turkey were celebrated in Baku and beyond immediately after that round of fighting.

"The Azerbaijani nation acknowledges Israel, appreciates it and is thankful for all the support we've been getting from the Israeli side for many years," he said.

Moving forward, Mammadov, who also spoke at length about his country's warm ties with the American Jewish community, said his country was focused on deepening cooperation with Israel. Two key projects in the areas of agriculture and high-tech are already underway and there is also a keen interest in benefitting from Israel's military

and cyber prowess.

"We're definitely interested in learning about different technologies because they are developing every day," Mammadov said. "We have to keep up with global trends and

our cooperation with Israel, as mentioned, will focus on the area of cybersecurity, startups and high-tech."

"We want to focus on developing our own capabilities," he concluded.

"Cooperation with Israel in these fields can be instrumental to develop our capacity in Azerbaijan." ♦

APRIL 5, 2023

Where is Bibi's head at?

'What I am seeing today is not the Netanyahu that I have known and this is what is so painful to watch,' former Israeli Ambassador to the U.S. Danny Ayalon, who also served as an advisor to the Israeli prime minister, told Jewish Insider

By Ruth Marks Eglash

Once referred to as "King Bibi," Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is viewed by many as an impressive global diplomat and master political tactician, but that image has lately been battered as he faces massive public demonstrations, threats of a national labor disputes and widespread criticism – both from former allies within Israel and from Washington – mainly over his government's attempts to overhaul, and some say weaken, the country's independent judiciary.

Some have raised hard questions over Netanyahu's current policies and wondered why he appears to be embracing some of the most zealous elements in Israeli society, or why his coalition is pushing so hard and working so rapidly to change the fundamental basis of Israel's de-facto constitution, when just a decade ago Netanyahu blocked similar initiatives against the justice system. Others are asking how much of these efforts are tied to Netanyahu's own legal predicament as he stands accused of bribery, fraud and breach of trust in three criminal cases.

Netanyahu's refusal to heed warnings from the country's top economic experts and from top security chiefs past and present, even going so far as announcing

plans to dismiss (and then reversing) his Defense Minister Yoav Gallant, who spoke up publicly urging the coalition to pause the judicial overhaul, have also raised concerns.

"Like everything else, it's very complicated, we are not talking about a single event with a narrow explanation," Uzi Arad, once a trusted foreign policy and national security advisor of Netanyahu's, told *Jewish Insider*.

Arad, who also served for many years in the Mossad, said Israel's increasingly tense situation, which some fear will cause irreparable social divisions and threaten Israel's special relationship with the U.S., is centered on Netanyahu's criminal indictments and has evolved from there over the past few years.

"As he sits on the bench and is leveled with three criminal cases, the effects are many," Arad explained. "He's trying to protect himself and much like with [former U.S. President Richard] Nixon – the cover-up is much worse than the original acts."

"Nixon went to lengths to obstruct justice, but at no point did he try to change the Constitution, or change the penal code," Arad continued. "Netanyahu is striking out at the law and wants to change the legal system... he's trying to cover up for himself."

Arad said he believed that Netanyahu was "very aware" of what he was doing and that he might even be acting "deliberately."

"Some people here are saying that he has lost his senses or that he is operating under a torturous mindset, which is leading him to cause damage in the hope that he will get a pardon or a plea bargain," he added.

Either way, the former advisor explained, the prime minister "is locked in a vicious cycle and that is what is causing problems."

Right now, Arad continued, Netanyahu has no choice but to align himself with far-right, theologically driven politicians such as National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir, head of the Jewish Power party, and Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich, head of the Religious Zionist faction, in a bid to save himself.

"He is in a self-defeating dynamic but he's still trying to vindicate himself; and he still wants to end his term with a historic success," Arad theorized.

In a public address last Monday, Netanyahu tried to calm public tensions announcing a time-out in the legislative process until after the Passover holiday but he raised eyebrows by comparing himself to the wise biblical King Solomon and accusing those protesting of being "extremists."

