

## THE WEEKLY PRINT

*Gallant: Odds of war on the northern front are significant; Biden's pro-Israel stance boosts his standing in Pennsylvania; The former hostages using data to help Oct. 7 victims; JChef offers kosher meal kits for the busy consumer; Education Secretary Cardona declines to say if 'from river to sea' chant is antisemitic; Noa Tishby, Emmanuel Acho to publish 'Uncomfortable Conversations with a Jew' in April; Cornel West defends campaign art director who published virulently antisemitic cartoons; Hadassah opens new rehab center 4 months early as war stresses existing facilities; Foundation for Jewish Camp says new research supports its focus on mental health; census shows mixed trends for camps; Sefaria to integrate AI into its text library by mid-2024; Saudi Arabia taps ex-Dell executive as CEO for new PIF manufacturing company*

FEBRUARY 7, 2024

## Gallant: Odds of war on the northern front are significant

*Israel's defense chief says the government is 'getting closer to making a decision' on how to tackle Hezbollah*

By Ruth Marks Eglash

Even as Israeli troops continue to battle Hamas inside the Gaza Strip, Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant told *Jewish Insider* on Monday that there is an overwhelming chance of a second front opening up in the north.

Dressed in his trademark all-black, Gallant, a former IDF general and a member of Israel's war cabinet, told *JI* in a briefing that Israel was "getting closer to making a decision" on how to tackle Hezbollah, the Iranian-backed Islamist group that dominates southern Lebanon, and the odds

of war on the northern front were significant.

Gallant said that Israel prefers a diplomatic outcome in tandem with American negotiators, but it is also ready and prepared for military alternatives.

Since Hamas carried out its brutal Oct. 7 terror attack on civilian communities in southern Israel, Hezbollah has joined the fray, threatening Israel from the north with a steady stream of rockets, projectiles and armed drones, even dispatching small terror cells to infiltrate across the border. The threat has forced some 80,000 Israeli

civilians to abandon their homes and seek refuge elsewhere in the country.

In recent days, as fighting inside Gaza has intensified and Israeli troops turn their attention south to where Hamas' leaders are believed to be hiding underground in a web of tunnels, Hezbollah's attacks have also increased, with the IDF returning fire on military targets deeper and deeper inside Lebanon and even Syria, according to IDF press statements and media reports.

Gallant's assessment of a looming war with Hezbollah comes following a meeting

on Sunday with Biden administration senior official Amos Hochstein. Hochstein, who as energy envoy in 2022 successfully mediated an agreement between Israel and Lebanon on a decades-old maritime border dispute, has been engaged in shuttle diplomacy between the two countries for the past month and, according to Israeli media this week, conveyed signs of a possible diplomatic solution that would include Hezbollah pulling back from the border.

"Any diplomatic solution must remove the threat of terrorist infiltrations and fire by Hezbollah," Gallant explained to JI, adding that such a solution might require an amendment to the U.N. Security Council Resolution 1701, which the two countries reached following the Second Lebanon War in 2006.

"My priority is to return 80,000 people to their homes, safely. I am giving the diplomatic channel a chance, but we will not tolerate the threat of infiltrations or firing on our northern communities," said the former general, who, according to reports, pushed for an immediate military operation against Hezbollah in the aftermath of the Oct. 7 attack.

"War would not be good for Hezbollah – they know they will pay a heavy price," he added. "But we mean to return our civilians to their homes either with a treaty or with force."

Gallant drew a direct line between Hezbollah and Hamas, saying that both groups, as well as other players in the region from Yemen to Iraq, were backed by Iran, which has provided funding, weapons and training.

"On Oct. 7, Hamas aimed to terrorize Israelis – to attack us brutally and project it to the world, aiming to deter Israelis from wanting to live in Israel," Gallant said, adding, "Hamas thought Hezbollah and Iran would be there to support them. They also thought that the Israeli army would not

enter Gaza, that it would be too scared of losing soldiers, but none of it happened the way Hamas thought."

"Today, Hamas is worried about the situation," continued Gallant, who said in a televised press conference later on Monday that the IDF had defeated more than half of Hamas' forces, taking out some 18 of its 24 battalions, including four in the southern city of Khan Younis.

Speaking to JI, the minister admitted that the next phase of combat in Gaza would be complex, perhaps one of the most intricate undertakings in the history of modern warfare. He said that the army had yet to enter the Strip's southernmost city, Rafah, and some parts of central Gaza.

According to military assessments, Hamas' top leaders, including Yahya Sinwar and its military chief, Mohammed Deif, remain hidden deep underground somewhere in the southern part of the Strip and have most likely surrounded themselves with at least some of the more than 100 Israelis still being held hostage. Above them, more than a million Gazan civilians – forced from their homes in the north during the four months of fighting – are now sheltering.

On one wall of his sparse office, Gallant proudly displays a flow chart of the very Hamas leadership that he has vowed to dismantle and destroy. The chart features names, ranks and photographs of the terror group's senior leaders and commanders, broken down by battalion and including those both inside Gaza and abroad. Individuals who have already been killed have been crossed out with a thick red marker.

"We need to put this in proportion," Gallant said. "The only way to close this out is to destroy Hamas – its military body and its governing capacity – and to return the hostages — and the only way to do that is through continued military pressure."

Since Oct. 7, the straight-talking Gallant

has been singularly focused on exerting that military pressure, arguing that Hamas' previous agreement to release, after some 50 days of war, more than 100 of the 240 people taken hostage was due to Israel's swift military progress. He has also maintained that continuing such pressure is the only way to force Hamas to even consider releasing the remaining hostages.

With Secretary of State Tony Blinken's return to the region this week, the U.S. is expected to push a proposal drafted last week in Paris that would see additional hostages released in exchange for a prolonged pause in fighting — which the U.S. reportedly hopes will turn from a temporary truce to a more permanent cease-fire.

Blinken met with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu earlier Wednesday, and is slated to meet with Gallant. He will also head to Ramallah for meetings with Palestinian Authority officials, according to reports.

Recent reports suggest that the U.S. administration is hoping to mediate and implement a plan that would ultimately bring about a Palestinian state in Gaza and the West Bank after the war ends, offering Israel a chance to normalize relations with Saudi Arabia — a move it hopes will stabilize the region for the long-term.

Israel's current leadership, including Netanyahu, has pushed back at the notion of a fully-fledged Palestinian state emerging from this war, as well as the idea that the Palestinian Authority, even a reformed version, would rule in some way.

"Israel will not rule Gaza after Hamas is defeated – there will be no Israeli civilians living there and no soldiers remaining inside, even though we will maintain security control," he said, sharing a final hope that a Palestinian leadership will eventually emerge that "is not hostile to Israel." ♦

# Biden's pro-Israel stance boosts his standing in Pennsylvania

*Democrats worry they'll lose left-wing voters over Biden's pro-Israel stance. But in Pennsylvania, he's gotten a boost — along with other top leaders.*

By Gabby Deutch

Shortly after hundreds of Hamas terrorists launched the Oct. 7 attack on Israel, President Joe Biden delivered an emotional address pledging to stand by Israel in responding to the massacre.

The months since have brought devastating fallout, both in the Middle East, where a bloody war in Gaza is ongoing as Israel tries to eradicate the Palestinian terror group, and in the U.S., where antisemitism has exploded and civil unrest has erupted over the war. Some Muslim Americans and young left-wing activists are threatening to sit out the 2024 presidential election or vote for third-party candidates over their opposition to Biden's support for Israel.

