

KISLEV/TEVET/SH'VAT 5784

DECEMBER/JANUARY 2023/2024

# THE JEWISH VOICE

Informing and Connecting Jews in El Paso & Las Cruces



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**SUNDAY  
FEB. 25, 2024  
5 P.M**

WATCH YOUR MAILBOX FOR MORE INFORMATION COMING SOON



# Letter from the Director

*By Marla Cohen, Executive Director*  
Jewish Federation of El Paso & Las Cruces

October 7 marked a changed world for Israel and the Jewish communities around the world. The Jewish Federation of El Paso and Las Cruces mission pivoted from trying to wrap up a campaign to focusing on raising money for Israel. As of November 27, 2023 JFNA raised over \$666M for emergency Israel aid, and Israel bonds raised over \$1B. More than 38 hostages have been released.

This war will test us in many ways. Visit our website for updates and ways you can take action. Our resilience and commitment to Israel, I do not doubt. Our exhaustion from combating anti-Semitism from those who should know better to “the simple son who doesn’t know how to ask a question” will wear us thin. On top of that will be our waves of fear and anxiety, from watching the news to learning about what is going on with our friends and families. El Paso has shown a great deal of support for Israel, many of our interfaith partners have shown up for us in their own way, but we still have antisemitic incidents occurring. People are scared and not reporting. Please report incidents to the Police, get a case number, and then report to the ADL and FBI.

Due to the war, many of our institutions have renegotiated their programming offerings. We need to shift the schedule for launching “Latitudes-Discussion with Sister Cities.” Our partner agencies in Israel must remain focused on addressing Israelis' immediate needs. I wrote about this program in the last issue of the Voice. It will explore many issues relevant to the Borderlands, Ciudad Juarez, and Israel, such as water and agriculture, borders and human migration, democracy and voting, pharmaceutical industry, cyber, and security. We will move this program forward as such conversations educate our community and lead to more significant partnerships to fight anti-Semitism.

I also ask you to commit to the Jewish Federation of El Paso and Las Cruces. Besides fighting antisemitism through gatherings, and community events such as Shofar Across Borders and Hanukkah at the Plaza (December 13), we are producing engaging programs like Borderlands Cafe Europa (The White Sands Missile Range Museum has been a highlight to date), PJ Library and the new teen philanthropy unveiling in 2024. Come shop at Kendra Scott on December 3. A portion of your jewelry purchase will go to the JFed campaign and Israel emergency aid. We thank you.

# The Jewish Voice

*is a publication of the*



**Jewish Federation**  
of El Paso & Las Cruces

The Jewish Voice, published six times a year, is dedicated to informing, educating, and uniting the Jewish community by providing news items of local, national, Israeli and international concern. The Jewish Voice will consider for publication any materials submitted that support the mission of Jewish Federation of El Paso & Las Cruces and have relevance and appeal our Jewish community. Articles are subject to editing at the editor's discretion and are subject to space limitations. Letters cannot be longer than 150 words and articles must be kept to a maximum of 1,000 words.

Please email to [thevoice@jfedepc.org](mailto:thevoice@jfedepc.org).

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# Hanukkah Events

Las Cruces' 14th Annual MEGA  
**CHANUKAH ON THE PLAZA**  
SUNDAY, DEC. 10 4:00PM DOWNTOWN PLAZA de Las Cruces

LATKES & DOUGHNUTS  
GIANT MENORAH LIGHTING  
CHOCOLATE GELT DROP  
LIVE CONCERT BY: DAN BERN  
FUN CHANUKAH CRAFTS & GIFTSHOP  
RAFFLES/PRIZES

AND SO MUCH MORE...FREE EVENT & OPEN TO ALL

For more information visit:  
[www.CHABADLC.org/CONCERT](http://www.CHABADLC.org/CONCERT)

## Hanukkah at B'nai Zion

**December 8-10**

Shabbaton with

Benji Lovett

Scholar in Residence



## Chanukah Playland

at Chabad Lubavitch

**Sunday, December 10 | 2:00 PM**

Chabad Lubavitch Center for Jewish Life

RSVP: [CHABADELPASO.COM/PLAYLAND](http://CHABADELPASO.COM/PLAYLAND)

OR 915-204-6581



## Vodka and Latkas

**Saturday December 9**

6:00 - 8:00 PM

\$10/person

Temple Mount Sinai

rsvp at [templemountsinai.com](http://templemountsinai.com)



Join us



Sunday, December 3

2:00-4:00 PM

at  KENDRA SCOTT

*Shine Bright, Do Good*

**Use code GIVEBACK-FNHZY online from Dec 3-4**

20% of sales go to Campaign and the Israel Emergency Fund

# Celebrate Hanukkah

## at San Jacinto Plaza



December 13

6:00 – 7:00 PM

Sponsor a Candle: \$1800

Food trucks, music, & more!