At the same time as his speech, members of his own government declared their intention to move ahead with the contentious reforms, and Netanyahu was reportedly forced to concede a private militia to Ben-Gvir, despite warnings from his own security apparatus, in order to keep his coalition intact.

He also appeared to have difficulty reining in members of his own Likud party and his supporters, especially after U.S. President Joe Biden – a day after Netanyahu said he was pausing the legislation – criticized the Israeli leader's actions, saying he was concerned about what was unfolding in Israel and that Netanyahu would not be invited to the White House in the near future. The backlash ranged from a letter sent by freshman Knesset Member Dan Illouz to 500 members of Congress accusing Biden of crossing a "red line in the relationship between our two countries," and outlandish comments by the deputy speaker of the Knesset, MK Nissim Vaturi, blaming former U.S. President Barack Obama for the deaths of Israeli soldiers during the 2014 Israel-Gaza war due to a "weapons embargo." On Thursday night, pro-government demonstrators could be seen waving banners that read "F-K Biden."

"What I am seeing today is not the Netanyahu that I have known and this is what is so painful to watch," former Israeli Ambassador to the U.S. Danny Ayalon, who has known Netanyahu since 1997 and previously served as his foreign policy advisor, as well as deputy foreign minister in a previous Netanyahu government, told JI.

"The Netanyahu that I worked with was charismatic, was very cool, was very calculating in the sense that he was smart and always put Israel's security above anything else," Ayalon added. "The Netanyahu of today is not the same guy, unfortunately, and in the last three months he has made every strategic mistake on the books."

Ayalon, who is co-founder and chairman of financial advisory firm Silver Road Capital Group, added, "Unfortunately, what we are seeing today is a prime minister who is in a free-fall, and the result is that this is a government that is in free-fall."

He said that he believes that Netanyahu is no longer totally in control of his

government and "as long as he does not get back control, I think that this government is doomed."

"I can tell you that within the Likud they are upset with Netanyahu, but they're afraid to speak out because of the wrath of his machine," Ayalon added. "They are upset with him because when he is not in control, then Likud is not in control and Likud is the largest party, the ruling party."

"Netanyahu has never been so weak vis-à-vis his coalition members," he observed. "He's had complex coalitions in the past and has managed them very well, to the best interest of the State of Israel, but not anymore."

Ayalon cited two examples showing how Netanyahu has lost control of his far-right ministers. The first is their responses to the recent security conferences in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, and Aqaba, Jordan, to discuss arrangements with the Palestinian Authority ahead of Ramadan, both organized under the auspices of the U.S., Egypt and Jordan. Despite agreements reached, members of Netanyahu's coalition said they would not abide by them.

The second example, according to Ayalon, was the government's decision to repeal the disengagement law – reached in coordination with the U.S. in 2008 – regarding four West Bank settlements.

"With this legislation, Israel is basically nixing the agreements it made previously, which is crazy," said Ayalon. "And for what? For nothing. Are they going to rebuild these four communities? Are they going back to Gaza? They say it's because of coalition considerations, so Netanyahu is being squeezed by his coalition members and he's also compromising Israeli strategic interests."

Neri Zilber, a Tel Aviv-based journalist and advisor to the Israel Policy Forum, also said that since returning to power after the November 2022 election, Netanyahu appears to be a "very different politician than the one we've come to know over the previous three decades."

"I don't think even his former aides or journalists who have been covering him for many, many years or from the beginning of his career, have a clear answer as to what is going on," he said, adding, "I think it's important to say that nobody has a

clear answer about what is going through Netanyahu's mind right now, so we should show some humility in terms of trying to diagnose the man either politically or psychologically."

However, Zilber said that what is clear is that throughout his career, Netanyahu has focused on three pillars, or made three wagers with the Israeli public: The first is economic growth, he said, "the Israeli economic miracle of prosperity and rising standard of living."