While that scenario has sparked serious concern among Democrats in Michigan, which has the nation's largest proportion of Arab-American residents, Democrats in Pennsylvania — the biggest battleground state and a must-win for Biden in November — view the political ramifications of the Israel-Hamas war differently.

Pennsylvania's Democratic leaders, from Gov. Josh Shapiro to Sens. John Fetterman and Bob Casey, have emerged as strong supporters of Israel and close allies of the state's Jewish community since Oct. 7. (In another sign of Pennsylvania voters' support for Israel, Republican Dave McCormick is running against Casey by arguing he has a stronger pro-Israel record — and making a January visit to the Jewish state.)

In December, after a protest outside a Philadelphia falafel shop owned by the Israeli-American chef Michael Solomonov, Shapiro called for all leaders to condemn antisemitism in strong terms. He also called out the former president of the University of Pennsylvania, Liz Magill, for her failure

to address antisemitism on campus. And Fetterman, a Pittsburgh-area Democrat who ran with support from progressives, has become one of Israel's fiercest backers in Congress. After anti-Israel protesters appeared at his house one night in January, he stepped onto his roof to wave an Israeli flag at them.

With the fourth-largest Jewish population in the country, Pennsylvania is one of just a handful of states where Jewish voters can have a decisive impact on election results. A 2021 study found that the state has 299,000 Jewish adults, about 3% of Pennsylvania's voting population. In 2020, Biden beat Donald Trump in the state by roughly 1.2%, or 81,000 votes.

"Pennsylvania has a significant Jewish population, one of the core parts of the Democratic base in the state," said Christopher Borick, a polling expert and the director of the Muhlenberg College Institute of Public Opinion. "You have that group that you need. But also, of course, the Democratic coalition in Pennsylvania includes younger voters and voters of color who certainly have differing views on Gaza."

Nearly a dozen Democratic activists and consultants in the Keystone State told Jewish Insider that they all recognize the concerns that the war in Gaza presents when it comes to young, left-wing voters. But many of them also said that Biden's support for Israel and the Jewish people after the Oct. 7 attacks has solidified his standing with a key constituency.

"I think the reason that people are standing by Biden so strongly in the Jewish community is because he recognizes the historic nature of this conflict, the historic nature of Israel and the Jewish people

fighting for our rights to have a place to live," said Josh Portney, a city councilmember in State College, Pa., and law student at Penn State. "He is somebody who recognizes how strong of an ally Israel is, and how much we need them as much as they need us. From a foreign policy perspective, I think Jews really appreciate it."

Biden's backers in Pennsylvania acknowledge the uncomfortable reality that governing during a deadly war in one of the world's most complicated regions means making difficult choices that will inevitably alienate some members of the president's coalition.

"No matter what decision he made, part of the Democratic support base would be unhappy," said Sue Berman Kress, a clinical psychologist and a Jewish Democratic activist in Pittsburgh.

Larry Ceisler, a public affairs executive in Philadelphia, argued that this is "the dilemma you're in when you're in office, and it's your responsibility. You can't please everybody, and you just have to try to do your best."

If Biden had changed his strategy and ceded to the demands of anti-Israel voices on the party's left, some Pennsylvania Democrats argue he likely would still have faced political consequences — just from a different direction.

"If you go down that alternate route, and say, 'Biden would have reacted the way some on the left want him to react,' there's no question that he would have paid a political price for that as well. It just would have been with, say, Jewish moderates in places like suburban Philadelphia or Long Island," said one top Pennsylvania Democratic elected official.

The Biden campaign declined to comment on how the president's handling of the war in Gaza is impacting his political standing.

"Our personal freedoms and democracy itself are on the line this November, and Joe Biden and Kamala Harris will spend the next nine months earning every vote and assembling the broad and diverse coalition it takes to win the White House," said Seth Schuster, a Biden campaign spokesperson. "Meanwhile, Donald Trump echoes the rhetoric of Nazi Germany and invites white supremacists to dinner at Mar-a-Lago. The choice this November could not be clearer."

Early polling averages show Biden with a slight edge over Trump in Pennsylvania, one bright spot in an otherwise bleak polling landscape for the president. More voters viewed Fetterman favorably after his outspoken backing of the Jewish state, according to a January Quinnipiac poll. That same survey found nearly twice as many Pennsylvania voters (26%) appreciated his

pro-Israel stance than were turned off by it (14%).

Nationally, public opinion polling about Biden's handling of the war presents a mixed picture: A new Economist/YouGov poll found a 52% majority of Democrats approve of Biden's handling of Israel's war against Hamas, while 29% disapprove. The findings show there's a clear divide within the party on the polarizing issue, but the pro-Israel wing of the party is much larger.

"I think a lot of hay has been made for a relatively small number of folks who have had some consternation over the actions of this administration," said Dan Siegel, a Democratic consultant who led the Biden campaign's outreach to Jewish Pennsylvanians in 2020. "As an American Jew, I feel like my president is standing with me. And that's enough for me."

Abigail Salisbury, a state representative in Allegheny County, said she has seen deep divides within her heavily Democratic district over the war. But she thinks the

war in Gaza, and Biden's handling of it, ultimately will not be the decisive factor in how her constituents vote in November.

"People are focused on their day-to-day living," said Salisbury. "One cannot blame them for not being absorbed in international affairs."

Mitch Kates, the executive director of the Pennsylvania Democratic Party, quoted Biden to explain his party's prevailing message — that not showing up is akin to casting a vote for Trump.

"As Joe Biden says, 'Don't compare me to the Almighty. Compare me to the alternative,'" Kates told JI. "We have a very strong story to tell on the accomplishments of this administration, and when you contrast that with what the other side is bringing, especially with Donald Trump, we think that people are going to, at the end of the day, show up because they need to." ♦

FEBRUARY 6, 2024

## The former hostages using data to help Oct. 7 victims

*Hostage Aid Worldwide puts Hamas' hostage-taking in historical, global context, calls on world to coordinate efforts and discourage bad actors from kidnapping*

---

By Lahav Harkov

In the aftermath of Hamas' Oct. 7 attack on Israel, many organizations in Israel, the U.S. and beyond have come together to advocate for the release of hostages held in Gaza and support their families. But only one is made up of former hostages using their experiences and a data-driven approach to advise the loved ones of those still in captivity and the Western governments trying to bring them home.

Hostage Aid Worldwide was established

in 2020 to fight for hostages around the world to be released and to prevent future instances of hostage-taking. It tracks hostages worldwide and advocates for their release, as well as for policies to disrupt what they call "the hostage-taking business model."

The organization's president is Nizar Zakka, who was held hostage in Iran for four years, and its board includes Alan Gross, who was wrongfully imprisoned in Cuba for

five years, Iranian women's rights activist Masih Alinejad, Sam Goodwin, who was held hostage in Syria, and others.

Zakka told *Jewish Insider* that the organization has "the largest database of hostage cases in the world, from 1975 until today...We have over 10,000 cases studied, detailed and reported on, and we developed a pattern of how each case was resolved in order to use this data for future cases, prevent hostage-taking and end the hostage



business.”

Gross explained that because “Hostage Aid Worldwide was founded by former hostages, we have a perspective about this that other people might not have, of great sensitivity for the hostages and hostage families.”

In addition, Gross said that HAW is unique in its “data-driven, very analytical” approach. “Anything we can do to improve the situation, we’re willing to do,” he added.

Zakka said that includes “speaking up, trying to give families the tools to fight this. We fight with governments a lot.”

