

A newly-animated Anne Frank for today's Europe

NEWS

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His psychiatrist took control of his house, his bank account and his life. Now Will Ferrell is portraying him in a true-crime TV series

Professors angry about anti-Israel union statement vote with their feet — and wallets

No dues, no denomination, no building: Colorado's 'Shul with Altitude' offers community — 9,000 feet up

CULTURE

Meet the husband and wife behind Williamsburg's first Hasidic art gallery

OPINION

How to be sad on Tisha B'av

Culture

A newly-animated Anne Frank for today's Europe

By A.J. Goldmann

"She's the greatest spiritual treasure this country has produced since Rembrandt," a modern-day Dutch policeman explains in Ari Folman's "Where is Anne Frank," which recently premiered at this year's Cannes Film Festival.

He's speaking to a little girl in 1940s clothing who is skating down a frozen canal in Amsterdam and who introduces herself as Kitty. 80 years after World War II, Anne's imaginary friend, the addressee of the famous "Diary of a Young Girl," explores a contemporary Amsterdam – a title card places the film's action "one year from today" – that teems with stylish hipsters, street urchins, prostitutes and refugees.

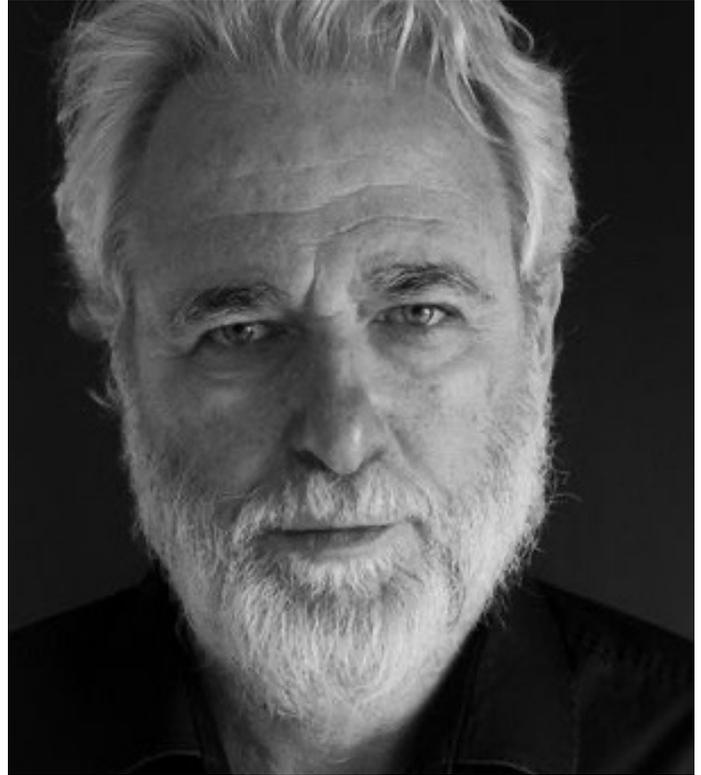
Having sprung from the pages of the handwritten diary (during an electrical storm), she wanders the city in search of her missing friend, who seems to be everywhere and nowhere at the same time. There's the Anne Frank School, the Anne Frank Hospital, the Anne Frank Bridge and the Anne Frank Theater, yet no trace of the girl herself.

"Where is Anne Frank?" a long-gestating project, is Folman's first foray into children's filmmaking. 13 years after "Waltz with Bashir," the Israeli director and animator's innovative documentary about the Lebanon War.

Folman's interest in and obsession with Anne Frank has also produced a graphic novel version of the famous diary that was published in 2017 and which is, somewhat cheekily, featured in the film when Kitty visits a school library with an extensive, and multilingual, collection of Anne Frank literature. (The film only gently skewers the Anne Frank industry: a cringe-worthy educational stage production that Kitty finds herself at is the one time the film shades cynical. Ultimately, however, the film is warm-hearted and generous).

"There is a real need for new artistic material to keep the memory alive for younger generations," Folman told The Hollywood Reporter in 2013. The filmmaker was granted unfettered access to the archives of the Anne Frank Fonds, which was founded by Anne's father, Otto Frank.

Watching the finished film, it isn't at all clear how that cooperation might have enriched the project, beyond the official endorsement. Indeed, the film doesn't set out to tell us anything new about Anne Frank; rather, it admirably and creatively meets the formidable challenges of bringing the poster child of the Holocaust to the screen yet again. In so doing, Folman finds a way to connect the events of 80 years ago to the plight of refugees seeking asylum in today's Europe.



A Newly Animated Direction: Ari Folman's latest film is 'Where is Anne Frank?' Photo courtesy of Ari Folman

The most recent feature Anne Frank feature film was a surprisingly serious 2016 German production that included some of its most controversial material, including passages about Anne's blossoming sexuality and her strained relationship with her mother that Otto suppressed in the published versions of the journal. By contrast, Folman's film is very clearly a kid's film – and he constantly finds G-rated ways to present the story's most upsetting material.

After two extremely dark and extremely adult animated films (Folman's 2013 follow-up to "Bashir" was the visionary science fiction film *The Congress*, which was a big budget box office flop) Folman has chosen to approach the Holocaust using the techniques and genre conventions of children's cinema.

The dialogue has a blunt directness that can be awkward or dopey and there are a number of high-speed-chase sequences are, well, cartoonish. Yet the film ultimately succeeds because the director's earnestness is matched by images of astounding visual imagination.

The diary comes to life with eye-popping sequences that highlight the young diarist's fertile imagination. Her father

admonishes her to retreat to fantasy worlds of “The Wizard of Oz” and “The Tales of Hoffmann” to escape the monotony of life in the secret annex.

As Kitty, who literally emerges from the diary’s ink, reads Anne’s description of her life as a popular girl before the Nazi occupation, we’re transported to a canal-side pageant complete with can-can dancing showgirls on a steamship where Anne introduces us to her various admirers. When rumors circulate that the allies are planning to defeat the Nazis by flooding the canals, we see the Frank family climb out the top story window and escape by boat, rowing past rooftops in a submerged, nocturnal Amsterdam. Listening to the allied broadcasts, she and Peter slip into the radio set and wind their way around the coils and bulbs.