The second is military caution. "Despite his international reputation, he has remained actually very pragmatic and cautious in terms of the use of force," said Zilber.

The third pillar, he said, was international acceptance and recognition, "increasing Israel's diplomatic and global standing, which he has taken great pride in throughout the years."

"Now we see that in the matter of three months, all three of these pillars, all three of these wagers that he made with the vast majority of the Israeli public, the points that got him reelected time after time, are in complete shambles," concluded Zilber. ♦

Supreme Court appears poised to expand, but not radically reshape, religious workplace accommodations, advocates say

The current ‘de minimis’ standard for denying religious accommodations in the workplace appears bound for an overhaul

By Marc Rod

The Supreme Court appears poised to expand protections for religious accommodations in the workplace, but may not fully overturn its previous precedent on the matter, Jewish communal leaders said following Tuesday’s oral arguments in a case on the subject.

Under precedent set by the high court in the 1977 *TWA v. Hardison* case, employers are not required to grant religious accommodations to employees if it causes more than a “de minimis cost” to the employer — a standard that Jewish groups argue places a particular burden on religious minorities, like the Jewish community.

Hardison and the current case, *Groff v. DeJoy* hinge on the proper interpretation of language in Title VII of the Civil Rights Act, which states that employers must provide accommodations unless doing so causes an “undue hardship.” More than a dozen Jewish groups filed briefs in *Groff* urging the court to increase the standard required to deny accommodations and potentially toss out the *Hardison* decision entirely.

Jewish leaders told *Jewish Insider* that they saw in Tuesday’s oral arguments a widespread willingness to dispense with the “de minimis” standard.

“I walked out of the court pretty confident that our side is going to win but it’s very hard to know how broad or narrow the decision will be made,” Nathan Diamant, the Orthodox Union’s director for public policy, told JI.

“From the point of view of religious observers, there’ll be an advance, is what it looks like,” Marc Stern, the chief legal officer for the American Jewish Committee, told JI. “But it won’t be the radical change that some

hoped for and it won’t be the radical change that some feared.”

Some court watchers said that the majority of justices appeared hesitant to raise the standard for accommodations to be fully in line with those required for other groups, such as workers who have disabilities, as many Jewish groups had hoped for.

“It was gratifying to see widespread rejection of the ‘de minimis’ standard. I think that this bodes very well for those of us who have hoped for years that the Supreme Court would find the right case to reject that standard. It appears the court is ready to do just that,” Kenneth Marcus, the chairman of the Louis D. Brandeis Center for Human Rights Under Law, told JI. “On the other hand, it was disappointing to see how little appetite there appeared to be on the conservative side, and even more so on the liberal side, for a potentially sweeping affirmation of religious freedom.”

David Schultz, the board chairman of the National Council of Young Israel, told JI the group is “optimistic that the Court will abandon, or at least modify, *Hardison*.”

The three liberal justices were broadly skeptical of the arguments presented by lawyers for the plaintiff, a former mailman who was disciplined and ultimately quit his job when the Postal Service was unable to accommodate his requests not to work Sundays so that he could observe his Sabbath. But court watchers highlighted that several of the conservative justices, particularly Neil Gorsuch, seemed eager to find a narrow compromise position.

“With the exception of Justice [Samuel] Alito and maybe [Clarence] Thomas, the

justices were clearly not looking for a revolution,” Stern said.

Gorsuch at one point specifically stated his interest in finding “common ground.”

“Some courts have taken this ‘de minimis’ language and ruined it and say anything more than a trifling [hardship] will get the employer out of any concerns here,” he said. “And that’s wrong, and we all agree that’s wrong. Why can’t we just say that and be done with it and be silent as to the rest of it?”

It’s unclear what exactly such a compromise outcome would look like in practice, Marcus said — it could potentially involve a partial overturning of *Hardison*, a clarification of the precedent, new guidelines surrounding modifications of employees’ work schedules or another resolution short of creating an entirely new standard.