HAW is 95% funded by its board, though it also accepts donations.

“We are independent,” Zakka said of the group’s funding. “We have a free voice to speak on behalf of the hostages and we don’t have to report anything to anyone but ourselves.”

Zakka called the mass hostage-taking of Oct. 7 “a new phase, a game-changer” in a global and historical context.

A special addendum to HAW’s 2023 report focused on Oct. 7 noted that last year “saw the highest levels of abducted persons since 1979... The most significant event this year was the Hamas attack on Israel.”

Oct. 7 “marks a major escalation in the history of hostage-taking within the context of global politics and security,” which “redefines hostage-taking as a tactic of war,” the report states.

Hamas’ hostage-taking on Oct. 7 fits into HAW’s four-stage “hostage business model.”

The first phase is reconnaissance: “The October 7 attack was meticulously planned with a strategic focus on targeting a broad demographic spectrum, including individuals of all ages from young children to vulnerable elderly, in order to maximize the negotiating position of the hostage-takers...evoke heightened emotions...[and] intensif[y] the psychological trauma inflicted on the community,” the report states.

HAW said that the attack on the Nova music festival, where 371 were killed and 40 abducted, seemed “to have been chosen carefully to have maximum impact and media coverage.”

The second phase, weaponization, included “a range of vicious acts inflicted by Hamas and other actions towards the hostages as a means for intimidation

and strategic control.” This included “the reprehensive deployment of severe sexual violence and assault against both men and women.” HAW also noted Hamas’ separation of families “as a form of blackmail and psychological torture.”

Videos in which the hostages thank the terrorists, who then “sadistically allud[e] to their impending fate” are meant to manipulate public opinion and lay the blame on Israel to increase Hamas’ leverage, the report said, warning media outlets that featuring the videos “promote and disseminate these manipulative narratives and Hamas’s strategic approach.”

The next phase is negotiations, in which Hamas has leveraged different intermediaries to those countries’ advantage.

The final phase is exploitation, by which Hamas attempts to brand the release of hostages as a humanitarian gesture in order to further its own objectives.

Of the hostages held in Gaza, 44% have only Israeli citizenship, 37% are Israeli dual nationals and 19% foreigners. They are roughly two-thirds male and one-third female, and 21.4% are under 20 and 14% are over 60. At the time of the addendum’s publication this week, 49% were released, 1% killed and 50% remained hostages.

Barry Rosen, a member of HAW’s board and a former hostage in the 1979 Iran hostage crisis, spearheaded the organization’s efforts to help hostages of Hamas soon after the Oct. 7 attack, working with the Hostages and Missing Families Forum in New York. Among the actions Hostage Aid Worldwide has taken to help Israeli hostages is to bring families to meet with *The New York Times’* editorial board, to take part in briefings to American Jewish community organizations and give interviews to the media to raise awareness.

Zakka noted that the organization has been advising the family of Orion Hernandez Padoux, a Mexican and French citizen who was kidnapped at the Nova festival.

The HAW report posited that Hamas’ escalation could be a result of hostage-taking by Iran, Venezuela, Russia and others, as well as terrorist organizations, which are viewed as successes by the captors.

“Hostage-takers are operating with an increasingly savvy playbook, with

an evermore nuanced understanding of the intricacies of the political landscape within the countries negotiating for their citizens’ release,” the report states. “These actors take advantage of the tendencies of politicians within these often democratic nations to score political wins (as opposed to evaluating the longer-term consequences of their negotiation conditions and the impact on the growth of hostage-taking). The short-term calculus of politicians is poorly suited to the long-term aspirations of hostage takers.”

HAW called for a coordinated approach to hostages between Western states, or else it is “ultimately encouraging the development and growth of the hostage business model as a strategic warfare tool.”

“We encourage governments the world over to consider the grand scheme of the hostage industry including hostage diplomacy, and develop coordinated preventative measures to ensure hostage-taking is not repeated in the future by Hamas, its proxies or any other state or non-state actors,” the report states.

When HAW initially released its report on hostages in 2023, it left out nearly half of those taken by Hamas to Gaza, because it generally operates under a definition of hostage that “refers only to civilians (dual or foreign nationals) taken hostage in another country.”

When referring to Oct. 7, the report said “Hamas militants and other Palestinian militant factions abducted around 125 foreigners and dual nationals from more than 20 different countries, to the Gaza Strip.” That description left out the 109 hostages who only had Israeli citizenship, sparking an uproar online.

On viewing the initial report, Israeli journalist Tal Schneider posted: “Where are the Israeli hostages?? HAW counts only those who have dual citizenship. What about the Israelis who have just Israel’s identity? ignoring those who were abducted from their homes, barefoot in PJs, elderly, babies, women, men???”

Though HAW decided to produce an addendum focused on Oct. 7 soon after the report’s release, Zakka defended the initial exclusion, saying that territories controlled by the Palestinians are not another country. If HAW did consider “Palestine” to be a

country, then it would be illegal for Israel to put Palestinian terrorists in administrative detention – something international law permits only in areas under military occupation – and then Israel would top HAW's charts for hostage-taking, which includes unlawful detention.

Gross said that people called him to complain about the report: "People said, 'How could you be associated with this?' My response is" – Gross, who spoke with JI via zoom video, stopped and pulled his "Bring Them Home Now" dog tag from inside his shirt. "I spent 1,400 days in [prison in Cuba]

as a hostage. I'm sensitive to the hostages and their needs."

Gross said that HAW learned from the experience for next time, citing the 15-page addendum.

"How can anyone think we do not care about hostages?" Nizar wondered. "Of course [Israelis] are hostages. Every person taken by Hamas is a hostage...but we didn't include them in the report because of this criteria. In my personal opinion, people were a little harsh on us...We hope to get a break when we make a mistake and not get attacked so viciously."

Xiyue Wang, a Chinese-American academic who was held in Iran from 2016-2019 and is now a HAW board member, posted that "Hamas' taking of Israeli hostages is unprecedented in modern history. Its solution requires a different magnitude of coordinated [international] effort that is beyond [HAW's] original mission to rally... Some self-claimed hostage advocates' criticism on [HAW's] work does not appear to be well-intentioned or constructive." ♦

FEBRUARY 6, 2024

## JChef offers kosher meal kits for the busy consumer

*Operating out of South Florida, JChef is certified by Kosher Miami, the rabbinical council that oversees all major kosher establishments in the area*

By **Tori Bergel**

For the hard-pressed businessperson, busy parent, college student or overall inexperienced chef, the emergence of ready-to-go meal-kit delivery services were a godsend. Instead of hassling over difficult recipes or long trips to the grocery store, companies like HelloFresh and Blue Apron were doing most of the work, leaving customers with fun, evenly portioned meals requiring little to no effort.

But while such services accounted for a wide range of consumers, including people who adhered to vegetarian, paleo and healthy diets, there was one community they largely overlooked: kosher diners.

Queue in Gabriel Saul, founder of JChef, which offers a rotating weekly menu of kosher meals to choose from in a variety of plan sizes. Saul, 40, who himself keeps kosher, saw that there was nothing available

for observant Jews and looked to fill the gap. In the last two years Saul and COO Allen Rabinovich worked to expand upon JChef's goal of bringing quality, hassle-free kosher food to Jewish families across the country, including through the establishment of an online kosher meat store, which opened at the end of January.