Anne loves Greek mythology, and Folman translates that interest into some of the film’s most exhilarating images - as well as some of its most haunting. Anne imagines a full cavalry charge of Greek gods and goddesses against the Nazis, with a galloping Clark Gable leading the attack. Later, when boarding the train from Westerbork to Auschwitz, Anne imagines her arrival at the camp as a passage along the five rivers of Hades, guarded by SS officers with black overcoats and mask-like white faces.

Kitty eventually finds her friend’s gravestone in Bergen-Belsen, but Folman doesn’t leave us there. Instead, Kitty returns to Amsterdam and does everything in her power to stop the deportation of asylum seekers. This seems apt for a project whose aim is not merely to re-animate [pun intended] Anne’s story for young viewers, but also to argue that our vast culture of Holocaust commemoration means nothing if we turn a blind eye to the millions of refugees, largely from Africa and the Middle East, fighting to remain in wealthy European countries like Holland and Germany.

As the literal manifestation of Anne’s diary, Kitty encapsulates that defiant hope and belief in human dignity. By bridging past and present in a creative cogent way, Folman explores his serious themes - the tragic as well as the heroic - with a firm yet gentle touch and with breathtaking imagination.

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A.J. Goldmann is a Munich-based arts journalist and a longtime contributor to *The Forward*

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News

Antisemitism on TikTok spiked 912% says a new study. But is it accurate?

By Mira Fox

It’s no secret that antisemitism runs rampant on TikTok, the viral video sharing app. And yet when a recently released study from the University of Haifa showed a 912% increase in antisemitism on the app since 2020, the size of the spike seemed shocking.

I’ve reported on TikTok for months, both on its inventive Jewish creators and the app’s struggles to contain antisemitism – such as when, for Jewish Heritage Month, the platform highlighted Jewish creators on its “Discover” page and exposed them to a barrage of antisemitic comments.

Antisemitism and hate speech is very difficult to regulate on social media, and most platforms struggle with identifying and blocking it. Yet a 912% increase is beyond the pale; what does it mean for antisemitism on the app to rise by such an exponential amount?

A better understanding of that alarming spike requires some context about how TikTok evolved during the pandemic, what antisemitism looks like on the app and how exactly the study is measuring the increase. While the findings sound alarming, they don’t necessarily show that TikTok is more of a magnet for antisemitism than it once was.

Antisemitism on TikTok takes myriad forms. These can include:

- Videos featuring Nazi salutes, Holocaust denial or other antisemitic conspiracy theories or allusions.
- Viral trends that are repeated and remade by thousands of users across the platform – combining songs, dances, gestures or filters in a way that mocks Jews. Previous examples include a trend using a filter to distort the user’s face, exaggerating the nose and smile, set to the song “If I Were a Rich Man” from “Fiddler on the Roof.”
- Antisemitic comments, such as posting “How was the Holocaust?” on Jewish videos; pushing Jewish creators to accept Christianity with remarks such as “Jesus is the Messiah”; saying “free Palestine” on non-political videos from non-Israeli Jews; and posting coded antisemitic references such the numbers 109 or 110, alluding to number of countries from which white supremacists claim Jews have been expelled.
- Antisemitic references in usernames.

- Using TikTok's "duet" feature to place antisemitic content opposite a Jewish creator's video, such as posting an oven opposite a video about Passover customs.

Breaking down 912% increase

All of the above could be found on TikTok before the pandemic, but the pandemic helped grow the platform into a bigger stage for all kinds of content – amusing and malicious alike.

TikTok's short, addictive videos and intelligent algorithm made for a great amusement during quarantine, and downloads of the app shot up. It went from being an app largely for teens and tweens to being one used by people of all ages around the world.

But the shocking 912% increase in antisemitism that headlines the University of Haifa study is only referring to comments; the increase in antisemitic videos was only 41%. In its sample, antisemitic comments rose from 41 to 415, and videos from 43 to 61. Meanwhile, the study notes antisemitic usernames grew by 1,375%, but the numbers used are quite small, showing a growth from just four to 59; TikTok's overall users likely number in the billions, given that it has now been downloaded 3 billion times.

However, the study does not identify when in 2020 the initial sample was taken; TikTok was downloaded 315 million times just in the first quarter of 2020 according to Sensor Tower, a third-party site. While TikTok has not released 2021 user numbers, its 2020 Transparency Report says there were over 891 billion videos uploaded in the second half of 2020; in comparison, the first half of the year saw around 104 billion, for an increase of 856%.

So though the study does not give the increase in antisemitism in relationship to the app's overall growth, from their data it looks as though the growth in instances of antisemitism on the app may be relatively proportional to the app's overall growth.

It can be difficult to paint an accurate picture of activity on TikTok. The app is known for its proprietary algorithm, which feeds videos to each user based on its assessment of their interests, so no single user's profile can give a representative cross-section of the app. It's also difficult to search the app, since it's not structured around keywords and users often purposefully misspell words to avoid filters. However, there is no mention in the press release provided to journalists of how the study selected videos or accounted for the algorithm to get a global view of the app, and I did not receive a response to my inquiry to the study's authors.

It also appears that the study did not use a large sample size, though the total number of videos viewed by researchers is not mentioned. However, TikTok has trillions of videos and many have thousands of comments; the 415 antisemitic comments referenced in the study is a very small number of the overall comments on the app, and the same can be said about the other numbers used.

Finally, the study used the IHRA definition of antisemitism, which can be read to define criticism of Israel as antisemitism; the results did not break out forms of antisemitism in their data, so it's impossible to know whether criticism of Israel represented a large portion of the antisemitism they found.

None of this is to say that antisemitism is not a problem on TikTok – every Jewish creator I've spoken to says they struggle to police comments on their videos, and find themselves constantly reporting antisemitic videos and users. Meanwhile, they often find their own videos flagged as hate speech by the app's algorithm or other users.

Antisemitism is an ongoing issue on TikTok, and it certainly hasn't gotten better. But it also probably hasn't gotten nine times worse.