# A Grateful Farewell to a Dedicated Staff Member

For more than 85 years, the Jewish Federation of El Paso, Jewish El Paso and the Jewish Federation of El Paso and Las Cruces (JFEDEPLC), has been an exceptional example of community and committed leadership, replete with dedicated individuals engaging together, connecting, supporting, and celebrating Jewish life, values, and culture in El Paso, Las Cruces, Israel, and beyond. For the last 26 of those years, Sue Bendalin has been instrumental in the Federation's success in providing an umbrella under which the Jewish community here could thrive, learn and celebrate our common bond. So, it is with great gratitude and respect for her service that we announce Sue's retirement from JFEDEPLC.

Sue grew up in our desert southwest in a loving family, and was the center of a multitude of friends and family spanning state borders with whom she celebrated our goals, lifestyle and faith. She is never without a story, sharing with each person she meets, that she had just seen their family member at Temple, Synagogue, or a recent event, and explaining their connection to our community. Sue has been an encyclopedia teaching the history of our Jewish Community to locals as well as newcomers. It is clear that she was and is a Torah for this community. For me personally, Sue was instrumental in my successful transition as Executive Director of JFEDEPLC. She helped me

learn a whole new forest of family trees and kept me informed of everything from who just had a birthday, to who is in the hospital, to who just passed away. I am very grateful to have had the opportunity to work with and learn from Sue Bendalin and know she will continue to be lovingly embraced by the community she served with dedication for so many years. Please join me in wishing Sue a very happy retirement.

With deepest respect and gratitude,

*Marla Cohen,*  
Executive Director, JFEDEPLC

# Mazel Tov's

## Lilah Berkson's Bat Mitzvah



Saturday, November 4, 2023 Temple Beth El, Las Cruces, New Mexico.

*From left: Rabbi Evette, Temple Beth El, Lilah Berkson, & Monica Kimball*

## Consecration Class of '23

Every other year, Temple Mount Sinai's Religious School participates in the ritual of consecrating our youngest students into their Jewish education.

This year, 12 students, between the ages of 4 and 7, participated with their families and the community as we symbolically and physically surrounding them in Torah to consecrate their lifelong journey into Judaism.



## Blanca Carrasco Awarded for Excellence

On November 14, Blanca Carrasco received the 2023 UTEP College of Engineering Staff Excellence Award. This award is given to reward exceptional clerical, administrative and



technical departmental staff who further the mission of the, departments, college and university.





# Prayer for Peace

*Co-written by the Mitzvah Corps Class,  
Temple Mount Sinai & Turkish  
Raindrop House middle school students*

Oh, Creator of humanity, may you lead us in the correct path of life and hear all of our voices. Please bless this world with peace.

The One and Only Lord, please don't let the fire get bigger, and find ways to make it smaller.

No matter the differences of each human being, we still will be judged for the actions we did.

May the differences seen between the people of this world, not be obstacles, getting in the way of peace, but as a gift allowing us to learn and grow from each other, giving the gifts of knowledge and acceptance.

Please bless our world with Peace and help the world come together to help resolve major problems.

Oh Creator, help us understand and respect our culture and please bless this world with peace.

O Creator, may you lead us into a path of love, kindness, peace and friendship.

The One and Only Lord, please help humanity get lead in the right way. Help make the world a better place.

Let us be one part of the great whole, for our cultures are one.

Oh Creator, bless this world with peace and harmony and end all the wars around the world

ALL: For we are all related to each other in our cultures, in our hearts and in our beliefs. As-salamu alaykum. Shalom Aleichem. Peace be with you.

## Mitzvah Corps, Turkish Raindrop House Write Prayer for Peace

*By Ellen Goodman*

On November 12, 2023 the Mitzvah Corps (middle school) class of Temple Mount Sinai met with the middle school class from the Turkish Raindrop House. Lufti Dagci, the leader of this organization invited us over to meet and to get to know the kids who are the same age as our Mitzvah Corps kids. The underlying tenant of this class is to show our students ways to make this world a better place.

If it is filling bag for a food kitchen, or pulling weeds in a public garden, we want to teach them that they can be involved, in their own ways, to make this world a better place for all.

Here, they learned the similarities in our cultures how their words can have the power to help effect change not only in their lives, but in the lives of others. The words written are reflected in an opening statement, and then individual prayers come next ending with a very powerful ending statement.

# Reflections: Am Yisrael Chai



*By Samantha Levin,*  
Cherry Hill School

I woke up on Shabbat, October 7th at 4:47 a.m. and found an urgent text message from my dad telling me that a full-blown war broke out in Israel and to turn on any news channel. My parents, following a life-long dream, made aliyah three years ago. My mother happened to be in Los Angeles visiting my grandmother, having left El Paso one day before. While here, my mom and I recalled how her visits always seemed to come before some calamity. As an army family, we move a lot.

Mom was helping me unpack in a new home when Hurricane Sandy hit; she visited right before the country shut down for COVID-19. She was even with us once when my dad was hit by a bus, riding his bike to work. We joked with a sense of irony that something bad must be on the horizon. Little did we know.