"I just felt like the entire kosher market was basically being ignored," Saul told *Jewish Insider* last month. "I wanted to create something that was a good mix of what some of those companies do, but obviously totally certified kosher."

Operating out of South Florida, JChef is certified by Kosher Miami, the rabbinical council that oversees all major kosher establishments in the area.

"I basically had to pitch all of the owners of Kosher Miami, all of the head rabbis, and

make them understand what the business was, which was not easy," Saul said. "Honestly, in just a little bit of time, I was able to convince them [of] the need...it was a mixture of trust and explaining the actual meal kit industry, what it is, and doing things the right way."

As an extra precaution, JChef only uses products with widely accepted *hechshers*, or certification symbols, and does not serve dairy in order to avoid potential spillage despite being given the go-ahead by the Rabbanut. All of JChef's food is watched over by a *mashgiach* who certifies that the meals adhere to the laws of kashrut, but as the company begins adding new produce-heavy menu items that require more washing and supervision, they will be adding additional *mashgichim* to the payroll.

"I can't tell you how many times I've had people tell me like, 'I can't believe I found you guys. I used to have to drive two hours, there's no kosher restaurant or grocery store anywhere by where I live,'" Saul recounted.

Early in its creation, JChef collaborated with a handful of Jewish kosher celebrity chefs whose recipes would sporadically become available as meal options to JChef subscribers. When those partnerships proved less budget-friendly, the company moved away from the format to instead focus on enhancing its overall functioning, including the launch of its long-awaited online meat store.

"A lot of our customers are typically located in places where they have access to regular supermarkets, obviously, but the kosher meat options at those said supermarkets are not the best," Rabinovich, 32, told *JI* ahead of the store's opening last month. "Our customers order from us, obviously because the recipes themselves are really nice and the produce and everything, but for some of our customers the meat is the most important piece, and the fact that they can consistently get great meat from us is why they've been with us for so long. And so we want to create that standalone offering for possibly new customers that aren't interested in necessarily cooking our recipes, but just want the meat."

Even before launching the meat store, Saul toyed with the idea of expanding JChef's capabilities beyond meal kits to include a full-scale kosher market that customers could purchase directly from. While he has no interest in transitioning into a brick-and-mortar store, he's working to secure partnerships that would broaden the new online store's offerings to include additional products such as wine, breads, challah, desserts and other snacks — though dairy products will remain unavailable.

"In the longer run, we definitely see JChef as a kosher brand," Saul said. "We're a meal kit right now, but, just based on the logistics alone, the way we can help is we can help bring pretty much anything kosher to anywhere in the U.S."

Keeping JChef affordable has always been important to Saul. While the price for other, non-kosher meal-kit services range from around \$45 to \$75, JChef is one of

the most expensive on the market, with a starting price of \$80 per week. Still, taking into account the added costs, requirements and certifications, as kosher options, specifically kosher meat options go, it's quite reasonable.

"I literally just had a conversation with a customer the other day, who was in Dade City, Fla., and he literally said he tried to purchase our recipes on his own, and he just couldn't get to the price that he was already paying for us," Saul recalled. The company lowered prices at the start of the new year after switching to a new, fully recyclable insulation material and removing shipping fees (packages are sent out late Monday afternoon and typically arrive Wednesday morning, though overnight shipping is still available for purchase).

"We actually reduced, I would say on average, each customer saves probably around \$30 – \$40 [more] than they used to," Saul said. "We're trying to reduce costs rather than increase prices to cover ourselves." JChef currently delivers nationwide, except for Alaska and Hawaii.

JChef consists of a rotating weekly menu that features two options for every protein they offer — two chicken-based recipes, two veggie recipes, two ground beef recipes, two fish recipes, etc. In the near future they're hoping to add a fixed classics menu of popular recipes that customers can choose from if they'd prefer to repeat one or two meals rather than follow the schedule. Saul and Rabinovich are working to enhance/diversify JChef's menu offerings to include both more options in general, but also more options for those with specific dietary needs.

"That's a big initiative for us, for Q1 this year is to just increase the total number of options per week," Rabinovich said. "We want folks to feel like there's variety... So those are sort of on the recipe front, something that we want to do is sort of create a recurring classics section plus having at least 10 options that rotate including X number of veggie, X number of possibly like keto-friendly, paleo, things like that, where folks can choose stuff based on their diet plan."

For any issues that arise, customers with questions or concerns can easily reach Saul through the JChef site's chatbox, which he

personally mans himself 24/7 — or 24/6 rather, in observance of Shabbat. It's almost unheard of these days for a business's messaging feature to immediately connect you with an actual person, let alone the company's founder, without any amount of preliminary AI, but it was important to Saul that he be there for his customers at all times.

"I knew there was gonna be a heavy learning curve [because of how new meal kits are to the kosher market]," he said. "And to be quite honest, one of the things I can't stand is not being able to get problems resolved. So, as long as I can, I'm going to keep doing it, because I want to be able to resolve problems in a snap. I know what I can do, what I can't do, what's fair, what's not fair, and I always, if somebody's not happy for whatever reason, which is rare, I will do everything I can to make it right."

"Honestly, I've found it to be extremely helpful. It's not even just for new customers or people that have been around for years, if they ever have a question about a new recipe, or, I even have people chatting me on how to cook it... So I think the customers appreciate it. Obviously, it's time consuming, but we want the customer [to be] happy. We want them to stay on and be a part of the family," Saul added.

Presently, JChef sends out around 100 meal kits per week with another couple hundred subscriptions that are on hold, and activated once or twice a month. He and Rabinovich have a number of bonus incentivization and contest ideas in the works to grab new clientele and keep their current roster coming back.

"I love the meal-kit industry. I see so much potential, not only in terms of the actual taste of the food, it's actually fun," Saul said. "I get customers showing me videos of them cooking with their, you know, 8-, 9-, 10-, 11-, 12-year-old kids, and they tell me how much fun it was. So I definitely see a lot of the reasons behind the entire meal kit industry, and I do believe in it personally. And when I talk to these customers and they give me feedback like that, it really does make a difference for me." ♦

# Education Secretary Cardona declines to say if ‘from river to sea’ chant is antisemitic

*Touting his department’s work against anti-Jewish hate, Cardona said he believes antisemitism can include anti-Zionist statements*

By Gabby Deutch

U.S. Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona said on Tuesday that calls for genocide are “not tolerable” but stopped short of saying whether the phrase “from the river, to the sea, Palestine will be free” should be considered antisemitic by university administrators.

“If there are students who are feeling that statements by students are being referred to genocide, or they’re feeling unsafe on campus, it is a responsibility of a university leader to get involved,” Cardona told reporters at a Tuesday briefing. “This is an opportunity for leadership to bring people together to talk about it and to set clear lines on how you communicate while not making students feel threatened or unsafe on campus.”

When pressed to say whether the “from the river, to the sea” phrase can be construed as an antisemitic call for genocide, Cardona declined to weigh in.

“That’s why I say we investigate each case, and it’s difficult for me to make a statement here about that. If students are feeling unsafe with that, it’s the responsibility of leadership to act,” said Cardona. “I believe antisemitism can include anti-Zionist statements,” he said, and “we take that into account when looking at cases.”

Late on Tuesday, Rep. Virginia Foxx (R-NC), the chair of the House Education and Workforce Committee, called on Cardona to resign because of his comments, saying “there is no excusing Secretary Cardona’s cowardly evasion of the antisemitic character of the phrase ‘from the river, to the sea.’”

A department spokesperson on Wednesday sent *Jewish Insider* a statement offering further context on Cardona’s views about the phrase.