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News

His psychiatrist took control of his house, his bank account and his life. Now Will Ferrell is portraying him in a true-crime TV series

By Debra Nussbaum Cohen

Imagine this: For nearly 30 years your psychiatrist takes over your life, claims your Southampton estate and your family business, as well as your Swiss bank account as his own. He buys tables at big Jewish fundraising dinners with your money. He convinces you to become estranged from your only sister and persuades you that anyone you date is after you only for your money.

It is a story almost unimaginably bizarre. But it happened, and now the saga of the relationship between patient Martin Markowitz and psychiatrist Isaac Herschkopf has been made into an eight-episode limited series starring Will Ferrell and Paul Rudd.

Markowitz's life today is radically different than it was when he was Herschkopf's patient.

Back then, he spent hundreds of thousands of dollars a year paying his psychiatrist (in addition to the money Herschkopf allegedly took control of) and did his doctor's bidding. That included writing and printing the invitations to the summer parties Herschkopf held at the Southampton property. At the parties, attended by many of Herschkopf's patients -- including Gwyneth Paltrow -- as well as the 'who's who' of Manhattan Orthodox Jews, Markowitz served drinks, grilled kosher meat for guests and was believed by those in attendance to be hired help rather than the property's true owner.

At Herschkopf's instruction, Markowitz also typed up a dozen book manuscripts the psychiatrist wrote out in long hand. Most have not been published.

In all, starting in June 1981, after he had been referred to the psychiatrist by Rabbi Shlomo Riskin, Markowitz paid Herschkopf more than \$3 million in fees, he said. Two years later, under Herschkopf's guidance, Markowitz disinherited his sister.

The following year, at the psychiatrist's direction, Markowitz created a private foundation. According to the Department of Health, Herschkopf kept the foundation checkbook and directed most of its donations. The psychiatrist used the money for donations to, among others, the Ramaz School, an elite Jewish school on the Upper East Side of Manhattan which his three daughters attended.

Multiple messages left for Herschkopf at his office and home



Photo by Debra Nussbaum Cohen

phone numbers were not returned. Neither was a message left for one of his daughters, Dr. Marta Herschkopf, who is also a psychiatrist and expert in psychiatric ethics.

In 1985, again at the psychiatrist's direction, Markowitz re-wrote his will to leave his entire multi-million-dollar estate to the foundation. Herschkopf was named the executor and his wife, the successor co-executor. Around the same time, Markowitz made his shrink the co-owner of his Swiss bank account, which contained about \$900,000. In 1991 Markowitz again re-did his will, this time leaving his entire estate to Rebecca Herschkopf, the psychiatrist's wife, and appointing his doctor with power of attorney.

In a recent interview from a New York City hospital, where Markowitz was coping with a bout of extreme vertigo, he told *The Forward*, "I was living a lie when I was with Ike. Ike sucked me into this cult of Ike and I was spending six or seven hours a week with him, he kept me constantly busy transcribing his handwritten books, throwing these parties, and I didn't appreciate what was going on. He didn't let me have a girlfriend. I would go on a date, and he'd call her a gold digger. He would say, 'Everyone is out to get you, I'm going to protect you.' And I was stupid enough to buy it."

Markowitz finally broke off the relationship in 2010 after he had a hernia operation and Herschkopf did not visit or check in on him. He soon reconnected with his sister, from whom he had been estranged for 27 years. In 2012 Markowitz filed his first complaint with the New York State Department of Health. It took them seven years to begin examining Markowitz's claims.

After a two-year investigation, New York State's Department of Health this April took the rare step of stripping Herschkopf of his license to practice medicine.

New York State's Department of Health, in its decision, found 16 specifications of professional misconduct – from fraudulence to gross negligence and gross incompetence as well as exercising undue influence and moral unfitness. The decision was based on records and testimony from three of Herschkopf's patients. Markowitz is "Patient A."

From true-crime to Hollywood

The riveting story was made into a 2019 podcast by Bloomberg journalist Joe Nocera, which Rudd heard, Nocera said in an interview, and developed into the forthcoming series.

Before production began Rudd, Ferrell and director Michael Showalter spent a day with Markowitz at his Southampton, NY home – which includes a main house and separate guest house, tennis courts, basketball court, a miniature golf course, koi ponds and contemporary sculptures throughout the wooded grounds. And, of course, a swimming pool.

"They came by themselves, no entourage, there wasn't any joking around. It was just them asking me question after question," said Markowitz. "After filming, Will Ferrell sent me an email saying, 'I don't know if you'll like the series, but hopefully you'll like the arc.'"

Other than that, Markowitz said, he has had nothing to do with the series, which is set to debut on Apple TV+ on November 12. He was paid \$100,000 by series producers for his life rights, meaning he can't write a book or play about his experiences, he said.

"I don't know if they're going to have a Hollywood premiere. I hope they invite me, but it remains to be seen," Markowitz told the Forward. "Over 1.5 million people downloaded the trailer in the first week. The one disappointment in the trailer is that the house is nowhere near as nice as my house is."

Prominent Jews still supporting the psychiatrist

Now, at 79, Markowitz is closing the theatrical fabrics business started by his father in 1928 and retiring. He plans to spend half the year in Thailand, where he met his current girlfriend, who he is soon meeting in Phuket.



Will Ferrell (right) as patient Martin Markowitz and Paul Rudd (left) as psychiatrist Isaac Herschkopf in a new TV series. Courtesy of Apple TV+

"All I want is a nice quiet life," Markowitz said. "I am going to retire and travel the world with my girlfriend."

Despite the allegations and the state's findings, Herschkopf's friends – many of them prominent men – are sticking by him.

Richard Joel, president emeritus of Yeshiva University, testified before the Department of Health as a character reference for Herschkopf.

"Ike is a friend for 40 years," said Joel in a brief interview. Joel currently teaches a class on the ethical and philosophical underpinnings of social work at Yeshiva University's graduate school of social work. He declined to say more.