They caught us with our pants down, and some southern towns are still not cleared of terrorists," read another text from my father a few hours later. I was horrified. I sat numb, watching CNN in a state of shock and disbelief. This was not a terror attack; this was a pogrom, a massacre, a modern-day genocide. My grandfather, Dad's father, 94 years old, is a Holocaust survivor who witnessed his father being shot dead by the Nazis in cold blood. This was real and raw. The Holocaust was no longer something I heard about from Saba, or a school program, it was happening

in real-time on TV, and the modern-day Nazis were airing their atrocities live.

By 7 AM, I couldn't hold off and woke my husband, Michael. I don't even know why I waited that long. For us, Israel is beyond personal. Ours is a proud Jewish and Zionist household. I grew up that way. We have lots of close family living in Israel, we would visit Israel at least every other year, and I went to Zionist day schools and summer camps. I marched in the Salute to Israel parade yearly on Manhattan's Fifth Avenue. I spent my post-high-school gap year in Israel, training as a medic and volunteering with Magen David Adom. Michael's deep connection to Israel came a little later in life. His Birthright trip was followed by studies at Hebrew University and two years serving as a paratrooper in the IDF.

Like Jews worldwide, I felt a need to take action, to contribute my little something to our hurting brothers and sisters. I immediately contacted the Jewish Federation of El Paso & Las Cruces to see how I could help. Marla Cohen, Executive Director, immediately assembled our Jewish community leaders to help put together an Israel Solidarity event for our city. The turnout and cooperation was heartwarming and not surprising. At the Cherry Hill School, where I am the Hebrew teacher, I witnessed my students singing Hatikvah, which brought tears to my eyes.

I feel an emptiness inside me like there is still more for me to do. At school, I realize the importance of my work. My grandfather taught me that the best revenge against Hitler and the Nazis was educating the next generations of Jewish children through the language and history of Israel and Jewish values and traditions. And, of course, a vibrant and secure Israel, the Jewish homeland. I am proud that my students are receiving that education and are taught to stand up against hate and anti-Semitism because history repeats itself as we see it today. Please, God, this time, never again. Am Yisrael Chai.

# Into the War

by Walter Chayes

Walter Chayes is a semi-retired investment counselor and avid cyclist who has lived in El Paso for 50 years. He is a founding member of the El Paso Holocaust Museum and Study Center. Growing up in New York City, he became actively involved in the Zionist movement as a teenager. Israel and Aliyah have always been central to his identity. In the summer of 2022, Congregation B'nai Zion, the Holocaust Museum, and Temple Mount Sinai sponsored a tour to Poland and Israel. This was the last of Walter's several trips to Israel, and as he went from place to place, he realized how much the country remained a very real part of his soul; yet, traveling as a tourist, he felt something was missing.

Then came the October 7 attacks. When a Solidarity Mission was announced, sponsored by the Jewish Federation of North America (JFNA), he leapt at the chance to do 'something special.' And so, with the concerned support of his wife, Theresa (and despite his own misgivings), Walter joined 24 federation leaders for a first-hand experience of the Hamas onslaught. Over two

days, the group traveled from Jerusalem to the Dead Sea to Ofakim, a town 12 miles from Gaza. They met survivors and families of hostages, toured service centers, and visited a devastated community.

## **October 31 El Al Flight 787**

I flew to Israel a day before meeting the group in Jerusalem to spend time with my cousin in Tel Aviv. The flight from Los Angeles was more than half empty. Where were the bearded old men? Little children running in the aisles? Young couples bantering in Hebrew? There was a somberness to the flight as if the passengers knew we weren't traveling to Israel for a vacation.

## **October 31 Tel Aviv**

My cousin Tovy lives in Givataim, a neighborhood outside of Tel Aviv. Twenty minutes after arriving at her apartment, the siren on Tovy's cell phone wails. The sound is immediately followed by sirens going off throughout the city. Tovy leads me to the safe room, closes the reinforced door and then slides a steel curtain across each window. We hear several booms in the distance--the Iron Dome is working!--and exit a few minutes later. I hear commotion outside our window and Tovy explains that the kids have learned to play right outside the front door of the apartment building so they can dash inside when the

alarm sounds. As if on cue, the sirens blare again. Two loud booms soon follow. What a hard way to grow up, I think. As we leave for dinner, Tovy shows me a beautiful wooden cabinet standing beside her front door. "This was made by a lady in Kibbutz Be'eri" she says, then adds that after the attack, she tried to find out if the woman was OK. "They found her body at the Kibbutz. Her husband and children are missing." Outside at a restaurant a few blocks away, I enjoy a great roasted veggie pizza, washed down with a Tuborg beer. The evening is cool and tranquil other than the occasional soldier passing with his rifle. How easy it is to forget what is happening, I think. Suddenly, the sirens sound again. As if perfectly rehearsed, everyone rises in unison. There is no panic; just an orderly fast walk because everyone knows they have 90 seconds to head to the basement of the restaurant. We emerge ten minutes later, pay our bill, and head home. In the cool quiet evening air, I marvel that one can become accustomed to living here. Entering the apartment building, I notice children's bicycles parked in the hallway and wonder how parents explain to a four-year-old that it's time to go to the safe room because just a few miles away there are people who are trying to kill them.