“Secretary Cardona has been consistent that calls for genocide must never be tolerated, that antisemitism can include anti-Zionist statements, and that university leaders have a responsibility to act when students feel unsafe on campus,” the spokesperson said. “He and the Department are acutely aware that many find the chant threatening and antisemitic. Students should never feel unsafe on campuses.”

Another senior department official at the Tuesday meeting pointed out that speech is only “a component of the kinds of harms that we can see.”

“Students are sometimes surrounded, students are sometimes barricaded, students are sometimes attacked. We are seeing harassment of a variety of stripes,” the official continued.

Speaking to reporters from Jewish media outlets, Cardona touted the Department of Education’s work to combat antisemitism and other forms of hate at American schools and universities since the Oct. 7 terror attacks in Israel.

“The words of the students really echoed in my mind when they communicated that antisemitism in some parts of our country has become normalized,” said Cardona, a former Connecticut teacher and school administrator. “At the Department of Education, this became an all-hands-on-deck moment. After the attacks, the terrorist attacks, we really recognized that we had to step up.”

The department has opened 60 investigations into allegations of discrimination on the basis of “shared ancestry,” a category that includes antisemitic, anti-Arab and Islamophobic discrimination, since October. It has not yet reached settlements in any of the cases and

acknowledged that resolutions for the cases are months, if not years, away.

The Office of Civil Rights, which investigates the allegations, is severely understaffed, Cardona said. He wrote to House Speaker Mike Johnson (R-LA) requesting additional funding in November.

“We need to make sure we have the tools to do our jobs to enforce civil rights systems,” Cardona said. He highlighted other work the department has done since October to address rising antisemitism — including holding webinars for university administrators and leaders in K-12 school districts, visiting campuses to meet students affected by antisemitism and making it easier for students to file complaints alleging antisemitism discrimination.

Many of these steps were described as addressing both antisemitism and Islamophobia. The department has opened roughly twice as many investigations into antisemitic discrimination as the number of investigations into Islamophobic discrimination. Some Jewish community advocates have taken issue with the frequent grouping of the two in public language from Biden administration officials.

“I recognize and I acknowledge that some people have expressed that to me to say, ‘Look, this is what we’re dealing with, and this is a unique thing.’ And when I speak to Jewish leaders, many of them are saying, ‘Look, even before October 7, it was on the rise.’ So it’s not to not acknowledge the challenge of antisemitism,” said Cardona, who claimed that antisemitism and Islamophobia are often grouped together to make it easier for people looking for resources on department websites.

“We do have a strategy to counter antisemitism, and that is focused on



antisemitism. So I respect the sentiment of those folks, and I think I want to be very clear that the way we do it, the way I've set it up on our website, I can't speak for everyone else, is to make sure that these materials that are — many of them — are for both groups ... [and] are quickly and easily accessible, and no other reason," said Cardona.

Antisemitism is increasing not just on

college and university campuses, but also at K-12 schools in the U.S., where it takes a different form, said Cardona.

"What I heard from younger students is, 'I have to hide who I am,'" said Cardona. "They might hide the sticker of the Israeli flag on their computer, or they might tuck in the Star of David, where before they didn't. That, to me, as an educator, as an educational leader,

is very concerning. When students can't be who they are unapologetically because of the conditions on campus, that to me is an unsafe learning environment, if you can't be yourself." ♦

*This story was updated on Feb. 7 at 3:42 p.m.*

FEBRUARY 6, 2024

## Noa Tishby, Emmanuel Acho to publish 'Uncomfortable Conversations with a Jew' in April

*Acho said the idea sprung from the notion that 'marginalized communities are much more powerful when they fight together as opposed to fighting in silos'*

By Matthew Kassel

Noa Tishby, Israel's former special envoy for combating antisemitism and the author of a popular explainer on Israel, is releasing a new book in April, *Uncomfortable Conversations with a Jew*, co-written with Emmanuel Acho, a Fox Sports analyst and former NFL linebacker.

The title riffs on Acho's digital video series, "Uncomfortable Conversations with a Black Man," which became the subject of two best-selling books.

Featuring a series of frank discussions on Jewish stereotypes, the nature of Judaism and the overlap between anti-Zionism and antisemitism, the book seeks to demystify and to create a space for such conversations as antisemitic incidents have risen across the U.S.

"These questions might make you squirm," the book description reads, "but the answers outline the history, the tropes and the catalysts of antisemitism in America."

Tishby said that Acho approached her with the idea for the book over a year ago. "Even before Oct. 7," she told *Jewish Insider*

on Monday, "he was sensing that there's an unnatural rise in Jew hatred and attacks and antisemitism, and he reached out to me and asked me if I wanted to write this book together."

"I was floored, honored and immediately said yes," she said. "We started working together and sitting through these conversations," which were "really uncomfortable at times."

Following Hamas' attacks in Israel, the discussions "became even more testy and more uncomfortable, and honestly more beautiful," Tishby said, "because we were able to have even deeper conversations."

Acho, for his part, said his motivation for writing the book extends from a belief that "marginalized communities are much more powerful when they fight together as opposed to fighting in silos — or worse, fighting against one another."

"When I saw the pain of the Jewish community, I was like, 'I gotta speak up,'" he added. "Otherwise, we'll never see justice. I can't just wait until I'm affected, until I'm

negatively impacted, to speak on an issue. But why not speak when my brothers and sisters are also impacted who look nothing like me?"

He hopes that the book will serve as a guide for "how to have these hard conversations" and to "hear from someone who's hurting," he told JI. "Noa and I are from different cultures, different genders, different skin colors, but willing to sit down with one another."

Tishby agreed. "When you come from a good place, you can ask anything and you can listen and hear anything — and I think this is what we're missing," she explained. "With the Jewish community, we feel, often, that we're alone in the fight, so having someone like Emmanuel reach out and openly be willing to be such a powerful, vocal and visible ally was incredible."

"To be able to sit through uncomfortable conversations and make it on the other side with love and with understanding," she told JI, "that's what we hope people would get from this book." ♦

# Cornel West defends campaign art director who published virulently antisemitic cartoons

*Dwayne Booth, who goes by the pen name 'Mr. Fish,' has been accused of promoting blood libel stereotypes*

By Matthew Kassel

Cornel West, the prominent left-wing academic now running for president as an independent, is vocally defending an art director for his campaign whose political cartoons promoted antisemitic tropes in the wake of Hamas' Oct. 7 attacks.

Dwayne Booth, who goes by the pen name "Mr. Fish," recently stirred backlash for publishing a series of incendiary political cartoons about the Israel-Hamas war, including one that depicts a cabal of Zionists drinking Gazan blood from wine glasses.

In other cartoons first reported by *The Washington Free Beacon* last week, the Star of David is drawn onto a Nazi flag in lieu of a swastika, while an Israeli soldier is seen placing a gun to the head of a hospitalized baby and Jews in a concentration camp are shown holding signs with such slogans as "Free Palestine" and "Stop the Holocaust in Gaza."

West, meanwhile, unreservedly praised Booth as "one of the great artists in American culture!"

"Like the great satirists of the past — from Jonathan Swift to Ishmael Reed — he exposes the hypocrisy and cruelty in our lives and society!" West wrote in a social media statement on Saturday. "He is my dear brother and I am blessed to have him as the premier Art Director in my presidential campaign for Truth Justice Love!"