Nathan Lewin, a constitutional attorney who argued in the *Hardison* case and helped craft the underlying legislation, said that the outcome of the case may “[depend] on how firm Gorsuch is in the proposal he made.” Lewin filed a brief in the case for the National Jewish Commission on Law and Public Affairs (COLPA).

“If Gorsuch is firm in that opinion... then I’m afraid that’s what the court will do,” Lewin said. “That’s certainly what the attitude of the chief justice will be, and probably even [Associate Justice Amy Coney] Barrett, [Associate Justice Brett] Kavanaugh would go along with that. I’m hopeful that Gorsuch just threw that out as a legalistic possibility, but he realizes that in the real world, that’s not going to end this.”

Stern said he “wouldn’t be surprised” if Gorsuch ultimately authors the

majority opinion in this case, and said he's anticipating a "very workmanlike, cautious opinion."

At the same time, Diament noted that Gorsuch and other conservative justices appeared receptive to an argument from Groff's lawyer that it is unsustainable to have different statutes that apply "undue hardship" differently — such as those governing accommodations for workers who are disabled or pregnant.

Lewin warned that a limited decision like the one Gorsuch appeared to outline would "cause confusion" for workers and employers going forward.

"The real question is whether this case will lead to an important new standard in religious freedom cases or [if it's] simply a matter of tinkering at the edges," Marcus said. "If the court merely dispenses with the 'de minimis' standard, it will miss an opportunity to strengthen religious freedom... It will be disappointing if the court issues a narrow opinion which leaves unopened questions that will have to be decided in the future."

Stern offered a more optimistic view for religious observers.

"A standard with more teeth to it doesn't

have to be revolutionary, [but] would, I think, catch a lot of those cases," he said.

He offered, as an example, a case in which a workplace had provided accommodations to an employee but withdrew them when a new supervisor was hired.

"In a stepped up standard, you'd be able to show that there can't be undue hardship, unless some circumstance in the [workplace] changed, because you did it for years," he said. "And yet under a relaxed 'de minimis' test, the employer wins."

Stern said it was "a little bit disturbing," however, that the court did not focus on dissecting an argument that any violation of a collective bargaining agreement could constitute an "undue hardship."

Lewin expressed disappointment that the justices largely stayed away from addressing the underlying interpretation of the Establishment Clause that drove the initial *Hardison* decision — an interpretation that the current court has rejected in other recent cases.

Diament, who was inside the chamber for oral arguments, noted that, at one point during oral arguments, Alito held up the various briefs the court had received from a broad variety of religious groups arguing

that *Hardison* had violated their rights.

"I'm really struck by your statement that, regardless of what *Hardison* says, for the last 40 or 50 years, the [Equal Employment Opportunity Commission] and the lower courts have interpreted this decision in a way that properly respects the rights of minority religions," Alito told Solicitor General Elizabeth Prelogar, who argued on behalf of the Postal Service. "Muslims, Hindus, Orthodox Jews, Seventh Day Adventists... they all say that that is just not true."

Prelogar responded that "in our view, they're not accurately portraying how *Hardison* has actually played out in the lower courts and the substantial zone of protection for religious exercise that lower courts have recognized in light of *Hardison*."

Diament described this as a "striking moment."

The Orthodox Union, AJC, the Brandeis Center, Young Israel and COLPA, as well as the Anti-Defamation League, Zionist Organization of America, Jewish Coalition for Religious Liberty, Agudath Israel of America, and a series of other groups mostly representing the Orthodox community filed briefs in the case. ♦

APRIL 19, 2023

Lawmakers, Holocaust survivors join together for commemoration event on Capitol Hill

More than 20 lawmakers, including the House majority leader, gathered to recognize Yom HaShoah

By Marc Rod

More than 20 lawmakers, including House Majority Leader Steve Scalise (R-LA), joined together with several Holocaust survivors on Tuesday morning for an event on Capitol Hill in honor of Yom HaShoah, Israel's Holocaust Remembrance Day.

