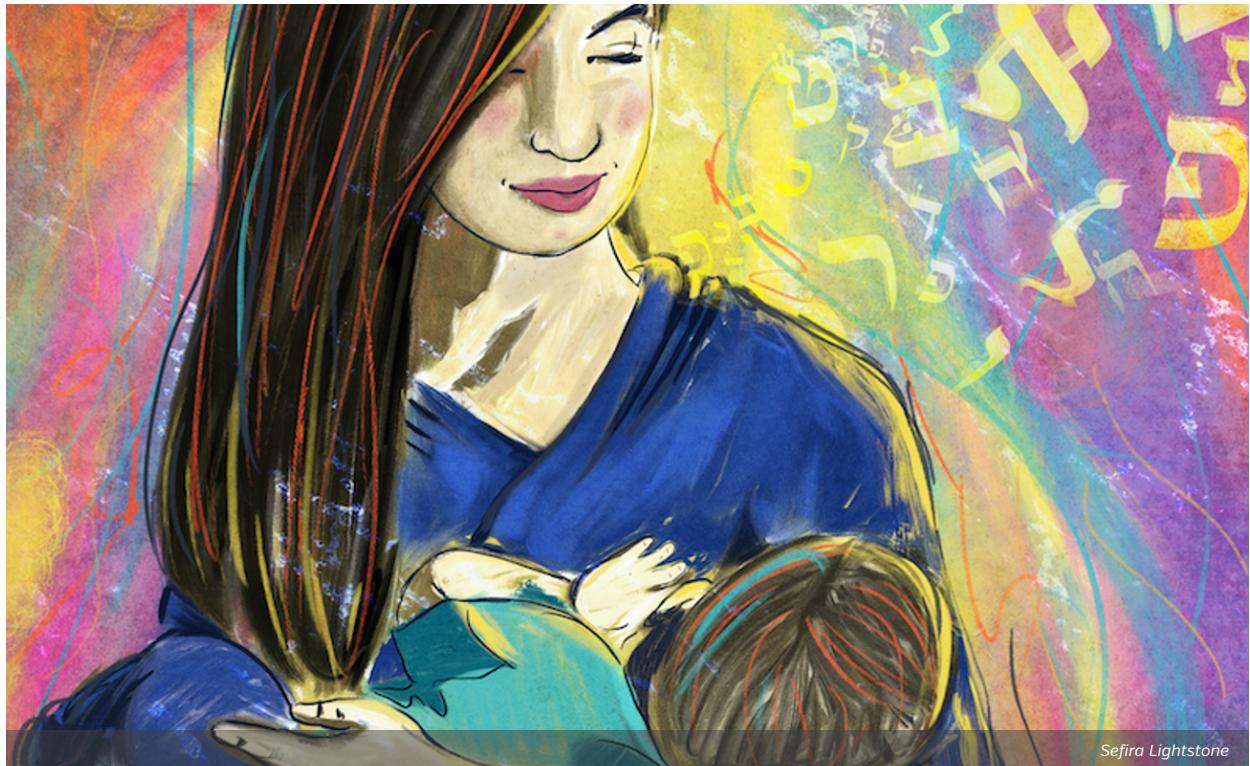


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### Life

## 'I'm Not Really Supposed To Be Here': Orthodox Mothers On Nursing In Shul

By Avital Chizhik-Goldschmidt

When Yael Mandel nursed her baby girl during kiddush in her Orthodox synagogue's sanctuary, no one seemed to mind. Even the rabbi walked over to her seat and said a warm *gut Shabbos*.

But not everyone welcomed the image of a woman breastfeeding in a sacred space.

One synagogue member posted anonymously in an Orthodox men's Facebook group. "Why is this even remotely ok," he wrote, adding: "Wtf is the actual sanctuary of shul the appropriate place for this!?"

Several friends forwarded the post to Mandel – it had enough identifying details to be clearly about her, she says. "Some people sexualize the breast so much that they can't even handle the idea of a woman nursing in public," she noted.

"Nursing is so hard on its own. If I were to seclude myself every time I nurse, I would have no part of shul or any social scene," Mandel told me. "I'd have to separate myself so frequently - to banish myself to another room. If I would ever feel that I can't be part of my community - it would be detrimental to my health."

Breastfeeding in public continues to be a source of debate – from restaurants to museums to airplanes to, most recently, elite conferences on golf courses.

And in houses of worship, the question is just as pertinent, as nursing mothers want to participate in communal prayer. "If a woman with a young baby wants to get out of the house on Shabbos and see her friends and socialize - it becomes too complicated if she can't nurse," said Avie Herman, a postpartum doula and

Orthodox mother based in Toronto. "If women can't feed our babies in shul - does that mean we're not welcome in shul?"