The cartoons drew criticism on Friday from Jonathan Greenblatt, the CEO of the Anti-Defamation League, who accused

Booth, a lecturer at the University of Pennsylvania's Annenberg School of Communication, of "exploiting images of Holocaust victims and invoking blood libel stereotypes to make a point."

On Sunday, UPenn's interim president, J. Larry Jameson, also spoke out against the cartoons, calling them "reprehensible" and "incongruent with" the university's "efforts to fight hate."

Since early October, West's campaign has paid Booth at least \$10,000 for design work, recent federal filings show. A new campaign poster for a West rally this Friday at the Maryam Islamic Center in Sugar Land, Texas, was signed by Booth, and reads, "In the Face of Tyranny: Gaza Endures!"

West, a former professor at Harvard and Princeton, has long been an outspoken critic of Israeli policies and is a high-profile supporter of the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement. In recent remarks, he has accused Israel of genocide and called President Joe Biden a "war criminal" for backing Israel in its war to eliminate Hamas.

His third-party bid has raised concerns among Democratic operatives who fear he could be a spoiler candidate in the November election, particularly as Arab-American voters voice disapproval with Biden's approach to Israel.

West himself has faced accusations of using antisemitic rhetoric, including in comments expressing suspicion of the pro-Israel lobby. He has also praised Louis Farrakhan, the antisemitic leader of the

Nation of Islam, and more recently said he broadly agreed with a controversial letter signed by a large coalition of Harvard student groups that blamed Israel for Hamas' attacks.

A spokesperson for West's campaign told *Jewish Insider* on Tuesday that he was unavailable to elaborate on his continued support for Booth.

For his part, Booth said he was drawn to West's campaign because they "have the same agenda: Truth, Justice and Love."

"I respect and agree with his mission to free the democracy from the crippling constraints of the corporate duopoly currently in charge," Booth explained in an email to *JI* on Monday, saying that West provides "a voice for the voiceless."

He dismissed the allegations of antisemitism stemming from his recent political cartoons, accusing critics of "misreading" his work while engaging in "smear campaigns" to censor him.

"In the case of the international conversation about the current war in Gaza," Booth said, "it will be impossible to have a substantive debate over the specifics and potential outcomes so long as there remains a lazy conflation that makes the State of Israel and the politics that guide its actions as a nation inseparable from Judaism, itself." ♦

# Hadassah opens new rehab center 4 months early as war stresses existing facilities

*After Oct. 7, the Jerusalem-based medical organization diverted existing resources and raised additional funds to open Gandel Rehabilitation Center ahead of schedule and create a fortified hospital on its Mount Scopus campus*

By Judah Ari Gross

*The article first appeared in eJewishPhilanthropy.*

Hadassah's new \$137 million, multi-story rehabilitation center was scheduled to open in May on the medical organization's Mount Scopus campus, the result of years of planning, fundraising and construction. But on the night of Oct. 7, seeing the devastation from the Hamas attacks and fearing an even greater conflict, Hadassah Medical Organization's director-general, Dr. Yoram Weiss, made two decisions: to construct a fortified hospital on the campus that could operate even under heavy attack and to open the rehabilitation facility to patients by January.

"People thought we were crazy. But we did it," Weiss told *eJewishPhilanthropy* last week during a tour of the facility, the Gandel Rehabilitation Center, which began receiving patients last month and will double its capacity in the coming weeks.

Weiss, who walked through the partially constructed center like a proud father showing off a newborn child, stressed that while he "loves to brag" about the facility, he gives full credit to its rapid opening to his staff. "People dedicated their lives to this," Weiss said. He offered as an example a worker he passed in the halls earlier. "That guy is in the reserves. When the army gives him a few hours off, he doesn't go home. He chooses to come here. It drives me nuts. People have a dedication to this place that's simply amazing."

This new fortified hospital project and the earlier timeline did not come cheap.

Among other things, the war caused a major worker shortage as foreign workers fled the country, Palestinian workers were initially barred from entering Israel and Israeli men were called up en masse to the reserves. And Hadassah wasn't just looking to complete construction on schedule, it was looking to finish it four months early.

"We went into acceleration mode," Carol Ann Schwartz, the president of Hadassah, the Women's Zionist Organization of America, told *eJP*. "Originally, the first phase was going to be finished in the second or third quarter of 2024. When the war broke out, it became: No, the first phase has to be finished now. It has to be finished yesterday. How are we doing this?"

Schwartz said her organization, which founded and still owns the Hadassah hospitals, was determined to raise the money necessary to make those two goals happen after hearing and seeing stories of Hadassah doctors operating while rockets could be seen raining down in the background.

"When things like that are shared with us, we look and say, 'OK, we need to make sure we raise these funds,' Schwartz said. "So we went out across the wires, making phone calls, talking to people. I met with 10 different donors in person in Cincinnati and talked to them about the needs that the hospital had. And every single one of them gave me checks, transferred funds. It wasn't, 'I'll pay you over a two-year period.' It was, 'You need this money and you need this money now.'"

Since Oct. 7, Hadassah has raised more than \$16 million, not only for the

rehabilitation center, fortified facility and the supplies that Hadassah hospitals need, but also to support the youth villages that Hadassah runs.

More than \$8 million of that has already been transferred to the hospitals, with \$5.5 million going specifically to expedite the work on the Gandel Center. More than \$400,000 was allocated to the youth villages.

Unlike Hadassah Hospital Ein Kerem and other major medical centers in Israel, the Mount Scopus campus did not have a fortified area that could function as a hospital if the area came under rocket and missile fire. To address this, Hadassah directed workers to rig up an under-construction underground parking garage with the infrastructure necessary to operate a fully functional five-ward, 130-bed hospital.

This was out of an understanding at the time that the Hamas attacks on Oct. 7 may have only been a prelude to a full-scale assault by the more powerful Hezbollah terror group in Lebanon. While this threat of full-scale bombardment has not yet been realized, the lower-level attacks by Hezbollah have forced Israeli border towns to evacuate and the situation remains a major concern for Israeli authorities, with high-level diplomatic efforts underway to prevent an all-out war on this front.

Seeing this as the top priority for the medical organization, Hadassah directed its contractors to pull all of their available workers from other projects, including a renovation job on the Ein Kerem campus, and put them on this effort, working around the clock. This five-ward hospital, protected

by a several-inches-thick steel door, was completed within a few short weeks, with specialty equipment shipped in from abroad.

Weiss recalled that when the hospital bed manufacturer complained of staffing shortages, making it difficult for him to fill the order quickly, Hadassah sent volunteers to the factory to help with the final stages of production. Though the underground facility is currently unused — computer monitors and other equipment are covered in plastic sheets — it could be up and running and full of patients in hours, Weiss said.

Once the more pressing matter of a fortified emergency hospital was completed, Hadassah turned its attention to the rehabilitation center, Weiss said.

Even before the Oct. 7 terror attacks and ensuing war, in which over 10,000 people have so far been injured, Israel lacked the rehabilitation facilities and staff to sufficiently treat all those in need of care.

According to *The Times of Israel*, Israel has only 0.3 rehab beds per 1,000 people, below the OECD average of 0.5 beds.

Jerusalem in particular was also in need of a large rehabilitation center. “In Jerusalem, we had one [rehabilitation] ward with 34 beds, under the best circumstances,” Weiss said.

He credited Hadassah Medical Organization Board Chair Dalia Itzik with prompting the hospital to open the rehabilitation center after she heard from an acquaintance from Jerusalem who was forced to go to Tel Aviv for rehabilitation

treatments because there was nothing available in Jerusalem.