Reps. David Kustoff (R-TN) and Brad Schneider (D-IL) hosted their colleagues for an emotional event that included remarks from Holocaust survivor Rachel Mutterperl Goldfarb, a candlelighting, a recitation of names of Jews who died in the Holocaust and remarks by Stuart Eizenstat, chairman

of the United States Holocaust Memorial Council.

In his remarks, Scalise reflected on his own conversations with Holocaust survivors and visits to the sites of Nazi atrocities and the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C.

"It's overwhelming, sometimes, but to talk to people who were there and experienced it, saw it, saw loved ones die, and then made it through it. It's important for all of us, because it's something that we need to continue to share with others," Scalise said. "It's important that we continue this remembrance because if we don't, and we don't continue to speak out, then further atrocities will happen."

"We see the rise of antisemitism... and it only goes away if we shout it down, and we stare it down," Scalise continued. "When we see evil, we speak out against it, we take action. Sometimes [the victims] are voiceless, we need to be their voice. You remind us of why we need to continue to be vocal."

Schneider emphasized that "if we look around the world and look at current events, we're reminded that genocide in general and antisemitism specifically remain a very serious threat."

Kustoff noted that fewer and fewer Holocaust survivors remain, while antisemitism continues, explaining, "that's why we've got to educate ourselves and future generations about the horrors and the cruelties that occurred."

"As members of Congress, we have the responsibility to combat antisemitism and find ways to ensure that the Holocaust commemoration remains relevant and important for tomorrow's leaders," he said.

Other attendees included Reps. Brad Sherman (D-CA), Kathy Manning (D-NC), David Cicilline (D-RI), Josh Gottheimer (D-NJ), Tom Kean (R-NJ), Brandon Williams (R-NY), Don Bacon (R-NE), Derrick Van Orden (R-WI), Dan Goldman (D-NY), Haley Stevens (D-MI), Mike Lawler (R-NY), Jan Schakowsky (D-IL), Jen Kiggans (R-VA), Jim Jordan (R-OH), Claudia Tenney (R-NY), Greg Landsman (D-OH), Joe Wilson (R-SC), Carol Miller (R-WV).

Goldfarb, the Holocaust survivor who addressed the group, said, "my story shows that hate must be confronted before it's allowed to grow," adding that she was "gratified that our elected officials recognize the importance of taking the essential work of remembrance, and the responsibility of preventing future atrocities."

Eizenstat emphasized that the Holocaust "was not inevitable," but rather

occurred because extremism and "pervasive antisemitism and apathy" led Germany's population to "abandon their ethical requirements."

He further highlighted the U.S. and its allies' slow response to the Nazis' atrocities.

"The allied nations turned a deaf ear," Eizenstat said. "It's too late to save them now but it's not too late to acknowledge our failures and dedicate ourselves to learning the lessons of the past."

Eizenstat also called out Russian President Vladimir Putin for his "misuse of Holocaust history... to justify his unprovoked attack on Ukraine."

Later on Tuesday, Reps. Judy Chu (D-CA), Steve Cohen (D-TN), Kim Schrier (D-WA), Jamie Raskin (D-MD) and Gottheimer introduced legislation to award a Congressional Gold Medal, Congress' highest honor, to Americans who helped rescue and resettle Holocaust refugees.

The legislation highlights congressional opposition to accepting Holocaust refugees, the U.S.' decision to turn away the S.S. St Louis — a ship laden with refugees — and American public opinion opposing aiding refugees.

"This historic legislation will for the first time ever give congressional recognition to the Americans who boldly took action to rescue Jews and refugees from almost certain death during the Holocaust," Chu said in a statement. "As we face rising antisemitism and authoritarianism in the U.S. and across the world, part of our commitment to 'never again' must include honoring those who took action, often at great personal risk, to save lives during the Holocaust. Theirs is the example we must memorialize and heed moving forward as we face bigotry and threats to human rights."