This issue is particularly relevant in the Orthodox community, where women on average spend more years child-bearing (with birthrate currently 5.64 per Orthodox woman between the ages of 40-49) – and where separate women's spaces exist, which could theoretically provide a comfortable place to nurse children discreetly, yet rarely do.

Women being shamed for breastfeeding their children in synagogue is not uncommon. Sarah Zell Young, 30, had just come to a new Orthodox synagogue in Highland Park, NJ, where she was confronted in the kiddush room by two female congregants for nursing her child.

"They said it's really inappropriate, that it's disrespectful to men," she recounted to me over the phone. "I said to them that I'm completely covered. I'm not even near any men. So then one of the women told me: 'Why are you not davening? If it's so important for you to be here, why aren't you praying? You should just go home. Why are you even here?'"

Young said that after this experience, she and her husband decided not to join the synagogue.

Even in women's-only spaces in synagogues, mothers are often pressured not to breastfeed – it is still considered by some as unseemly. "Tznius only applies in front of men, to my mind," Herman said, referring to Orthodox views on women's modesty. "In shul, you're in a women's section, there are no men around, it's not really a tznius issue. It should be the place that's most comfortable to nurse." Instead, she said, "There's a lot of anxiety in it."

Some women have found solutions by arranging family rooms in their synagogues. Last Yom Kippur, in the Young Israel of St. Louis, Missouri, Rachel Shorr Deutsch needed somewhere to feed her then-five-month-old son.

"There was a bathroom with a toilet and a rocking chair," she said. "I walked in - it reeked, I couldn't stand there, let alone sit and nurse. And I didn't want to go home back and forth on a fast day."

Deutsch found what she called a "junky storage closet," filled with old books and unused furniture, and nursed her baby there. After the holiday, she mentioned the space to the rabbi and to friends in the community, suggesting it be reimagined as a family room – and a small renovation project was born.

"We went through the *machzorim*, old stuff, organizing and sorting and cleaning out," she said. Deutsch and her friends sold the unused furniture on Facebook Marketplace, and then used that money to pay for the

nursing room. "We sanded and painted the walls ourselves, and asked people for like-new items that they could donate. We wanted women to come in and feel like the shul is a second home. There's no reason you should sit in a dirty room to feed your child."

Within two months, the young couples of the community collected a changing table, water bottles, toys, artwork (including one painting made by a shul member), and a clock.

"I used to ask myself, 'Should I really go to shul now, if the baby has to nurse again in thirty minutes?'" Deutsch said. "Now that's no longer a question."

Deutsch posted pictures of her nursing room project on Facebook – then inspiring other Orthodox women to do the same in other communities. Over on the West Coast, Rena Katrikh, a mother in Los Angeles, brought up the issue of a nursing space during a Shabbat meal with her synagogue's Rabbanit Alissa Thomas-Newborn. Some female congregants had complained to Thomas-Newborn about having to nurse in the B'nai David-Judea Congregation's bathroom, which had two rocking chairs set aside for nursing mothers.

"I was not yet a mom," Rabbanit Thomas-Newborn wrote in an email (during her maternity leave). "But as a woman and future-mom, I was fully invested in it. Nursing rooms and family rooms (which are for both moms and dads) are becoming more and more present in workplaces and businesses, so why not in shuls?"

Alongside other synagogue members, Katrikh and Thomas-Newborn spearheaded a "family room" – a space with a diaper-changing table, a rocking chair, a couch ("so you can bring in a friend and not feel so isolated," Katrikh explained), nursing pillows, toys, and a baby bouncer seat. "It's also good for older children with special needs who need to be changed," she added.

Katrikh said. "So much of this was motivated by [Rabbanit Thomas-Newborn] asking and bringing this question and wondering how we can address some of the concerns."

But even for women who have "clout" in their synagogues – it doesn't always occur to them to speak up. Dina Rabhan, CEO of Jerusalem U and long-time rebetzin, spent years nursing her seven daughters wherever she could find. "I spent hours and hours nursing in the weirdest places in shuls," she told me. "I have nursed in bathrooms stalls, leaning against the sink in bathrooms with women walking around me staring, in playrooms and [children's] groups, coatrooms."

Rabhan said that she once nursed in the corner of the women's section in a sanctuary, and women around

Rabhan said that she once nursed in the corner of the women's section in a sanctuary, and women around her were "highly upset". Years later, Rabhan remembers with regret that she was quiet. "I didn't even think I had a voice. My husband was the rabbi in most of these shuls, and it didn't occur to me, I should have said, 'Hey, I'm nursing baby after baby, can we figure out a space for me to do it that's comfortable and appropriate in synagogue?'"