## **November 1st Jerusalem**

Magen David Adom (Israeli RedCross) has 70 centers throughout Israel. On October 7th, MDA's phone lines are overwhelmed. We learn that the first ambulance drivers had been shot and killed as they approached Kibbutz Be'eri and that armored ambulances were dispatched thereafter. At the time of our visit to the Jerusalem center, MDA needs 18,000 units of blood a day, all to be stored in underground bunkers. Training is being offered to thousands of volunteers, ranging in age from 15 to 90.

The most heart-wrenching part of the day is meeting with families of the kidnapped hostages. They show emotional strength while discussing their plight but are clearly under tremendous stress. They are frustrated because the International Red Cross has come to Jerusalem demanding evidence that captured Hamas terrorists are being treated well but have no plans to go into Gaza to inquire about the Israeli hostages. They beg us to apply whatever political pressure possible in the United States to force international intervention to release the hostages. The only optimism that the IDF has offered to the families is to say, "We know things, but we can't tell."

Nefesh B'nefesh (Jewish Souls United) is nonprofit organization with the goal of helping olim (Jewish immigrants) when they arrive in Israel. That mission changes on October 7th. A 24/7 hotline is established to connect soldiers who have parents scattered around the world. Teams are formed to handle funerals, provide Shiva visits, and perform no-cost weddings to military personnel. A database of volunteer physicians has been created that highlights the need to recruit trauma surgeons and forensic pathologists. On this day, the database contains 5000 volunteer physicians. The remains of 400 hundred victims lack sufficient DNA for identification. The Jerusalem Civic Command Center (JCCC) is a consortium of seven non-government agencies set up in an acting school in the heart of Jerusalem. It includes a call-center, a warehouse, and a transportation team to deliver needed supplies. Over 4000 volunteers staff the call center, find housing, supply hot meals and clothing to the 200,000 people displaced from the north and south, and now housed in country's center. We watch hundreds of volunteers, mostly college students, busy packing food, paper goods and clothing. We visit an area set aside for displaced parents to bring their children to play games, obtain clothing and find emotional support.

## **November 2 The Dead Sea and Ofakim**

Hotel David at the Dead Sea continues to serve guests, but the resort now houses survivors from Kibbutz Be'eri and serves as an outpost for the Jewish Agency and the Joint Distribution Center. The Jewish Agency is working with 9,000 families. One hundred ninety-seven (197) families are now headed by a single parent. Children have lost parents and parents have lost children. The families are too traumatized to be independent. Each is assigned a caseworker. The feeling is that the government is dysfunctional and will take too long to help. Everyone must rely on the NGOs.

### **Meeting with Kibbutz Be'eri**

**Survivors.** This is certainly the most difficult meeting of my trip. The sentiment of the survivors is that the army has been lying to them about their safety; it will take a long time to trust them again. They need to know that Hamas will be destroyed.

We talk with Michal, a thirtyish blonde woman. As the Kibbutz was being attacked, Michal was in a safe room, talking on her cell phone with her parents who are a few houses away. She heard them being captured. She later learned that her mother and father were led outside, wrists bound, and shot in the back of the head.

"If they couldn't open a door, the terrorists burned the house down. They came to murder, burn and rape, like 2000 years ago," Michal said, and then added "It's too early to mourn. We're still in shock. We know we will all need mental care." Michal tells us that the first emergency call to the army was made at 6 a.m. The first soldiers arrived at 1 a.m. the following morning. In addition to the sense of shock and depression, there is a palatable anger in Michal's words. "I have gone from depression to thankfulness to anger."

**Joint Distribution Committee (JDC)** The JDC has opened a kindergarten at Hotel David for displaced children, bringing in teachers to pick up the material being taught in the kindergartens of the kibbutzim before the disaster. Teachers have received special psychological training to be attuned to the emotional needs of the displaced children from the moment they arrive. Each child receives a backpack, water bottle and food container to make them feel at home.

**Ofakim** This town of 40,000 lies 12 miles from Gaza. Safe rooms are built into three-quarters of the homes. Residents living in the 25% of homes without safe rooms must rely on public shelters. The shelters were locked on the morning of October 7. Ofakim's small security force had been dispatched to the music festival so the town was unprotected when 14 Hamas terrorists attacked. Ofakim's mayor called his friend, Yoav Gallant, Israel's Defense Minister, and demanded a helicopter and military support. Gallant told the mayor that resources would be there as soon as possible. The army arrived seven hours later.

The terrorists had machine guns, hand grenades, and rocket-propelled grenades. Residents went after them, armed only with pistols, and managed to kill seven terrorists. Many of the people of Ofakim lost their lives.