Another close friend of Ike's for decades told the Forward, on condition of anonymity, that he is not aware of all the allegations against Herschkopf and doesn't want to be. "He's larger than life and there are eccentricities there," acknowledged the friend. "I do know that there isn't a malicious bone in his body. He's my friend, he says he didn't do anything intentionally to harm another person. I leave it at that."

Markowitz says that he is "much happier now" than when he was under Herschkopf's care. "It's my 40-year ordeal. It was 29 years under his power and 11 years seeking justice. I finally got it." What matters most is that "I got justice. That's what I wanted."

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Debra Nussbaum Cohen is an award-winning journalist who covers philanthropy, religion, gender and other contemporary issues. Her work has been published in The New York Times, Wall Street Journal and New York magazine, among many other publications. She authored the book "Celebrating Your New Jewish Daughter: Creating Jewish Ways to Welcome Baby Girls into the Covenant."

Culture

Meet the husband and wife behind Williamsburg's first Hasidic art gallery

By Irene Katz Connelly

Just off Flushing Avenue, a bustling thoroughfare in Hasidic Williamsburg, there's a basement full of art.

Chiaroscuro portraits of eminent rabbis. Scenes of Jerusalem's Western Wall. Modernist sculptures of men kissing their tefillin, tender floral still lifes, a collection of old violins splatter-painted in exuberant colors.

Housed in a lower-level ballroom in the Condor Hotel, Shtetl is the first art gallery in Williamsburg operated by and for Hasidic Jews. It's a passion project of Zalmen Glauber, a local sculptor and an evangelist for his neighborhood's artistic potential.

"There is talent in the community, but people don't have the platform to share it," Glauber said.

Long before Glauber's art appeared at Shtetl, it decorated what his wife, Leah Glauber, called "the best sukkah in Williamsburg." Each year on Sukkot, Glauber, previously a real estate developer, painted miniature figurines to resemble Biblical characters and arranged them in elaborate tableaux of Torah stories. One year, he had a revelation: Why buy figurines, when he could learn to make them himself?

A few sculpting courses and several years later, Glauber turned to art full-time and started befriending other Hasidic artists in the neighborhood. With Leah, he visited galleries in Manhattan for inspiration, and started wondering why his community lacked a venue to show off its art.

Enlisting Leah as communications director, he started envisioning the art space that would ultimately become Shtetl. The gallery finally celebrated its grand opening, delayed for months due to the coronavirus pandemic, in mid-June.

Shtetl's inaugural exhibition fuses ancient ritual with modern Jewish life. Portraits of religious leaders share space with surreal dreamscapes and, among more sober work, a watercolor depiction of the April stampede on Israel's Mount Meron that killed 45 people. Some of the featured artists, like Rosa Katznelson, known for her vivid depictions of holiday rituals, have arrived at Shtetl after long careers. Some, like Lipa Schmelzter, a well-known singer, are already established in other fields. Others, like 22-year-old Hillel Weiser, are just starting out.

But Glauber found the artist he considers to be his standout close to home. His mother, Miriam Lefkowitz, began painting in retirement, and contributed a series of impressionist city scenes



Leah and Zalmen Glauber, fifth and sixth from the left, at Shtetl's grand opening. Photo by Lea Glauber.

that are among the exhibit's most arresting pieces.

Shtetl isn't the first institution to nurture an art scene in Brooklyn's Hasidic enclaves. The nonprofit Creative Soul, for instance, has organized several pop-up shows for local artists. But contemporary art isn't widely popular in the Hasidic world.

"Art, right now, is where wine was 20 years ago," Glauber said, pointing to a time when there were one or two kosher brands on the market and few wine stores to sell them. As more wines came on the market, Leah said, advertising and events like wine tastings gave people the knowledge and appetite to become connoisseurs. The couple hopes to accomplish something similar with Shtetl, which has already sold its first pieces and aims to bring in new art three times a year.

"People should be introduced to art, and it will grow on them," Leah said. "They'll come and get a feel for it, and hopefully share – and buy."

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News

Professors angry about anti-Israel union statement vote with their feet – and wallets

By Arno Rosenfeld

Universities have long been a battleground for debates over Israel, but academics at the City University of New York are leveraging a new tool to make their voices heard: resigning from their union. Dozens of CUNY faculty and staff have moved to withdraw from the Professional Staff Congress after it passed a resolution last month condemning Israel.

Faculty outraged over the union's statement, which referred to an Israeli "massacre" of Palestinians in May and called for consideration of a boycott against the country, reason that leaving the union will pressure its leadership to stop what they see as one-sided attacks on Israel.

"Their assertions sound as if they were taken from Hamas propaganda," Eugene Chudnovsky, a physics professor at CUNY Graduate School, wrote in an email to union president James Davis after the resolution passed. "Do the Union leaders understand that the discussion of whether to demand the boycott of Israel and the withdrawal of U.S. military help ... is equivalent to the discussion whether another Holocaust is justified?"

While the question of what criticism of Israel is legitimate and what crosses the line into an unfair attack on the Jewish state is nothing new in higher education, some CUNY professors now believe that threatening to leave the union – and making good on that threat – may prove to be an effective new tactic against a union with a penchant for weighing in on events from Colombia to Greece and India.

"Until now their approach was, 'We control this entity and we can use it to endorse any kind of ideological crusade we want,'" KC Johnson, a history professor at Brooklyn College and longtime foe of the union, said of Davis and other union officials. "It will be much harder for them to do that if there's a substantial withdrawal."

So says the court

The ability for members to withdraw from the union, which represents roughly 30,000 faculty and staff, to leave the union and stop paying 1% of their salary in dues is relatively new. It's the result of a 2018 Supreme Court decision known as *Janus*, that said government employees like the faculty and staff of CUNY can't be forced to join and pay dues to the union that negotiates on their behalf.

That change transformed leaving the union from a purely symbolic statement – while you would no longer be a member, you still had to pay dues – to one that had the potential to hit the organization's bottom line: a CUNY professor earning \$100,000 currently pays about \$1,000 to the union each year.

James Davis, the PSC's president, said the movement to encourage members to leave the union over its position on Israel was exploiting "principled opposition to the resolution and sincere expressions of distress and disappointment from some of our members" to push a broader agenda.