For Rabhan, the choice to remain quiet was just part of how many religious women are conditioned. "The tales we're told, of women suffering for the sake of their family, for Yiddishkeit. It's part of who we are! Now, there is some nobility in sacrifice for family and Judaism, but not in sacrificing *unnecessarily*. The younger generation, my children among them, will have nothing of that – they want to be *frum*, but they don't want sacrifice that doesn't make sense anymore. They're educating me that it doesn't have to be like this."

Though many synagogues and temples in non-Orthodox denominations have embraced welcoming policies to breastfeeding mothers – the Conservative movement's law committee passed a religious opinion in 2005 endorsing women's breastfeeding in the sanctuary. According to Rabbi Leora Kaye, Director of Program for the Union for Reform Judaism, "Reform congregations are encouraged to create an inclusive environment where families can always feel at ease feeding their children, including parents that are nursing." Still, some mothers face pushback in non-Orthodox synagogues, despite official policies focusing on inclusion.

And these questions are of course not limited to Jewish houses of worship either – women have been asked to leave church services, too. Pope Francis himself has had to step forward and encourage women to nurse in the Sistine Chapel. "Countless other Christian women, trying to feed their children without having to miss a sermon, have faced the disapproval of others who think breasts have no place in the sanctuary," Rachel Marie Stone wrote in Christianity Today.

And a woman's ability to feed her children is just part of larger obstacles that young mothers face, when trying to find a place for themselves in communal prayer services, Herman, the postpartum doula, adds – whether it's babysitting services, changing tables, or stroller parking. "What happens when there's no changing table in the men's bathroom?" she asked. "It's so subtle, but it sends

a big message about what's important." Not having a changing table in the men's room, she says, messages that "men are davening, and their davening matters, while the mother can step out to change a diaper, because her davening is less important."

"It makes you feel like 'I'm not really supposed to be here,'" she said.

"There is a real need among parents to nourish their souls, get self-care, and feel supported as adults in their life-stage," Thomas-Newborn said. In advising synagogues to improve their services to families, Thomas-Newborn suggested talking with parents about their schedules in advance, when planning Torah classes and communal meetings. "Offer childcare at shul lunches, onegs, and Shabbat afternoon events," she said. "And build a strong base of parents of small children to whom you can turn to get their perspective on how to be more inclusive of them and their friends. It can feel like when you have a young child that you have to put your own spiritual life on hold, but a shul community that encourages a full family life should strive to find a way to nourish every family member – parents included."

Herman agreed – wondering aloud about the ironies of life as an Orthodox young mother.

"I feel this a lot, as a frum young mother," said Herman. "I'm doing exactly '*what I'm supposed to be doing*', what the community wants from me. I'm having babies! So why am I facing barriers? Why is this so difficult for me?"

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**Opinion**

# As We Leave This Horrifying Year Behind, Let's Recommit to The Jewish Value Of Civil Discourse

By Jodi Rudoren

The most important Jewish thing I did in 5779 did not take place in a synagogue, in Israel, or at summer camp. It did not involve prayer, a specific one of the 613 commandments, or even food (though I'm pretty sure I had some unkosher chicken sausage for breakfast just before).

The most important Jewish thing I did in 5779 was needlepoint 11 Jewish stars with hearts on them and help my kids hang them outside the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh. It was the Monday after Thanksgiving, and it was rainy. The whole thing took about 15 minutes.

What a terrible, horrible, very bad year this has been in news of the Jews.

Pittsburgh and Poway – a dozen people gunned down while davening, the sanctuary no longer a sanctuary. Anti-Semitic cartoons and Tweets – symbols and stereotypes seemingly retired long ago back in our faces. A fractious Israeli election, and then a do-over, and still no stable coalition in sight.

Worst of all: a devolution in our discourse, a growing sense that people cannot talk to each other across generations or geographies about the things we care about because we cannot agree on the axiomatic facts, because we do not trust each other's intentions.

So I am holding onto Jewish Hearts for Pittsburgh, a Facebook project organized largely by Ellen Dominus Broade, a television executive and former synagogue president who happens to be the sister of my best friend.

Pittsburgh was personal for Ellen: her daughter, Emily, was a senior at Carnegie Mellon University and, the year before, had taught music at one of the Hebrew schools in the building that got shot up.

Ellen is also a lifelong knitter – her mom actually used to own a yarn shop. So when she saw a Facebook post showing a knitted pink heart with a Jewish star and suggesting people shower Pittsburgh with such crafts, she jumped.

"I was pissed and I'm confident," Ellen said. She got a P.O. Box and tapped "knitting influencers" on Instagram. Nearly 2,000 hearts poured in, from 21 countries.