“She said, ‘This cannot be,’ and reached out to Hadassah, the Women’s [Zionist Organization of America], to start the project of building a rehabilitation center. That was about six years ago,” Weiss said.

Schwartz recalled the event similarly. “They came to us and said, ‘The country needs this,’” she said.

Hadassah’s America organization and Hadassah International set out to raise the money for the center. The largest donation, over \$20 million, came from the Gandel family of Australia, representing the largest-ever gift from Australia to Israel, according to *The Australian Jewish News*. The Israeli government has also given approximately \$27 million (NIS 100 million) toward the project.

Once completed, the Gandel Rehabilitation Center will be able to provide treatments to 10,000 patients annually in four in-patient units with a total of 132 beds.

Currently, the center has 30 in-patients, with plans to expand to 74 by the middle of the month. Around the same time, the center plans to open its state-of-the-art hydrotherapy pools, Weiss said. Though there are already patients using the facilities, the building is still in the process of opening. Some pieces of equipment have yet to be assembled and installed. Others are ready-to-go, but covered in plastic sheets to keep them pristine before being put into service.

By October 2024, the hospital plans to open its outpatient floor, which will be able to provide treatments to some 140 people

each day, Weiss said.

For the patients that are receiving treatments, the new facility marks a major improvement from the rehabilitation ward in Hadassah Hospital Mount Scopus.

One patient, Elazar, was seriously injured when the tank that he was serving in was hit by an anti-tank guided missile in Gaza, causing a fire and filling the vehicle with smoke. Elazar, who did not give his last name, said he sustained burns to much of his body, requiring some skin grafts to his face, and severe damage to his lungs from the smoke inhalation.

He told eJP that the new facility allowed him to do more running sessions than in the old one, which was speeding up the recovery process for his lungs. Elazar lauded the rehabilitation center’s belief in the need for patients to play an active role in their own care. In his case, this meant applying many of the treatments to his burns.

“They let me take care of myself,” he said. “That gives you strength.”

Weiss noted that many of the rooms are equipped with ceiling lifts, which allow patients with limited mobility to move themselves, instead of having to rely solely on staff for help.

The center has six floors in total — four above ground, two below. Of these, four are either built or on track to be built, while the other two will require further fundraising before they can be completed, Weiss said. He added that there is also a plan to turn the roof into a rooftop garden for patients, but this too will require further funds. ♦



# Foundation for Jewish Camp says new research supports its focus on mental health; census shows mixed trends for camps

*Data from over 300 camps shows that enrollment is up — back to pre-pandemic levels — but so are staff turnover and financial strains*

By Esther D. Kustanowitz

*The article first appeared in eJewishPhilanthropy.*

**T**he trick to having happy campers, it turns out, is having happy counselors.

That's the takeaway from a new study by the Foundation for Jewish Camp (FJC) and the American Camp Association, which was published last month, focusing on mental health at camp.

It's a lesson the leaders of Camp Ben Frankel in Belleville, Ill., have long been preaching: One of their central mantras, the camp's director, Aaron Hadley, told *eJewishPhilanthropy* is, "When staff thrive, campers thrive."

This mission begins with rigorous hiring standards for all staff, especially counselors, he said, and continues with a daily meeting of the camp's Community Care team "to assess the well-being of each individual member of our community, every staff member and every camper, and ask ourselves whether anyone needs additional support." The camp also provides its staff with training, ongoing coaching and support throughout the summer.

"Once staff members begin to trust that their input and ideas are valued, they start to make more suggestions," Hadley said. Many of the camp's initiatives have emerged from counselors' input and feedback, he noted.

The study, which appeared in the latest issue of the *Journal of Youth Development*, found that when staff felt supported and were given adequate training to meet campers' mental health needs, they felt more satisfied in their work. Consequently, their campers' parents were also more likely

to express satisfaction with the camp and report that camp is a positive environment for their child.

"The results of this study suggest that camp is a setting that can support young adult and youth well-being, and, more specifically, that supporting staff well-being also benefits youth well-being at camp," wrote the researchers behind the article, "Mental, Social, Emotional and Spiritual Health."

The study used data from 80 Jewish overnight camps in the U.S. and Canada, including 3,524 camp staff and 9,210 parents or guardians.

"When young adult staff feel supported and listened to, valued and heard, it leads to a more supportive environment for campers," said Nila Rosen, FJC's director of learning and research, who co-authored the mental health study.

Having multiple mental health professionals on staff is becoming more common at Jewish summer camp, thanks to funding from the Yedid Nefesh Initiative, which launched in 2020 to provide monetary support and staff training to over 100 day and overnight camps in the FJC network.

Funded by The Marcus Foundation, UJA-Federation of New York and the Jewish Federation of Greater Los Angeles, and now operating in about 100 camps, Yedid Nefesh focuses on making mental health a central consideration at Jewish summer camps.

"Camp is full of new experiences. Trained mental health professionals can be there to help build a safe container," so that youth and young adults can "try new things and be under different contexts and environments

and social situations and take healthy risks," Jill Goldstein Smith, FJC's senior program manager, told *eJP*.

"While camp is not a place for therapy, or therapeutic intervention, more and more camps, and FJC, have been working with the Network for Jewish Human Services, to help camps connect with their Jewish family service, locally or regionally," Goldstein Smith said, noting that as campers grow and learn more about their identity, mental health professionals at camp "is one piece of this much larger ecosystem."

Mental health professionals can also help empower young adult counselors to better understand their role in their campers' well-being, giving them "life skills that [they] get to implement and feel a sense of ownership [of]."

This week, FJC also released its 2023 Jewish summer camp census, with data from 158 overnight camps and 166 day camps. The census indicates that the state of Jewish camp is strong but needs additional support, according to FJC. Camp enrollment has continued to grow, especially in day camps, which returned to pre-pandemic enrollment levels — 73,000 overnight campers and 75,100 day campers attended Jewish camp in summer 2023, the census found.

The "leadership pipeline," which was severely compromised during the pandemic, continues to be a staffing challenge: The census identified increased turnover of Jewish camp professionals, with 66% of the overnight camps and 58% of the day camps reporting they had professional staff leave their positions between fall 2022 and fall 2023.

Financial aid is being requested more than ever, with overnight camps reporting about a 30% increase in the amount of financial aid that families asked from their camps. These demands come on top of camps' growing expenditure on their facilities.

For both sleepaway and day camps, the census data — collected prior to Oct. 7 — showed that camps' top projected need was an increase in mental, emotional, social and spiritual health resources for campers and staff alike.

The Yedid Nefesh advisory board of

experts is beginning plans to identify and fund needs and innovations for the coming years, Rosen told eJP, adding that because camps may differ structurally, in terms of physical capacity or in myriad other ways, there's no one-size-fits-all approach to mental health care in Jewish summer camps. Camps may implement different models for staff training based on their capacity and need, she added.

The FJC Learning and Research Team, which is supported by the Jim Joseph Foundation, is hosting two upcoming webinars for camp leadership, lay leaders,

and board members, on how to use the census data to benefit the camps they represent.