"They want to defund the PSC and discourage other unions from taking positions of political import," Davis said.

"Until now their approach was, 'We control this entity and we can use it to endorse any kind of ideological crusade we want,'" said professor KC Johnson.

The organized effort to encourage members to withdraw could have an impact beyond the CUNY system, as a teachers union in San Francisco and Seattle voted to boycott Israel earlier this spring and educators in Los Angeles will consider a similar measure in September. And across the Hudson from CUNY, the Rutgers staff union released a statement last month that stopped short of calling for a full boycott of Israel but asked the American Federation of Teachers – the parent union that it shares with CUNY members – to divest from Israeli bonds and for an end to U.S. financial support to Israel.

While there has been internal debate at the other unions considering measures related to Israel, the campaign against the CUNY union – known as "PSCexit" – appears to be the most formal. It has a website with a dues calculator and a page highlighting other political resolutions passed by the union, and describing the process of withdrawing from the union. The creators of PSCexit appear to be anonymous and there was no response to an inquiry from the Forward sent through a form on its website.

The PSC declined to say exactly how many members have withdrawn since the "Resolution in Support of the Palestinian People" was approved on June in an 84-34 vote by the Delegate Assembly – the union's legislative body made up of elected leadership from every campus. The resolution was a compromise between the international committee, which wanted to fully endorse BDS – the movement to boycott Israel

over its treatment of Palestinians – and top union leaders who called for a more moderate approach.

But Davis confirmed that “dozens” had taken steps to begin the process. He said union leaders were following up with everyone who was considering resigning to hear their concerns and encourage them to remain members with a voice in union operations.

[The human resources departments of several CUNY campuses, which withdraw union fees from staff paychecks, told the Forward that they could not say how many people had stopped paying dues until early August.]

The role of a union

Marc Edelman, a law professor at Baruch College, left the union in early July. Edelman said he understood the value of the union and had mixed feelings about the Supreme Court’s Janus decision, which made his withdrawal possible. But he called the CUNY union’s Israel resolution “bizarre” and far beyond what he saw as the role of a union.

“It is nearly impossible from my perspective to come up with any nexus between the union’s resolution and any bonafide union function,” Edelman said. “This creates the extreme example that would support Janus and support leaving the union.”

“We’ve always been the kind of union that tries to build solidarity,” said union president James Davis.

The resolution itself referred to Israel as a “settler colonial state” and resolved to “condemn the massacre of Palestinians by the Israeli state.” It also called for the union’s local chapters to “consider PSC support” for the BDS movement and report back on those discussions this winter. To date, the union has not endorsed BDS, and in 2007 it came out in opposition to an academic boycott of Israel.

Davis, the union president, said he understands concerns from members that weighing in on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict – regardless of the side it takes – is a distraction from the union’s core functions. But he pointed to two decades of political activity by the organization, spanning local New York City and state politics to expressions of support for workers and other populations around the world.

“We’ve always been the kind of union that tries to build solidarity with all kinds of coalitions and groups and communities,” Davis said, noting CUNY’s diverse faculty and student body. “It’s never been an: either you get better working conditions and raises for our members or you become a political union. We’ve always done both and been successful at that.”

Impact remains uncertain

While the Janus decision means that members who disagree with the PSC’s positions on Israel and other contentious political issues can withdraw their financial support while continuing to receive union benefits, organized labor experts say that won’t necessarily make the CUNY union – or any other – less likely to speak out about politics.

Kate Bronfenbrenner, director of labor education research at Cornell, said that she had not seen evidence that public unions were shying away from political battles out of fear that a minority of their membership might stop paying dues.

“If they do that then the right has won,” Bronfenbrenner said, referring to conservative opponents of organized labor. “Just like any campaign, if you let the other side determine your campaign then the other side has won.”

CUNY faculty like Edelman, who has represented unions in private practice, said his decision to resign came from a belief that the union had inappropriately singled out Israel for condemnation and questions over whether the action was even legal, given an executive order by New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo barred state institutions like CUNY from doing business with entities that backed the BDS movement.

“I always have been very pro-union and had always happily paid the dues without focusing on the minutiae,” Edelman said. “But the union should have recognized that if they were going to move in the direction of something so controversial as supporting BDS, certain members were going to leave.”

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Arno Rosenfeld is a staff writer for the Forward, where he covers U.S. politics and American Jewish institutions. You can reach him at arno@forward.com and follow him on Twitter @arnosenfeld.

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Opinion

How to be sad on Tisha B'av

By Laura E. Adkins

No one likes to be in pain. But what if we stopped resisting it? Just for one day?

Tisha B'Av, the saddest day in the Jewish calendar, begins Saturday evening. For 25 hours, observant Jews fast and deny themselves certain other comforts to mourn the destruction of the temples in Jerusalem more than 2,000 years ago, along with myriad other tragedies in Jewish history.

The halachic rules of Tisha B'av are straightforward: don't eat or drink, bathe or have sex, sit or sleep in comfortable positions, wear leather shoes or put on makeup or lotion.

But too often, many of us follow these strictures yet ignore the larger point.

On Tisha B'av, our tradition offers us a clear path toward experiencing something transcendent. I've collected several strategies below that you can use, whether or not you're a religious person, to get into the right headspace.

The catch is that the process of doing so can be deeply uncomfortable. But this year especially, we owe it to ourselves to try.

On Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, we attempt to reconnect with God by going cerebral: the deep soul-searching involves listing out every sin imaginable and recounting the Temple sacrifices in exacting order. On Sukkot, we go all-in on vulnerability, sitting exposed to the elements to remind us how little we actually control in life.

On Tisha B'av, our job is simply to feel sad and be still in our sadness. We lament the tragedies of Jewish history, the harsh realities of today, and our own limiting behaviors – like being unkind to one another – simultaneously.

Spending a day focused on sadness and pain is not easy. But amid a year full of trauma and a lifetime of overintellectualizing, I've made an intentional choice to do so.

As a journalist, my primary job is to Think Big Things. Sometimes, I fear I have lost some of my ability to Feel Big Things.