Three weeks later, on Emily's 21st birthday, a group of volunteers hung them in front of the synagogue and throughout the stricken neighborhood.

I came late to all of this, and kind of accidentally. I'm a journalist, not an activist, but the Tree of Life shooting felt different, felt close. My husband and I took our twins, who were 11, to a vigil that night at B'nai Keshet in Montclair, N.J., maybe the first such thing I've ever been to without a reporter's notebook.

For Thanksgiving, we were driving to my sister's in Chicago, and seeking somewhere to stop overnight to break up the trip. We'd done the Rock'n'Roll Museum in Cleveland the year before; Pittsburgh was also about halfway, and when I saw Ellen's sister post about the hearts, I knew that was the thing.

I'm also the daughter of a knitter who loves to craft. I'd miss the big event, but Ellen said sure, we could go hang more hearts. Which is what we did. In the rain.

I know: This is a sweet story, but it is not going to solve our problems. It is not going to stop the next shooter, or soothe any anti-Semitic trope. It will not bring peace any closer in the Middle East, or bridge the gaps between Israel and Diaspora Jews, or curb climate change, or cure cancer.

But journalism – like Judaism – is all about stories. And about tackling the big questions. It's about engaging those questions, maybe disagreeing about them. It's about a raucous but respectful debate on the things that matter, the things that are really hard.

So let's ask the tough questions. I'm going into this year mulling a few that I hope we can pick apart in the Forward without picking each other apart. Here are three:

**How can American Jews engage constructively in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict?** Ariel Sharon famously said, upon becoming Israel's 11th prime minister, "What

you see from here, you don't see from there," referring to how different it was just to be the head boss in charge rather than a senior cabinet official. Israeli Jews rightly feel like we do not fully understand the daily reality of living in a place with serious security threats and a mandatory draft, and often see American activism as so much meddling.

But if Israel is the nation-state of the Jewish people, as the current prime minister loves to say, then don't we have a rightful say? Especially if we're worried that the status quo is not sustainable, the two-state solution increasingly unachievable, and any one-state option inevitably leads to an existential confrontation between the state's Jewishness and its democracy? I get why Israeli Jews are scared about terrorism if they make a move without a reliable Palestinian partner; why aren't they also deeply afraid of what happens if they don't?

#### **What will the future American synagogue be like?**

I grew up in an Orthodox shul where the vast majority of the members came to services every Shabbat morning. At the Conservative and Reform congregations I've joined as an adult, it's a tiny fraction. I used to think, what's a synagogue about if not prayer? But I'm starting to see it as more of a community center, where the busiest days of the week may well not be Shabbat.

Last year, I helped start a popup brunch cafe at ours, Temple Ner Tamid in Bloomfield, N.J. My husband has taken over as director of its Purim Shpiel, which draws a crowd of hundreds – I'm still getting used to it not being actually on Purim, but the Saturday night closest to Purim, and to it not following a Megillah reading. Perhaps most interesting, many of our synagogue's active members are non-Jews who are married to Jews and raising Jewish kids. The very definition of our peoplehood and practice is changing.

**And: Why is Israeli television so good?** [Also: Can they make a show without Michael Aloni?].

Like journalism, Judaism is all about questions, and stories, and debate. From Talmudic times to today's Seder tables, our tradition encourages us to ask any question. Make any case, as long as you cite your text, give your examples, defend your ideas. Shamai seems never to have won the day over Hillel, but neither was he cast out.

So maybe hanging needlepointed stars in Pittsburgh

wasn't the most important Jewish thing I did in 5779, because eight months later I left The New York Times, where I'd been a reporter and editor for nearly 21 years.

A lot of people have asked why I would leave the senior leadership of The Times to join a small Jewish news organization. One big reason is because I'm worried about the lack of civil discourse in our community, and I want to help restore it.

We need to engage each other's ideas, even when they're unpopular or uncomfortable, or ugly. Like handmade hearts that make a monument to our people's conjoined vulnerability and resilience, Jewish journalism is a project our community must commit to together.

Let's make 5780 a year of memorable stories – and provocative questions.

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*Jodi Rudoren became Editor-in-Chief of the Forward on Sept. 9, after nearly 21 years at The New York Times. Follow her on Twitter @rudoren, or email rudoren@forward.com.*

**The views and opinions expressed in this article are the author's own and do not necessarily reflect those of the Forward.**



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**Opinion**

# The Case For Bernie Sanders, The Only Real Progressive In The Race (Sorry, Warren Fans)

By Jaya Sundaresh

On Wednesday morning, news broke that Vermont Senator and presidential candidate Bernie Sanders was taking time off from the campaign trail after he had received two stents to the heart. He had felt some chest pain at a rally, which turned out to be a blocked artery. The Senator is currently recovering, and “in good spirits”, according to his campaign. But he will be absent from the campaign trail for the foreseeable future.