I visited the house of an elderly couple who were held hostage for 19 hours before special forces killed their five terrorist-captors. This was perhaps the only 'happy ending' to the many heart-wrenching stories we heard. Beyond the War Zone The corridor leading to the airplane is lined with posters of the hostages, each face underscored by large letters: Bring Them Home Now. The picture of a four-year-old boy tugs at my heart. I think of the families and survivors, the rapid response of the service agencies. I'm reminded that the Israelis are incredibly resilient people. They will survive, in large part due to their technological and military expertise, and perhaps most importantly, thanks to their emotional strength.



In the US, the short-lived sympathy for Israel in response to the horrific attacks has quickly mutated into a hatred of Jews never seen in modern times. This is the first war in Israel that threatens to spread throughout the world, provoking not only anti-Zionist but also antisemitic backlash. There are dramatic outbreaks of anti-Semitism and universities around the world; the welfare of Jewish students from New York to California has been threatened.

Israel will certainly win this war and learn from this terrible experience. JewHaters will hopefully recede into the background. However, we need to remember that this venom always lurks just beneath the surface as it has for 2000 years.



## Jewish Camp

# First-Time Campers

*Libi Lanski and Isabella Levin, both 9, attended Camp Ramah Darom this past summer. They are both students at The Cherry Hill School and close friends. Both girls received the One Happy Camper Grant from the Jewish Federation which gives \$1,000 dollars off for every Jewish camper going to sleepaway camp for the first time regardless of financial background. It is given on a first come first serve basis. For more information on this grant please visit [JewishCamp.org](http://JewishCamp.org)*

**Samantha:** Ramah has locations around the U.S and Canada, has an excellent reputation, and a huge network that sticks around through college and beyond. My grandmother was a director of one of the Ramah Camps in the northeast many years ago so I had some familiarity of what Camp Ramah is about. When we got to El Paso, several members of the community recommended Ramah in Georgia and said the camp site was not only beautiful but also an amazing experience with excellent leadership. It was really important to my husband and I that the camp we were sending our kids to has a strong connection to Israel, is kosher, and is shomer shabbat. We want our kids to have that special experience in camp. There is nothing like shabbat at camp and we want them to live it from kabbalat shabbat on Friday through Saturday night's Havdalah.

**Wendy:** We initially looked into Ramah Darom since Isabella was going and we thought it would be great for Libi to have a friend from El Paso with her. But it was exactly what we were looking for, for her and (next year) Liam. A place for the kids to expand their Jewish pride and their love for Israel and surround themselves by Jewish kiddos from all over the country. Added bonus was it was outside Atlanta so we could visit friends (and have close friends to the kids if they needed help). We are so excited for both Libi and Liam to attend next year! We are so thankful to the Jewish Federation for the One Happy Camper Grant-it made the financial part of sending the kids for the 1st time, even easier!

*Were you nervous to go to sleepaway camp for the first time?*

**Libi:** Yes, I was a little nervous because I was meeting new people I didn't know, but I was excited to make new friends.

**Isabella:** A little bit because I was far away from home.

*What was it like arriving at camp on that first day?*

**Libi:** It was very fun! I was happy to be there and excited, but I wasn't looking forward to the lice check.

**Isabella:** It was interesting because when you get there it looks so new and different from El Paso. I didn't like the lice check but it was nice meeting new people.

*Do you feel that Camp Ramah gave you a deeper connection to Judaism? Israel?*

**Libi:** Yes, we got to learn a lot about being Jewish, more davening than I usually do and it made me feel more connected to my Jewishness. Yom Israel made me want to go and visit Israel.

**Isabella:** The Jewish activities were fun, I especially loved Yom Israel and it made me excited to meet up with my counselor who live in Israel when I visit this spring. I also can't wait to go see what a shuk is like! We learned about shuk's on Yom Israel and it was so cool. Every night my counselors said the shema to our bunk and I still say it every night.



*What was experiencing Shabbat like at camp?*

**Libi:** Shabbat was amazing! There was dancing, singing, services, food, and so much more! It was my favorite part of camp!

**Isabella:** Shabbat was so fun! We would sing songs while standing up on chairs and the food at Shabbat was so good. Especially the "Shabbat morning cake."

*What is your favorite memory of camp?*

**Libi:** The friends and counselors I am now connected with forever. I cannot wait to see them again.

**Isabella:** Doing the swing/zip line, blobbing one of my counselors on the lake, and doing Shabbat activities.



*What was your favorite daily camp activity?*

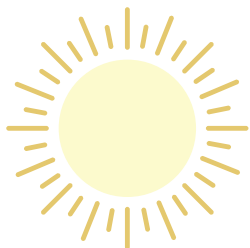
**Libi:** Tennis, drama, art, and yoga.