Numbing isn't always bad: it has helped us survive a year and a half of awfulness. But the coping mechanisms that keep us in survival mode and the Always On, Always Thinking lifestyle prevent us from fully living.

When we hold ourselves back from feeling at all, we live at less than our full capacity. And the very distractions and behaviors

that keep us from feeling sad also keep us, in the long run, from feeling good.

For me, unlearning this mode of living over the past few months has been both deeply uncomfortable and exceptionally boring. I read brain health, trauma and relationship books. I made more of an effort to prioritize exercise, sleep and healthy food. I stopped drinking so much. I challenged my thoughts and beliefs. I tried to learn more Torah. I let go of relationships that were no longer healthy and relied on my closest friends more. I went to therapy.

It has been difficult and painful. It has also been rewarding: I feel grounded and whole when I don't try to hustle my pain along.

When I feel anxious, overwhelmed or sad these days, I try to sit still and listen.

Of course, sometimes it overwhelms me and I go down the TikTok wormhole (or take a Xanax).

But you can't outrun your pain in the long run. We know intuitively that feeling better requires exploring our heavy feelings, not pushing them away.

Every time I have tried to be less sad or anxious – or just to feel less in general – I have ended up feeling much worse.

On a communal level, this tendency dulls the sensation of our strongest moments – including stripping the power away from the saddest day of the year.

For Tisha B'av, synagogues and camps generally screen Holocaust films or offer lectures and readings about the tragedies that have befallen the Jewish people. But as a friend of mine recently expressed, it's disappointing that we've turned the holiday into a history lesson instead of a day to feel sad.

Tisha B'av does not arrive abruptly. Observant Jews take on extra obligations during the three weeks, and especially the nine days, leading up to the holiday. Happy occasions like weddings are not allowed and we avoid listening to music, getting our hair cut, or even eating meat and wine (except on Shabbat).

These extra observances were designed to test not our ability to follow rules, but our capacity to feel strongly negative emotion in the face of incomprehensible devastation.

But the reality is that most Jews today are not actually sad that the Temple doesn't exist (though admitting it can make the

observant uncomfortable]. Most Jews don't truly consider ourselves to live in exile, which is the reason we're supposed to be mourning. Our prioritization of text study over spirituality, our love of debate and analysis and our desire to understand things by intellectualizing them and by picking them apart are not bad traits. But on Tisha B'av especially, they stand in the way of deep connection.

The way Jews treated one another leading up to the destruction of the first and second temples, with wanton and baseless hatred, should still rattle us.

The pain and agony inflicted upon our ancestors was incomprehensible. The scale of loss and devastation that followed was unimaginable. We're supposed to be acutely and painfully aware of what we've lost.

This trauma deserves not a day of powering through, but of processing – ideally, from a place of empathy and understanding.

Our traditional rituals, if we let them, can help us go there.

We're not supposed to be mired in sadness all the time – there's a reason Tisha B'av lasts only 25 hours.

But instead of trying to power through it this year, I'm going to aim to process. Sit in the overwhelming pain of Tisha B'av this year and emerge stronger, healthier and more prepared to reconnect – with the divine, with others and with yourself – on the other side.

Here are nine things I'm trying this year as I approach the holiday with more openness.

Get uncomfortable.

On Tisha B'av, being uncomfortable is the point.

Intentionally sitting in your sorrow doesn't make you less happy long-term. Instead, it makes the contrast all the more beautiful when you emerge on the other side.

Try taking on something intentional this year to get a little bit uncomfortable – whether you're mourning the tragedies of today or 2000 years ago.

Sit on the floor. Without a pillow. Without a book. Just sit. Meditate. Look at the cobwebs. Be still.

Feel where your body is storing tension and don't try to change it, just notice it.

Observe your thoughts as they come and let them go.

Take a break from distractions.

With the exception of reading the books of Lamentations, Job

and Jeremiah, traditional Jewish law prohibits studying Jewish texts on Tisha B'av.

Why? The answer given in the Talmud is that learning Torah generally makes one happy.

Lamentations, Job and Jeremiah are all filled with brutal, unique imagery of devastation and metaphor. They contain layer upon layer of hidden meaning. They are written in difficult, teeth-breaking biblical Hebrew, even for native speakers. They perplexed our wisest sages.

Spending a day watching Holocaust movies just isn't the same.

The Holocaust was inexplicable and utterly devastating. But in Holocaust movies, there are also clear villains, clear victims and Hollywood-style endings.

The deepest pain is that which one does not understand and from which there seems to be no end.

Let Tisha B'av be a television-, social media- and maybe even book-free day. Engage in the mystery and power of sadness.

Let it be hard.

You're tired. You're hungry. You're thirsty. You're feeling lost.

What if that's OK?

This too shall pass. Accept that this is where you're supposed to be right now.

Go somewhere bigger than you are and let your self empty.

Whether it's a forest or the Trader Joe's parking lot, find somewhere you can sit and be still (with your cell phone on silent).

Approach your pain with curiosity.

What are you feeling – and what is that feeling trying to tell you?

Does your pain stem from a particular thought? Is that thought a true reflection of reality – or a reflection of past trauma and an imagined future? Are there changes in daily routine that may have contributed to this feeling? What could you do differently to feel better tomorrow?

What is your biggest fear? What are you doing to avoid it and what are the consequences?

What thoughts inside scare you the most? Are they true? What would you be without them?

What are your biggest regrets or losses? What can you learn and grow from them?

Write it down.

Journaling, especially by hand, can help you process the big things in life and better understand yourself. So write about what enrages you this year, what you've lost, what you miss and what makes you feel sad.

Ask why – and accept when you do not and cannot know the answer.

Why did the Holocaust happen? Why do stray bullets kill innocent people? Why did my parents stop loving each other? Why did my friend die so young?

Ask why. And then accept that you don't have to know why to grow stronger, wiser and more empathetic from the experience itself.

Get mad at God.

Anger is a part of processing pain. The infinite creator of the universe can handle it.

Choose to have a relationship with the divine anyway.