As a die-hard Sanders supporter and someone who’s made up my mind to vote for him in 2020, I was devastated to read the news about his health. But I’ve been worried for the Senator for a while now, not for his physical health so much as for the health of his campaign, as former Bernie supporters seem to be defecting to Massachusetts Senator Elizabeth Warren, who’s also running for president.

Take Jennifer Owens, a 44-year-old New Hampshire resident. Owens used to be a huge Sanders fan, back in 2016. “I liked that he seemed outside the system, and that he was inspiring people,” she told me. “Bernie was the first one I heard who said the things I’d been thinking – about the minimum wage, the stock market, the structure of American business, the healthcare system.”

But this time around, Owens has switched her allegiance to Elizabeth Warren. She was struck by the Massachusetts senator, who seemed like a version of Sanders that was, well, *better*. Warren hadn’t been in politics for very long, something Owens liked about her. She was drawn to Warren as she was to Sanders’s outsider position in the Senate. But she was also impressed by Warren’s proven track record of working with those she didn’t agree with.

Owens is not alone. Elizabeth Warren’s campaign poll numbers are skyrocketing. In the most recent polls, she was at nearly 27% – to Vice President Joe Biden’s 25%, making her the solid frontrunner. Liberals and progressives love her. Luminaries from Jonathan Van Ness to Scarlett Johansson have thrown their support behind her.

It’s not hard to see why: She’s running a dynamic campaign, staking out a position as the candidate with the wonky plans, lending her an aura of competence. Most importantly, many view Warren as not substantively different from Sanders, except with the added bonus of being female, and perhaps easier to listen to and work with.

As Owens put it, Elizabeth Warren is a “practical, bookish Bernie.”

But this view is wrong. While Warren may be more similar to Sanders than she is to a centrist like Biden, who is also running for president, that doesn’t mean that she and Sanders are at all interchangeable.

The vision Sanders offers, unlike the one that Warren offers, is radical. It’s existentially important to progressives, because it offers a new way of doing politics in the Democratic Party. Sanders alone is offering a politics that appeals to the vast, as-of-now politically unengaged working class, as opposed to the overwhelmingly white, overwhelmingly middle class crew that makes up Warren’s base.

Let’s start with the fact that Sanders has a better, more comprehensive healthcare plan, one that will insure all Americans. Medicare for All is a central plank of his platform. Meanwhile, Warren, despite cosponsoring the bill that Sanders wrote can’t seem to decide whether she endorses the plan or not.

Furthermore, Sanders has a bigger proposed wealth tax, and a foreign policy that is more radical than Warren’s. He wants to cancel all student debt in America, while Warren plans to cap student debt relief at \$50,000 per person.

Warren is similarly wobbly on K-12 education, and has not come out in support of the NAACP’s proposed moratorium on new charter schools the way Sanders

has. And Sanders' plan for "workplace democracy" – which will galvanize the labor movement in this country – is nothing less than revolutionary. No other candidate has anything like it.

It's not just the differences in policies. The philosophies that animate the two sets of policies are different. Warren still describes herself as "capitalist to [her] bones," and her policies, even her far-reaching economic ones, are still reforms to the system that leave it essentially intact. Sanders, who describes himself as a democratic socialist, intends to alter the system beyond recognition.

For progressives who care about such things, the choice could not be more clear.

Sanders is often accused of being uncompromising. But it's his legendary consistency, with which he has approached every political issue of the last 30 years, which bodes so well for a Sanders presidency. If it, one can see his ability to not compromise on his principles when in office – as Obama did on so many issues that were important to progressives, from closing Guantanamo Bay to liberal judicial appointees.

Put another way, Sanders was advocating for single payer healthcare when Elizabeth Warren was an avowed Republican – a fiscal conservative still under the seductive sway of Reaganomics.

Instead of coming up with limp compromises that don't actually change anyone's life for the better, a Sanders presidency would harness a political revolution, would push for socialist allies in Congress to get elected, would mobilize the working class in this country to support important legislation, and would aggressively use the presidential bully pulpit to go to war with recalcitrant members of his own party, and of course, the Republicans.

It's simply indisputable that during his 2016 run, Sanders created the seeds of a mass movement, resulting in teachers' strikes across multiple states that won significant demands for labor and for education, as Eric Blanc lays out in his excellent book, *Red State Revolt*. Sanders has woken up the left in this country from its deep slumber, has revitalized organizations like the Democratic Socialists of

America, Indivisible, and Our Revolution.