**Isabella:** Climbing, swimming, Hebrew, and the meals.

*What are you most looking forward to next year for Ramah summer 2024?*

**Libi:** Seeing all my friends, counselors, meeting new people, and Shabbat!

**Isabella:** To see my friends and counselors, and I hope to do even more climbing than I did this past summer.



# Camp Shamayim Reunion

January 27th, 2023 | 7:00 PM - 9:00 PM

Ardivinos Desert Crossing

*Celebrating 75 years of the original Camp Shamayim Day Camp property*

Havdalah | Talent Show | Snacks

# We Stand With Israel

## Reflections on the Current Situation from Someone who Recently Visited

*Written by Barry Armour*

*Eileen Armour and her son Barry visited Poland and Israel this past summer with Rabbis Scott Rosenberg and Ben Zeidman as part of an El Paso group tour. In the Voice August/September issue, Barry wrote a thoughtful article of his reflections on their experiences. We asked Barry to share his thoughts since the war with Hamas broke out. To read his full article, click [HERE](#).*

*Here is a brief outtake from that article:*

As a student of history, I have read about and studied anti-Semitism. In college, I took an entire course on the history of the Holocaust, so I have read the debunked “Protocols of the Elders of Zion” and the transcript of the Wannsee Conference. I can tell you the name of the person who coined the term “anti-Semitic”. And I can explain how anti-Semitism has morphed from blaming Jews collectively for the death of Jesus, then to the Nazi idea of the Jewish race, and finally to the modern-day blurring of the lines between anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism. Despite all the study and learning, I still cannot understand why it is that there are people who want my existence eliminated simply because of the religion I practice. Why is it that people believe that the attack against Israel is justified or that people who engage in wanton bloodlust, people who rape women and kill babies and behead people are freedom fighters?

As a Jew, it is difficult for me to understand the notion that Jews had what happened on Oct. 7 “coming to them.” Why is it that Jews seem to be the only minority group that is attacked from both the right and the left, from conservatives and liberals alike? People march to unite the right and chant, “Jews will not replace us”, and people march in support of the so-called Palestinian resistance and chant “From the river to the sea.” But how is it resistance when you burn people alive?

[Click here to continue article](#)



*Photos: Patrick Craig, Interfaith Vigil*





*Photo: Patrick Craig*

## March for Israel

*Written by Cindy Metrikin*



*Cindy Metrikin and Amanda Levine at the March for Israel in Washington D.C.*

Last week, my daughter, Amanda and I had the privilege of attending the March for Israel in Washington D.C. It was an exhilarating and overwhelming experience. We stood shoulder to shoulder with thousands of people, but we were as one. The deep pain and angst we have all been experiencing as Jews was transformed into an overriding feeling of unity and connection.

The power of the USA/Israel bond was palpable. We were fortunate enough to be quite close and we could see the large Israeli and American flags on the stage together. Below the banner which stated

“Americans March for Israel”, we could see the dome of the Capital Building in the distance. I found that tremendously moving. At one point a seagull flew overhead, which felt a little surreal, as I imagined it representing the dove of peace, presaging a peaceful outcome to this agonizing conflict.

I’ve never been in a crowd of 290,000 people, I don’t think any of us had. The speakers and attendees showed we are not alone. We are struggling, we are hurt, we are vulnerable, we are scared, we are worried but we are not alone, that is certain.  
AM YISRAEL CHAI



# Get to know: Larry Lesser

*The Jewish Voice caught up with national award-winning UTEP professor Larry Lesser whose 2 decades of contributions to our community include JV columns, talks (for adults, teens, EPJA students), concerts, a funded speaker series, and congregational board service.*

*JV: In your March 2020 Journal of Statistics Education interview, you said you started songwriting the same year you became a math major in college. Were you encouraged to pursue music as a career or was it a creative outlet?*

LL: Music has always been more serious than a hobby for my identity and growth. But while I saw after after my first album (in 1992) that it would be too hard making a living from it (and it's gotten even harder with people streaming and expect locals to play for free), I'm happy that hasn't kept me from doing much of it with professional quality and I'm blessed to have had songs make a difference when we come together, ranging from "Healing Song" at TMS services to "Sderot Sky" at gatherings for Israel to fun ditties like my "El Paso version" of the dreidel song. Music and Judaism are way too important to leave to the full-time professionals!

*JV: You have stated how music is a mnemonic to remember math content. What inspired your parody "American Pi" (which won the National Museum of Mathematics' Pi Day of the Century song contest)?*

LL: Yes, songs are great mnemonics with their many "hooks" (rhyme, rhythm, melody, emotion, etc.). "American Pi" was sparked by noticing how the meter and rhyme in the chorus of Don McLean's #1 hit "American Pie" supported recalling pi's first 6 digits, and verse structure lent itself to touring pi's interesting (partly-American) history. Besides contest awards, my educational songs have helped yield NSF grants that brought money to UTEP.