Rosen said her department is also working on the Character at Camp Initiative, which aims to understand and elevate camp practices that help young people and young adults who work at camp to develop character, specifically relational virtues, with a focus on “how they strengthen the muscles of kindness, compassion, empathy, generosity, through their experience living together at Jewish overnight summer camp and how that relates to Jewish values.” ♦

FEBRUARY 5, 2024

## Sefaria to integrate AI into its text library by mid-2024

*As the technology becomes yet more ubiquitous, it will surely enter Jewish religious study, bringing with it clear benefits and murkier potential challenges*

By Jay Deitcher

*The article first appeared in eJewishPhilanthropy.*

**T**he high-tech Jewish text repository Sefaria hopes to integrated artificial intelligence into its system by the middle of this year to allow users to have a trustworthy source to answer their textual questions, Lev Israel, the organization's chief product officer told *eJewishPhilanthropy*.

The inclusion of AI into religious text study is a potentially fraught issue, yet Sefaria understood that as the technology bounds forward in all facets of our lives, Torah study will undoubtedly be part of it as well.

“There’s no world where forcing people to use a book is the right decision for the

future of Torah,” Israel said. “People’s brains shift as media shifts, and people who are now 20 years old are much more likely to be learning on their phones, learning with an audio device, learning from video, learning from TikTok, just a different wash of media. And it’s important to me that Torah make that turn.”

Still, many in the Jewish community are unsettled as technology becomes the go-to for many Jews seeking answers on Jewish practices. If people can ask AI-powered pseudo-rabbinic chatbots questions about halacha, what does that mean for flesh-and-blood rabbis? (Sefaria’s AI won’t answer halachic questions, just textual ones.)

“We’ve never had technology that could threaten knowledge workers in this way

before,” Israel said. “That would upset the balance of power so that white-collar workers are feeling the kind of stress that blue-collar workers [have been] feeling for years. The growth curve on this stuff is not linear. It’s accelerating.”

As the inclusion of AI in Jewish textual study is both a surety and a great unknown, Sefaria is looking to navigate this process with the hopes of allowing users to have a trustworthy source and a “safe space to learn” amid the vastness of the internet and the torrent of dubious information that’s out there.

AI is democratizing religious knowledge for a wide audience, which can be a great thing, Elad Caplan, director at Menomadin Center for Jewish and Democratic Law in

Israel's Bar Ilan University, told eJP. "AI can significantly enhance access to religious sources and texts. It can help efficiently navigate through vast amounts of religious sources, commentaries, interpretations. [It] can help people gain a deeper understanding of Torah. It can also help bridge the language gap between Hebrew, Aramaic and other languages. It can... help rabbis, scholars, students, identify different patterns, themes and connections within religious sources, which can help lead to a deeper insight and possibly a more profound understanding of the Torah," he said.

But one of the main dangers of people depending on AI to educate themselves is that it depends on the knowledge base that it sources from: often the entire internet, which has a lot that is inaccurate and antisemitic, Yehuda Hausman, a Los Angeles-based rabbi who has taught at the Academy of Jewish Religion California, American Jewish University and the Melton School of Jewish Learning, told eJP.

"One thing that Judaism stands for is truth," Hausman said. "As much as [AI]'s a

tool for learning... It's also a tool for learning the wrong things, learning things that aren't true, learning things which are hateful."

Sefaria aims to negate these concerns by fencing in users' searches within related documents in its trusted database, offering users a safe space to learn. "We want the citations that it gives you to be real citations," Israel says. "We want it to be based on facts."

Unlike Google or Open AI, the tone of Sefaria's AI answers will not be authoritative: "God said do X." Instead, the library will often offer differing views on how commentators wrestled with a particular question, pushing users to dive deeper into the texts.

There are still concerns that even if the knowledge an AI engine feeds a user is correct, it can stifle the growth of Torah, Caplan said, because the AI depends on existing interpretations of religious texts. Sefaria's Israel acknowledged that challenge.

"The study of Torah often lies at the intersection between religious texts, tradition and the lived human experience," Caplan said. "While AI can give us vast amounts of information, it will struggle

with the creativity and innovation [that] the human minds and the human experience bring to the interpretation of these different religious teachings."

AI should be seen as a partner to learning with others, Harris Bor, a research fellow and lecturer at the London School of Jewish Studies and the author of *Staying Human: A Jewish Theology for the Age of Artificial Intelligence*, told eJP.

Sefaria can help create that community by inspiring users to organize learning groups, Bor offered. Users and developers need to remember that studying Torah, he said, "is a form of devotion," with the goal to heal the world, bring us closer to the sacred and make us better people. "We're gonna still have to do the actions," he said.

Luckily, Bor said, Shabbat safeguards us — especially religious Jew — from becoming too dependent on technology. "You're always going to have that one day where you may want to reach for your hard copy... and we're back to the old days again." ♦

# Saudi Arabia taps ex-Dell executive as CEO for new PIF manufacturing company

*Amit Midha comes to Alat with a background in smart cities – and an ambitious mandate for ‘Made in Saudi Arabia’ technology*

By Kelsey Warner

*The article first appeared in The Circuit.*

Saudi Arabia has tapped an ex-Dell Technologies executive to lead the recently formed Public Investment Fund company Alat, an industrial electronics company with \$100 billion in backing that aims to become a local manufacturing powerhouse.

Global CEO Amit Midha will lead the ambitious plans for the new manufacturing hub in the kingdom. Chaired by Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, Alat is targeting the creation of 39,000 direct jobs in Saudi Arabia and a \$9.3 billion contribution to GDP by 2030. The company is launching with more than 30 product categories including robotics, computing and digital entertainment, as well as advanced heavy machinery.

Alat, which will officially open for business on Feb. 20, also has a sustainability component and plans to work with global companies to reduce their emissions and move towards zero-carbon manufacturing.

“We will passionately use technology to transform business,” Midha said in a statement on Tuesday, adding that Alat’s “mandate is to transform the global industries of electronics and advanced

industrials by creating a sustainable manufacturing hub leveraging the Kingdom’s solar, wind and green hydrogen clean energy.”

Midha comes to Riyadh from Singapore, off the back of a nearly 17-year career at Dell, which he joined when the Red Rock, Tex. company was the world’s biggest PC maker. Fierce competition in personal computing and the global recession of 2008 threatened Dell’s future and spurred one of the biggest corporate turnarounds of the century.

Today, Dell continues to be a large manufacturer of personal computers and laptops, but has expanded its scope to data management and storage over the last 15 years. Midha was part of that evolution, leading Dell’s growth in Asia-Pacific and Japan, overseeing a multi-billion-dollar business with a focus on digital cities.

At the helm of Alat, Midha is set to lead the kingdom’s biggest bet to date on “Made in Saudi Arabia” advanced technology components – including chips.

Saudi Arabia’s investment in artificial intelligence and Internet of Things for smart cities is driving demand for millions of microprocessors and controllers. Greenfield sites like mega-project NEOM,

and large-scale transformation plans for existing cities like Riyadh and Jeddah are significant opportunities for the country to manufacture smart electronics and reduce dependence on foreign imports, Carrington Malin, a technology strategy consultant who advises executives and governments from his base in Dubai, told The Circuit.

“The challenge is the size of the ambition,” he said. “The country doesn’t have much of an electronics ecosystem to build on. So building out this new sector will require both a carefully planned ecosystem that will connect with other local, regional and global ecosystems over time, and cherry-picking the most productive, highest value short-term investments.”

The Saudi government has a broad target for attracting foreign investors.

The PIF and its portfolio companies have brought in \$25.6 billion worth of investments in under three years, according to its Governor, Yasir Al-Rumayyan. The kingdom has set a goal to derive 65% of its GDP from private business activities by 2030, Al-Rumayyan said at the Private Sector Forum in Riyadh on Wednesday. ♦