And let's not forget that often, a charismatic leader is necessary to provide oxygen to a grassroots movement. If you doubt this, consider where the runaway success of the extreme right-wing that now animates the Republican Party would be without President Donald Trump.

Does achieving a successful Sanders presidency seem a little hard to imagine? Maybe. But who could have imagined six years ago that out of nowhere, a little-known senator from Vermont would upend politics so much that socialism would cease to be a dirty word in large swathes of this country? For that matter, who could imagine that, within the span of a few years, a largely homophobic country would change its views on gay people so much that gay marriage would become legalized in all 50 states? Who would have imagined that within a decade, a non-violent uprising in the South would shift public opinion and force real legislative and social changes to end the system of racial subjugation known as Jim Crow?

Political miracles happen. It's time to think big, my fellow progressives. That it will be difficult is not a reason not to try.

Don't settle for the political convenience of a reformer when you can have a revolutionary.

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*Jaya Sundaresh is a journalist and a writer. She has lived all over the Northeast, in Canada and India, but calls Brooklyn home. You can find her at @shutupjaya on Twitter.*

**The views and opinions expressed in this article are the author's own and do not necessarily reflect those of the Forward.**

**Culture**

# Your Jewish Guide To Post-Season Baseball

By Jay Schreiber

Rosh Hashanah concluded at sundown on Tuesday and, almost on cue, the 2019 baseball postseason began.

Make of that what you will but what is certain is that this postseason is featuring the best Jewish baseball there is. Of the 10 or so current major leaguers who are considered Jewish, four have standout talent and all of them made it to October. This was essentially the case last year, too, and to a lesser extent, what took place in 2017.

All this can be viewed as part of a Jewish baseball bonanza that extends back to 2016, when Theo Epstein, the brains behind the Chicago Cubs, orchestrated a championship for a team that had spent a confounding 108 years without one. The following March, Team Israel pulled off a stunning run in the World Baseball Classic before eventually succumbing to reality.

That fall, Alex Bregman, a Bar Mitzvah boy from Albuquerque, helped lead the Houston Astros to its first championship in franchise history. A year later, Ryan Braun, the best Jewish player in baseball until Bregman came along, almost did the same with his upstart Milwaukee Brewers.

And the team that did win the 2018 World Series, the Boston Red Sox, had a famous championship curse of their own until the same Theo Epstein helped end that misery in 2004. Since then, the liberated Red Sox have won three more championships, including last year's, and symbolically at least, Epstein is still listed in the credits.

Which brings us to this year. Last month, the Israeli national baseball team surprised again, qualifying for the 2020 Olympics in Japan. And now we have America's baseball showdown – the wild-card games, two rounds of playoffs and then the World Series. And a handful of really good Jewish players to

contemplate. Here's a primer to help you along:

## BREGMAN LEADS THE WAY

At the age of 25, Alex Bregman is not just the best Jewish player in baseball, he is one of the best players, period. This year, he batted .296, hit 41 home runs, drove in 112 runs and led all of baseball with a .438 on-base percentage. He's a third baseman who also fills in ably at shortstop. A year ago, he finished fifth in the voting for the American League's most valuable player. This year, he could finish first.

Better still, Bregman is an interesting dude. He has a charity – AB for Autism – and, in a nod to his Latino teammates, has learned how to speak Spanish. And a year ago he spoke up after Donald Trump, on the night of the synagogue shootings in Pittsburgh, wandered on to Twitter to second-guess some of the managerial moves in Game 4 of the World Series.

Bregman was quick to take issue. Why, he wondered, was Trump tweeting about a baseball game when a mass shooting had happened earlier that day.

Bregman's Astros team is the betting favorite to win the World Series for the second time in three years and once again they may have to conquer the Los Angeles Dodgers to do so. In the 2017 Series, Bregman went head to head with Dodgers outfielder Joc Pederson, who is also Jewish and is also pretty good. But Pederson, who is now 27, was only a part-time slugger back in 2017. Now he's a full-time threat who hit 36 homers this season. And it's entirely possible that he and Bregman may go at it again this month.

Then again, Max Fried of the Atlanta Braves might get in the way. Like Bregman, Fried is 25. He had a cameo role in the 2018 postseason. But this year he has emerged as one of the better left-handed pitchers in baseball – no, he doesn't throw as hard as Sandy Koufax – and he will be central to the Braves' chances.

Finally, there's Ryan Braun. Or at least there was, until his team lost the National League wild-card game on Tuesday night. So gone from the postseason after just one game is the 35-year-old dean of Jewish players in the majors. Being the dean sounds pretty cool in a way, but Braun is forever tarnished by the fact that he

once lied about a positive drug test and, for a while, got away with it.