*JV: A press release for your newest album notes that "Post-college relationships launched his journey through 5 denominations to a more knowledgeable, spiritual and conscious connection with his heritage, and these songs on the Sparks CD reflect his experiences. Having David Wilcox and Nance Pettit visit during their Out Beyond Ideas tour sparked the idea of writing songs out of textual nuggets of spiritual wisdom, and from there the concept grew." How did you choose those nuggets of wisdom?*

LL: As the liner notes share, what grounded me were "bite-sized" text or stories that encapsulated values

that work for seekers and believers across denominations, or even beyond Judaism. Many songs were inspired by my growth and experiences in our diverse community, with 21 of the album's 24 songs written in El Paso!

*JV: Reflecting on your album Sparks being a Finalist in the 2021 New Mexico Music Awards for Best Album as well as for 3 other very different categories: best bluegrass song, best religious song, and best humorous song (which you won), how does the album reflect your Jewish journey now?*

LL: [CEO Emeritus of USCJ] Rabbi Jerome Epstein saw each song had multiple copyright years and noted (correctly) that lyrics must have evolved as I did, and the songs and I are still works-in-progress! From playing diverse events (Opera UTEP, museum exhibit opening, congregation services, Jewish food festival, New Mexico Music Awards gala, Society for Crypto-Judaic Studies conference, a Cantors Assembly event, etc.), I fine-tune music, lyrics, or song introductions. What stays constant is my aim to connect across exaggerated boundaries of genre, denomination, demographics, etc. because my Judaism and muse don't fit in one box!



# Two Jewish Historical Societies Meet in Houston

By *Tumbleweed Smith*

A joint meeting of the Texas and Southern Jewish Historical Societies took place on the campus of Rice University in Houston the weekend of October 20-22. The level of education, intelligence, accomplishments and dedication of the presenters on the packed agenda was dazzling. For the 120 people attending it was a stimulating, enriching and motivational event. Dr. Josh Furman, associate director of Jewish Studies at Rice and his staff worked for months getting ready for the gathering, which had the theme Space and Place in Southern Jewish History. Some of the topics included "Jewish Race, Place and Memory in the Deep South" and "Exploring the Jewish History of the Texas Borderlands" and "Southern Jewish Reactions to Klan Anti-Semitism in the 1920s."

There were roundtable discussions on a variety of pertinent issues regarding preservation of Jewish research and projects. These included oral histories, film, art and poetry, stressing the need to save Jewish experiences and stories for generations that follow. Both societies are diligent about maintaining archives.

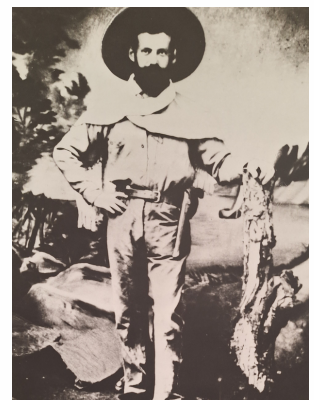
Many people on the program had received grants from Texas Jewish Historical Society (TJHS). Keynote speakers were Bryan Stone and Tyina Steptoe. Dr. Stone spoke on "Very Small Histories in a Very Large State" and highlighted the Jewish history of a small Texas town. Dr. Steptoe's topic was "On My Block: The Ethno-Racial Landscape of Jim Crow Houston."

During the conference TJHS Past President Lonnie Schooler made public the creation of the Rabbi Jimmy Kessler Fund for Educational Outreach. Donations so far exceed \$30,000. Rabbi Kessler founded the Texas Jewish Historical Society in 1980.

Saturday night was a Havdalah and performance by singer and songwriter Joe Buchanan. The winter meeting of TJHS will be in McAllen January 26-28. Hosts Lynda and Michael Furgatch promise a good time with a borderlands flavor.



The players on the Temple's Y-Church League team are (*front row, from left*) team camptain Harold Potash, Errold Lapowski, and Isidore Grossblatt; (*back row*) Henry Blume, Ralph Aaronson, Max Katz, Herman Silberg, Robert Marcus, and Rabbi Zielonka. (*Courtesy Temple Mount Sinai*).



Ernst Kohlberg

# HIDDUR MITZVAH

*Beautification of a Mitzvah through Ritual Art*

By *Robin Krasne*

On Sunday, October 15th, the Jewish Community came together for the first in a series of Hiddur Mitzvah events hosted by Congregation B'nai Zion. These events have been generously supported by a grant from The Jewish Community Foundation of El Paso.

Hiddur means "to beautify" in Hebrew. This exciting event series focuses on creating artistic ritual objects to enhance and beautify the practice of fulfilling mitzvot surrounding the Sabbath. In Exodus the text reads "This is my G-d and I will glorify him." Creating objects enriches the religious observance by adding an aesthetic dimension while making the observance of mitzvot more engaging to the senses.

This first event concentrated on creating beautiful tile mosaic Shabbat candlesticks. The 85 attendees were involved in a hands-on project which resulted in works of art which will enrich their Shabbat.



The second event in this series will take place on January 21st at Congregation B'nai Zion. Participants can look forward to creating challah boards for themselves or to share with loved ones. Watch for details to come soon.