Traditional Jewish sources suggest that the Messiah will be born on Tisha B'av. Whether you take this literally or metaphorically, the awesome power of pain is what can emerge after it clears away what wasn't meant to be there in the first place.

When the temple is restored, we're told, Tisha B'av will be a day of celebration. But this restoration can only come when we've truly processed our pain and trauma, and corrected our mistakes.

The key is to let yourself be moved. Let the sadness transform you into a softer, stronger, kinder person. Just like torn muscles after a hard workout.

Instead of running into my head, this year, I'll be trying to tune into my heart.

I'll try, as messy as it is, to truly feel my pain, the world's pain and the pain of those I love. I'll try to sit with the complexities and incomprehensible moments rather than trying to fix them.

And when I emerge – tired, hungry and weak – only then will I ask myself what should come next.

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Laura E. Adkins is the Forward's Opinion Editor. Follow her on Twitter @Laura_E_Adkins or email adkins@forward.com.

News**Looking to follow Team Israel at the Olympics? This duo has you covered.**

By Rebecca Salzhauer

David Wiseman and Shari Wright-Pilo were at the 2019 Tel Aviv Grand Prix when Israeli judoka Or Sasson won the gold medal. As the press section swarmed him with cameras and rapid-fire questions in Hebrew, Wright-Pilo was recording on her phone and decided to try something. She asked the judoka, "Ori, can we have a few words in English?" He turned toward her voice, as if in slow motion, and recognized her immediately. He replied, "Sure, Shari, no problem."

To Israeli athletes like Sasson, Wiseman and Wright-Pilo are widely-known as the co-founders of Follow Team Israel, a social media page that reports Israeli sports news in English to more than 22,000 followers across Facebook and Instagram.

"Our whole mission statement is to connect the fans with the athletes," Wiseman said. "I think we're loved and appreciated from both sides of the equation because of that."

The page was conceived a few months before the 2012 Olympic Games in London and has become a passion project for lifelong sports fans Wiseman and Wright-Pilo, who both work in digital marketing.

Wright-Pilo, who grew up playing softball and figure skating in Canada before moving to Israel, wanted to help her daughter learn English while nurturing her love of sports. She asked on Twitter if anyone had seen any news about Team Israel in English. "David jumped in with his usual 'No, why?'"

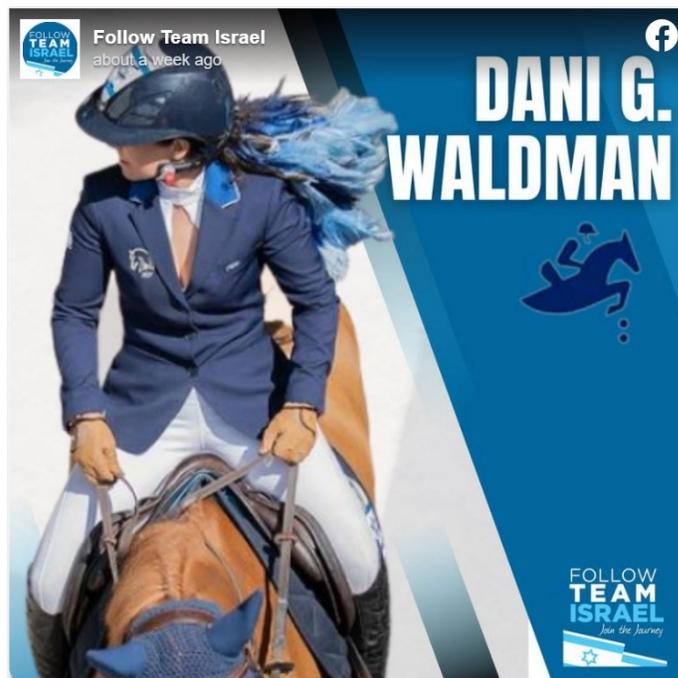
An Australian transplant to Jerusalem and the husband of one of her close friends, Wiseman is what Wright-Pilo calls a "sports genius." After talking, the two of them decided to build a Facebook page to fit the niche they were missing.

"The Israeli Olympic Committee barely had a social media presence, let alone one in English," Wiseman said. The first athletes he and Wright-Pilo met with hadn't thought to post about their sports on Facebook, he said.

As an "early adopter" of spreading news on social media, Follow Team Israel steadily grew to 5,000 followers in the next six years, Wiseman said. At the 2018 Winter Olympics, the page posted a few videos of Israeli athletes that went viral. The page's following doubled in three days.

Although Team Israel typically sees spikes of attention around the Olympics, Wright-Pilo and Wiseman regularly travel

throughout the country to events both in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem and in smaller cities. “You realize it’s like a plant. You have to tend to it constantly,” Wiseman said. “You can’t neglect your fans. In that regard, we sometimes have to aggressively pursue content.”



English-speaking countries – a third of its followers are in the United States alone – it reaches fans from Brazil to the Philippines.

As Israeli athletes and federations have grown their social media presences, so has Follow Team Israel. Sports journalists recognize Wiseman and Wright-Pilo, and players often share their posts. “We try to be as clean and as branded as possible,” said Wright-Pilo, who makes their graphic design templates.

To gear up for this summer’s Olympics in Tokyo, Wright-Pilo set up three screens on her kitchen table to juggle watching the competitions, working her full-time job and running the page. Wiseman is taking two weeks off from work to focus on the Games, but Wright-Pilo will cover for him on Shabbat, she said.

Wiseman, who has been in Israel since 2004, noticed a vast increase in attention toward Team Israel in anticipation of the 2020 Olympics. He and Wright-Pilo are hoping to harness some of that excitement. “By far, there’s been more high expectations and awareness for this team than any other,” Wiseman said. “Even if we can claim 0.5 or 1% of that, it’s a privilege.”

When asked about which Israeli athletes to watch in Tokyo, Wiseman said, “It’s like asking which of your kids is your favorite. The answer is all 89 of them.”

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‘We’re here for the athletes’ stories’

Wright-Pilo and Wiseman choose to make the page’s tone distinctly positive, focusing on the athletes’ journeys rather than reporting scores. “Success is quite seldom, which is why it’s celebrated so passionately when it happens. There’s always going to be defeat and failure, but that’s not what we’re here for. We’re here for the athletes’ stories,” Wiseman said.