#### FOR THOSE KEEPING SCORE

Inevitably, fans interested in the phenomenon of Jewish players arrive at the same question: How Jewish? So, for better or worse, here's the breakdown.

Bregman and Fried appear to have had more-or-less traditional Jewish upbringings. Fried took part in the 2009 Maccabiah Games in Israel. Bregman has second-guessed himself for not playing for Team Israel in 2017.

Braun is half-Jewish – his father was born in Israel before moving to the United States as a child – and he did not, among other things, have a Bar Mitzvah. He has, however, come to embrace his Jewish heritage. Pederson is also half-Jewish, on his mother's side, where the family tree extends back to membership in a San Francisco synagogue in the mid-1800's. And he played for Team Israel in 2013.

#### COMING SOON: YOM KIPPUR

The High Holidays, and particularly Yom Kippur, can create a dilemma for Jewish players, who have to decide whether to sit out or play. It's not much of an issue if the game is not important. Just miss it if you want to. But it is an issue if the game really matters. And in the postseason, every game matters.

Back in 1965, the Dodgers' Sandy Koufax decided to sit out Game 1 of the World Series rather than pitch on Yom Kippur. In his absence, the Dodgers lost. They also lost Game 2, when Koufax did pitch. But in a saga that seems almost biblical, Koufax went to throw a shutout in Game 5 of the Series and then, on just two days of rest, another shutout in the decisive Game 7.

Nothing like that has happened since. Nothing probably ever will. But Yom Kippur will arrive next week during the latter stages of the first round of the playoffs and games could take place on both days of the holiday. Decisions may have to be made, all part of a postseason with a little bit of a Jewish imprint.

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Jay Schreiber, a longtime sports editor at The New York Times, is a contributing editor to the Forward.

#### Culture

## Could It Be Time For A Yiddish 'Porgy And Bess?'

By J. Hoberman

Suppose, instead of adapting the white Southerner DuBose Heyward's 1925 novel "Porgy," the Russian-Jewish American composer George Gershwin took on the Russian-Jewish Russian writer Isaac Babel's 1926 play "Sunset." Imagine a Gershwin folk opera set in a Jewish ghetto, rather than African-American slum, not populated by the poor people and criminals of Catfish Row but those of Moldavanka.

Or maybe, to continue the thought experiment, an opera set in a shtetl. That almost happened. Five years before "Porgy and Bess" had its world premiere on Broadway in October 1935, Gershwin was engaged to write an ambitious show for the Metropolitan Opera. Its source was S. Ansky's play "The Dybbuk."

Gershwin's "Dybbuk" was scheduled for April 1931. Then it was discovered that the rights to the play had already been obtained by an Italian composer, Lodovico Rocca, who premiered his opera at La Scala in March 1934. Gershwin moved on to another project: "Porgy and Bess." By the time Rocca's "Dybbuk" played Carnegie Hall in May 1936, "Porgy and Bess" had closed on Broadway – a disappointing run after mixed notices. Now it's back in a new production at the Met, along with all the baggage the classic folk opera has toted since its premiere 84 years ago.

Born in Brooklyn to Russian-Jewish immigrants, Gershwin – characterized by the critic-historian Alex Ross as "the ultimate phenomenon in early-twentieth-century American music... in whom all the discordant tendencies of the era achieved sweet harmony" – was a trained musician who swerved into popular culture and crossed back, moving from the pop ragtime of "Swanee," a massive hit for Al Jolson in 1919, to the concert jazz of "Rhapsody in Blue," first performed by the Paul Whiteman orchestra in 1923.

Gershwin was also the crown prince of those Jewish American musicians who built their career on the foundation of African-American culture. "Porgy and Bess" may be the greatest single example of this

fusion. Or is it simply an appropriation?

In "The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual," Harold Cruse called "Porgy and Bess" "the most contradictory cultural symbol ever created in the Western world" which is one way to characterize Gershwin's genius for miscegenatin' rhythm. Where the jazz critic Rudi Blesh termed "Porgy and Bess" "Negroesque," fellow composer Duke Ellington, an initial critic of the opera who later came around, saw it as a kind of musical gumbo: "Mr. Gershwin didn't discriminate – he borrowed from everyone from Liszt to Dickie Well's kazoo."

Indeed, "Porgy and Bess" incorporates elements of jazz, pseudo jazz, spirituals, and opera, as well as Jewish liturgical, Gullah, European romantic and avant-garde music. In 1932 Gershwin began studying with the composer-theorist Joseph Schillinger, a Russia's leading apostle of syncopation, recently relocated to the US. Ideas regarding dissonant chords and rhythmic organization that, perhaps first intended for "The Dybbuk" informed "Porgy and Bess."