Mark your calendars also for the final event of this program series, which will take place on April 7th. Those who attend will be guided by a special guest artist, who will lead the attendees in creating a unique hand-painted Challah Cover. There will be multiple smaller sessions offered so all who wish to participate will have an opportunity to do so in an intimate class setting.

The Hiddur Mitzvah events help foster a sense of community as well as provide a deeper appreciation for the Jewish tradition of adding beauty to elevate our mitzvot.





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### Upcoming Order Deadlines:

**Jan 17** (for February), **Mar 13**  
(for Passover)

# Save the Date



Congregation B'nai Zion presents

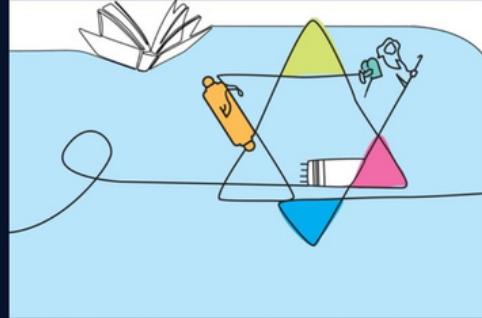
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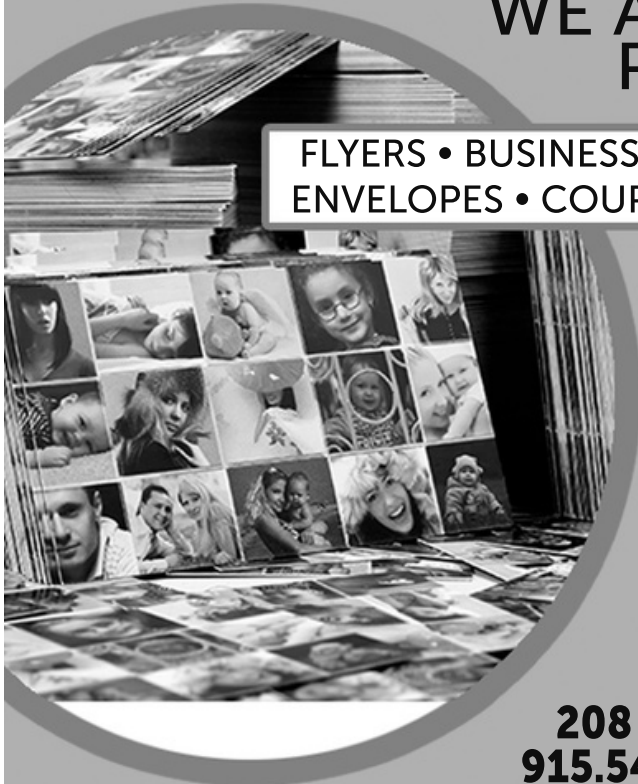
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**Wednesday, January 17, 2023**  
**11:30am - 1:00pm**

Watch for Details



# Andrew Lawler

Andrew Lawler is an award-winning journalist who has written for *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *National Geographic*, *Smithsonian*, *Science*, and other publications. Author of three books, his work has appeared several times in *The Best of Science and Nature Writing*. A frequent and engaging public speaker, Andrew enjoys bringing his findings to a broad audience.



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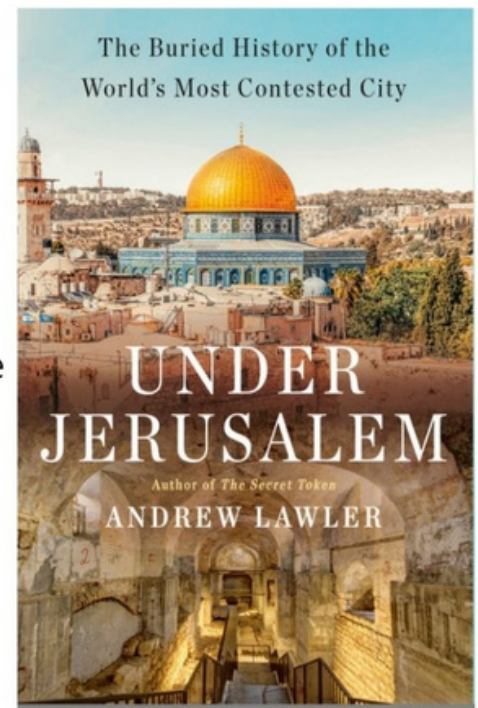
In the century and a half since, Jerusalem has drawn a global cast of treasure hunters, missionaries, archaeologists, and religious zealots eager to extract remains of the biblical past from beneath its streets and shrines. Their efforts transformed our understanding of Jerusalem's history, and sparked bloody riots, thwarted international peace agreement, and helped turn it into the world's most contested city.

*Under Jerusalem* takes readers into the tombs, tunnels, and trenches of the Holy City, bringing to life the indelible characters who have explored this subterranean landscape. With clarity and verve, acclaimed journalist Andrew Lawler reveals how their pursuit defined the conflict over modern Jerusalem—and ultimately could provide a map for two peoples and three faiths to peacefully coexist.



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