Their personal approach resonates with followers, many of whom are more excited about rooting for Israel than the intricacies of the sports themselves, he said. While the largest portions of Follow Team Israel’s audience are in Israel or

News

No dues, no denomination, no building: Colorado's 'Shul with Altitude' offers community – 9,000 feet up

By Rachel Hale

Formed by glaciers and nestled into the Rocky Mountain range, the town of Winter Park, Colo. boasts 600 miles of mountain biking, an average 29 feet of seasonal snowfall and a population just over 2,000. In the highest incorporated town in the United States, where schools close on Fridays to take advantage of ripe ski conditions, lies a community of Jews not discouraged by lack of size or cold temperatures. They have dubbed themselves the “Shul with Altitude.”

“It definitely has given me a lot more of a connection with Judaism,” said congregant Andy Chasin. “I’ve been to more Shabbat dinners since I lived in Winter Park than I have my entire life growing up.”

At an altitude over 9,000 feet, the shul lives up to its name. In what they call their own breed of freestyle mountain Judaism, the group exists without a denomination, building or even fees. “We have no dues, no building funds, no pledge drives, no bake sales,” reads their website. With the nearest synagogue more than 50 miles away in Evergreen, the group formed out of necessity – but now has at least 100 members throughout Colorado’s Grand County, about two hours northwest of Denver.

Claude and Claudia Diamond, the synagogue’s founders, didn’t expect to find a Jewish community when they moved to the area in 1997 with their two young children, but were pleasantly surprised when they realized the owners of the local ski shop were Jewish. Soon after, the “Shul with Altitude” was born.

Today, they hold brief Shabbat services, high holiday events, Passover seders and their annual flame-thrower Chanukah lighting service – which involves lighting nearly 30 menorahs around a table and holding a fire extinguisher for prop. Often held outside at local parks, Shabbat dinners may have themes like Mexican or Italian night. Congregants range from interfaith, secular families to Orthodox Jews who walk to services.

“We’re the only shul in the area if you want to call us that; I think we’re a chavurah on steroids, actually,” Claude said, using the Hebrew term for a small group. “We wanted services to be spiritual. But why can’t it be social also? Why can’t it be fun? We wanted to have a balance, and it just felt right to bring people together.”

One of those at that first event was Doris Sedacca. Like many others in the group, Sedacca splits her time between Winter Park and a second home in another state. “There’s a sense of camaraderie at Shabbat. It’s very nice because everybody looks forward to it, and it’s usually at least two or two-and-a-half

hours. Some of us have been here forever, and there’s always new people coming in. It’s such a neat group.”

Deep history of Jews in Colorado

Driving up I-70 West from the Denver airport amid peaks that are capped with ice even in the summer, it’s easy to see why the area was a prime choice for miners and trappers to settle in during the 1800s. The state’s earliest known Rosh Hashanah service was held in Denver the same year that the Pikes Peak gold rush ushered in more than 100,000 immigrants in 1859.

Starting small businesses in mining camps and towns throughout Colorado, Eastern European Jews established an economic presence in the area during the late 19th century. The Jewish community spearheaded the fight against tuberculosis with the founding of the National Jewish Hospital for Consumptives in Denver in 1899, leading Golda Meir to the city as a teen in the early 1900s when her sister fell ill with the disease.

Today, most of Colorado’s Jews – which make up 1.8% of the general population – still reside in Denver, with some pockets spread out to Boulder, Colorado Springs and, more recently, Aspen, Vail, Steamboat Springs, Breckenridge and Durango.

While that spread doesn’t extend to Grand County, members of the Shul with Altitude emphasized that part of the synagogue’s appeal is its open nature for friends passing through, new neighbors and even those from other faiths. Claude, who acts as a lay rabbi, has helped with bar and bat mitzvahs, weddings and naming ceremonies. He’s also worked together with other religious leaders in the area, hosting pastors and members of the local Presbyterian church at Shabbat dinners and holding a mountaintop memorial service for a Christian family.

“The uniqueness of the Fraser River Valley is how there’s a wonderful mutual respect by all the religious groups. We invite them to our services, and they come, we go to theirs,” Claude said. “We’re all dependent on each other because there’s not as many of us there.”

Claude’s own Jewish upbringing was more traditional – he recalled long services growing up as part of an Orthodox congregation in New York. His parents escaped Nazi Germany, and instilled in him the resiliency of Judaism against all odds. He and Claudia, who grew up Lutheran and converted to Judaism, have worked hard to imbue a love of Judaism with their children.

Chasin, who now splits his time between Denver and Winter

Park, echoed that the community has become a way both to preserve and spread Judaism. “I remember growing up, sitting in temple you’re falling asleep or fidgeting or trying anytime you can go out to go to the bathroom. It’s boring,” said Chasin. “The interaction that my kids have is a fun social atmosphere. Without it, we probably would have zero connection to Judaism.”

Some of Chasin's favorite memories from his time with the group include hosting 45 people for a Rosh Hashanah meal in their backyard and his daughter Tori's bat mitzvah, which Claude officiated. Chasin said the low-responsibility, community-led nature of the Shul with Altitude is what makes it different from other synagogues.

“Claude and I put the service together, so I think it meant a lot more than just going through the motions,” Chasin said of the bat mitzvah. “I think it’s really cool that you’re not tied to funding a temple and buying tickets for the High Holidays –

everybody just pitches in.”

Despite the group's resilience, the COVID-19 pandemic has taken a toll on the community. The Diamonds had to leave Winter Park for periods of time to take care of Claude's mother in North Carolina, though they kept up with the community via Zoom. On July 9, community members led the group's first in-person event since March 2020.

“I think this is the future of Judaism and keeping it alive,” Claude said. “The best movies you’ve ever seen make you laugh and cry. The best services I’ve ever been to are where you meet friends, you get that *kibbitz* where you have good food and wine, and then you have a sentimental moment. I like to take people and make them laugh, make them cry, but make them pay attention.”

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