Jewish musicians have had little difficulty finding affinities. In an unpublished interview cited by the musicologist Mark Slobin, the Broadway composer Jerry Bock linked his "Fiddler on the Roof" to "Porgy and Bess." Both "stayed within their respective pale [sic], closer to the ground from which their immigrant roots took hold. In that sense I feel they have a spiritual attachment as well as a theatrical one."

"Summertime" has been said to draw on the Yiddish lullaby "*Lulinke lu-lu*." [According to Hollywood composer Bernard Hermann, Gershwin was concerned that audiences might find the tune too Jewish.] "It Ain't Necessarily So" has been identified with a well-known *nigun* and claimed to be structured after a *haftora*. It's been pointed out that one only need to shift tempo to find a resemblance between "It Takes a Long Pull to Get There" and "*Havenu Shalom Aleichem*." But then, according to the klezmer Frank London, "the most facile of all fusion/synthesis musical equations is 'Melody from culture A + Rhythm from culture B.'"

The radical klezmer Eve Sicular suggested that three other songs, "My Man's Gone Now," "Bess You Is My Woman Now" and "A Woman is a Sometime Thing" could all lend themselves to a "Yiddish sound." In the late 1990s, both the Argentine clarinetist Giora Feidman and the Minnesota Klezmer Band put out

albums reinterpreted Gershwin as a klezmer, including three of the afore mentions songs plus "There's a Boat Dat's Leavin' Soon for New York."

If indeed Gershwin appropriated African-American musical forms, "Porgy and Bess" was triumphantly reclaimed by Billie Holiday, Sidney Becht, Miles Davis, Louis Armstrong, Ella Fitzgerald, Nina Simone, and the Modern Jazz Quartet, to name a few. "The score," as Ross notes, "invites considerable freedom of interpretation." So why not that which has been most found objectionable, namely the book?

Theatrical estates are notoriously protective. Anne Bogart ran afoul of one when she directed an NYU production of the Rogers and Hammerstein musical "South Pacific" set in a VA hospital. Arthur Miller served another mid 1980s avant-garde production, the Wooster Group's LSD, with a cease and desist letter for its incorporation of material from "The Crucible."

Because it was initially feared that "Porgy and Bess" might be turned into a minstrel show it has long been stipulated that only black actors can be cast. While this stricture arose out of concern that the opera might be staged in blackface, Cruse took an opposite position, asserting that, "No Negro singer, actor, or performer should ever submit to a role in this vehicle again. If white producers want to stage this folk-opera, it should be performed by white performers made up in blackface."

Forget blackface, would it not be at least interesting to stage an experimental Yiddish-inflected "Porgy and Bess," set to a bulgar backbeat in the underworld milieu of Babel's Odessa? The two Sportin' Life songs, "It Ain't Necessarily So" and "There's a Boat," would immediately take on whole other meanings. I asked the musicologist, historian and klezmer revival pioneer Henry Sapoznik if it were possible to produce a klezmerized "Porgy and Bess." "That it can be done goes without saying," he replied. "That it hadn't been done speaks to taste and restraint."

Point taken but, as the song says, it ain't necessarily so—even though, as things stand, it would be impossible to find out.

**The Schmooze**

# Timothée Chalamet Handed Out Bagels On The Red Carpet On Rosh Hashanah

By Jenny Singer

Like an inverse Santa Clause, Timothée Chalamet – diminutive, hairless, Jewish – arrived at the red carpet for the premiere of his new Netflix film “The King” on Tuesday night, holding aloft a sack of gifts.

The 23-year-old star of “Call Me By Your Name” came bearing bagels, which he proceeded to distribute to the screaming fans who lined the red carpet at the New York City premiere.

Chalamet has publicly declared allegiance to Tompkins Square Bagels; reports say that the carbs he gallantly tossed at his public were everything bagels. In footage he can be seen towering over his female fans like a satin-draped sapling, gleefully pressing bagels into outstretched hands.

Chalamet, whose mother is Jewish, may or may not have had the Jewish new year on his mind – a time when breaking circular bread with community is paramount. His unorthodox group-*hamotzi* was apparently inspired by a fan who tweeted at him, two weeks before the event, “bring bagels to the red carpet.” Chalamet responded “lol imagine,” and later deleted his tweet.

Yet a full fifteen days later, there he was – literally bagel-ing.

Asked for his favorite bagel order by a reporter for Paper Magazine, he smiled his characteristic I-was-bullied-in-high-school-but-now-I-wear-designer-harnesses-to-the-Golden-Globes smile and said, “Bacon egg and cheese on a bagel.”

Timothée Chalamet – off the derech, but on the red carpet.

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