Proposed honorees enumerated in a press release include former First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, former Treasury Secretary Henry Morgenthau Jr., Former Interior Secretary Harold Ickes and former Rep. Thomas D'Alesandro Jr. (D-MD), who is the father of Rep. Nancy Pelosi (D-CA), although no specific honorees are named in the legislation itself.

The legislation is supported by the American Jewish Committee, Pave the Way Foundation and the Institute for the Study of Rescue and Altruism in the

Holocaust. Legislation has separately been introduced this year to honor World War II-era diplomats who helped save Jews during the Holocaust with a gold medal. ♦

Jewish leaders mark 80th anniversary of Warsaw Ghetto Uprising in this year's March of the Living

Philanthropists, politicians, organization heads to march alongside survivors to honor Jewish resistance during the Holocaust

By Judah Ari Gross

The article first appeared in eJewishPhilanthropy.

More than 9,000 people from around the world arrived in Poland for the annual March of the Living from Auschwitz I to Auschwitz-Birkenau on Tuesday to mark Israel's Holocaust Remembrance Day, Yom HaShoah.

The participants include philanthropists Robert Kraft, Miriam Adelson, Ari Emanuel, David Zaslav, Iris and Haim Taib, Eitan Neishlos and Mati Kochavi, as well as Italian President Sergio Mattarella, Israeli Education Minister Yoav Kisch, Jewish Agency Board of Governors Chair Mark Wilf, Jewish Agency Chair Doron Almog and Keren Kayemet Le'Yisrael-Jewish National Fund Chair Ifat Ovadia Luski, rapper Meek Mill and CNN anchors Wolf Blitzer and Dana Bash, according to March of the Living.

In addition, U.S. Ambassador to Israel Tom Nides and his predecessor, former Ambassador David Friedman, are taking part in the march as part of an inaugural Bipartisan Diplomatic Delegation, an American initiative aimed at highlighting "what unites us as Jewish people and as human beings," the two ambassadors said in a joint statement.

This year's march was given the theme "Honoring Jewish Heroism in the Holocaust," to mark the 80th anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. The march was led by 42 Holocaust survivors, including Halina Birenbaum, who was a child during the uprising and was hidden in a bunker until Nazis liquidated the ghetto. She was deported to Majdanek and later to Auschwitz, March of the Living said. Birenbaum will walk alongside the

grandchildren of Jewish resistance fighters: Eyal Zuckerman, the granddaughter of ZOB commanders Zivia Lubetkin and Yitzhak (Antek) Zuckerman, and Nir Yaari, grandson of resistance fighter Bela Hazan Yaari.

The march began at 2 p.m. in Poland (8 a.m. ET/3 p.m. Israel time) and the entire event was livestreamed.

"This is a special year that marks several significant events, the 80th anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, the 75th anniversary of the State of Israel, and the 35th anniversary of the March of the Living," President of the International March of the Living Phyllis Greenberg Heideman, and its chair, Shmuel Rosenman, said in a joint statement ahead of the march. "This year we will shine a light on Jewish heroism during the Holocaust. For years, Jews have been presented as victims who went 'like lambs to the slaughter.' Young people in Israel and throughout the Jewish world are not familiar with the countless acts of courage by thousands of Jews during the Holocaust; as an international educational organization, it is our duty to share these stories and to shine a light on the acts of these brave heroes."

At the main ceremony of this year's March of the Living in Auschwitz, torches were lit marking the fight against antisemitism, in honor of the State of Israel and — for the first time — in memory of the persecution of Tunisian Jewry during the Holocaust, the organization said.

Mattarella and Kisch spoke at the ceremony, and the seven torches were lit by Kraft; Nides and Friedman; Wilf; Iris and Haim Taib; Adelson; Ovadia-Luski and March of the Living Vice-Chairman Baruch Adler, the organization said.

With the outbreak of the COVID-19

pandemic, March of the Living, which has led trips to Auschwitz since 1988, was forced to hold "virtual marches" in 2020 and 2021. Last year, the organization was able to hold an in-person march, albeit in a more limited configuration. This will be the first year since the pandemic that the March of the Living will be held in its full format.

Kraft led a delegation titled, "Speak up to Jewish hate," which is connected to a campaign that he recently launched to combat antisemitism. "The March of the Living is a powerful statement of solidarity for all those who have been victims of intolerance and discrimination, and it reminds us that we must stand up against antisemitism and all hate to ensure that history does not repeat itself," he said in a statement.

Haim Taib, an Israeli entrepreneur born in Jerusalem to Tunisian parents, marched in memory of the Tunisian Jews killed in the Holocaust whose persecution by the Nazis — along with other Jewish communities in North Africa — has long been overshadowed by the experiences of European Jews.

"I am proud and emotional to be leading the March of the Living, for the first time, in memory of the wonderful Jewish community of Tunisia, which was occupied by the Nazis and experienced antisemitic persecution, forced labor and starvation," Taib said in a statement.

"I will be marching with my grandfather Haim Taib in my heart, the man I am named after, who was sent to do hard labor and returned beaten and bruised, just skin and bones. It is important that we remember the story of the Jewish communities of North Africa during the Holocaust." ♦

Israeli venture grants ‘wishes’ to 1,600 Holocaust survivors

Mishalat HaLev, or ‘Wish of the Heart,’ a joint initiative by Israel’s Health Ministry and the Ezer MiZion aid group looks to get aging survivors to ‘dare to dream,’ director says

By Judah Ari Gross

The article first appeared in eJewishPhilanthropy.

A joint venture by Israel’s Health Ministry and the Ezer MiZion aid organization has granted the wishes of more than 1,600 Holocaust survivors in the past four years, the director of the initiative told *eJewishPhilanthropy* on Monday ahead of Yom HaShoah, Israel’s Holocaust Remembrance Day.

Adina Englund, the chief social worker in the Health Ministry’s Geriatrics Department, developed the idea for *Mishalat HaLev*, meaning “Wish of the Heart,” after seeing that many of the Holocaust survivors living in state-run facilities rarely if ever left the building because of their disabilities, *Mishalat HaLev* director Naomi Mizrahi told eJP.

“They saw the Holocaust survivors in these institutions weren’t able to do what they want. People who are physically disabled, who need a special car for a wheelchair or even an ambulance in some cases. They live their lives in a cycle, based

on the schedule of the old-age institution or geriatric hospital,” Mizrahi said.

The Health Ministry issued a tender, which was won by Ezer MiZion, a medical aid group. It has been running the program for the past four years.

The program is open to Holocaust survivors living in Health Ministry geriatric facilities. That mostly means survivors who immigrated from the former Soviet Union, according to Mizrahi, though she said there are also people from elsewhere in Europe and some from North Africa.

Mishalat HaLev receives a list of eligible participants from the Health Ministry and then meets individually with the survivors, sometimes for over an hour, to speak with them and understand what wish would give them the most satisfaction, Mizrahi said.

Often, The “wishes” that the organization grants are, on the surface, relatively modest: visiting the Western Wall, attending a concert or going to the beach.

“One woman said she just wanted to go to the supermarket, something that’s routine for most people. But for someone who’s

disabled, who is living in a geriatric hospital, who needs an ambulance to go anywhere, that’s very complicated,” Mizrahi said.

In another case, a woman wanted to visit her old home, a seemingly simple request, albeit one made more complicated by the fact that she had severe mobility issues and her apartment was located on the fourth floor of a building with no elevator. But Mizrahi said the organization found a way to make it work.

While the wishes themselves bring joy to the survivor, Mizrahi said the real value of the initiative is that it gets the person to think about what they want, what would make them happy.

“The hard part is to make the person dream. A lot of them don’t dare to dream, to think beyond the day-to-day. This allows the person to do something different, to go out. They can think, ‘What do I want? Where do I want to be?’” she said. “And only then comes the second part, ‘How do we make it happen despite their disability?’” ♦