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of navigating the wider world

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ACT

BY JOHN LORINC

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ON TAKING
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AN INTERVIEW
WITH
ADAM EDELMAN





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“I Wanted to Make Sure That I Was Seen”

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ON THE COVER:
As we worked on this issue of the magazine, we realized that the stories in it naturally coalesced around the theme of fitting in — a theme we tried to convey with playful curiosity in the cover illustration.



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Contributors



MIKE AUSTIN

COVER

MIKE Austin is an award-winning illustrator, graphic designer and children's book author. He is the author-illustrator of *JUNKYARD* and *Monsters Love Colors*. Mike lives in Hawaii with his wife, illustrator Jing Jing Tsong.



JOHN LORINC

FEATURE, P.34

JOHN Lorinc is a Toronto journalist and editor. He writes about cities, climate, and business for publications including *The Globe and Mail* and *Spacing*. His 2024 book, *No Jews Live Here*, won this year's Canadian Jewish Literary Award for memoir.



ANNITA SOBLE

BOOKISH, P.49

ANNITA Soble is an illustrator and multi-disciplinary artist. She has worked with many institutions and publishers, illustrated children's books, and is currently art-directing a feature-length animated film. She lives in Brooklyn with her husband and five children.

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On Living in Two Worlds at Once...

IT IS A QUESTION as ancient as Judaism itself: How do we fit into and engage with the wider world around us? For a people whose religion includes both laws meant to separate us from our gentile friends and neighbours, and edicts about respecting and engaging with civic life, this has always been a complicated matter. It can seem even more so now, at a time when many Jews — and many non-Jews — are paying more attention to Jewish identity than they have in a long while.

This is a question of navigating a post-October 7 world, one that is more fraught, more divisive, and in many ways more painful — but it isn't only a question of this. It is wide-ranging, and encompasses everything from culture to politics to the role of technology. As Olympian Adam Edelman puts it: every people, every community, has a way of seeing and understanding itself — an inherited sense of how to be. These models and self-conceptions are worth examining: often they inspire, give a sense of purpose and continuity. But they can also be confining.

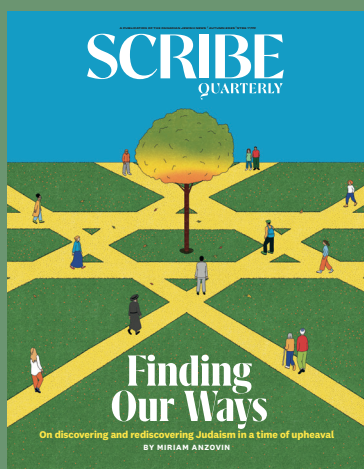
For Edelman, who is Modern Orthodox and a world-class athlete, reckoning with overlapping worlds means busting through cultural conventions about Jews and sports. For rising political star Melissa

Lantsman — the subject of a feature-length profile by John Lorinc — it means realizing that a great many hopes and dreams, and also some significant animosity, will always be vested in her simply because she is Jewish. (As she told Lorinc during one of their conversations, she gets more email about being Jewish than on any other subject, by a wide margin.) For *Scribe Quarterly* contributing editor Phoebe Maltz Bovy, who reviews a new anthology of old short stories, it includes seeing echoes of our present in-betweenness in the past.

There is, of course, no one answer to this question. Each of us answers it in our own way — and often in different ways at different points in our lives. This issue of *Scribe Quarterly* is but one installment in the ancient, ongoing discussion. We're very glad to be having it with you.

HAMUTAL DOTAN
EDITOR IN CHIEF
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The Dura-Europos
Synagogue wall
paintings in the
National Museum
of Damascus.



CULTURE

AFTER YEARS OF WAR, THE WORLD'S OLDEST SYNAGOGUE PAINTINGS ARE REVEALED AS INTACT IN DAMASCUS

by GRACE GILSON

AFTER STUDYING the world's oldest synagogue paintings for nearly a decade, Jill Joshowitz had accepted that she might never be able to stand before them in person, as they remained locked away in Syria amid its civil war. Jewish sites and synagogues had suffered lootings and bombardment over the course of the war, which followed the emigration of virtually all Syrian Jews. Could the paintings have even survived?

"I spent almost a decade of my life researching and writing about these paintings, and because they were stored in Syria, I never thought that I would really have an opportunity in my lifetime, as a

Jewish scholar and researcher, to see these paintings,” says Joshowitz, a historian of Jewish visual culture based in Pittsburgh. “I didn’t really know what the status was.”

This fall, Joshowitz learned the astonishing answer. Not only had the paintings survived, but they had been preserved in their original arrangement, the way they first appeared more than 1,700 years ago.

The answer was revealed when she arrived at the National Museum in Damascus alongside a delegation of Jewish scholars and leaders, in a trip made possible by the fall of the Bashar al-Assad regime. The trip was facilitated by Rabbi Asher Lopatin, director of community relations for the Jewish Federation of Ann Arbor in Michigan, and Joe Jajati, grandson of a former leader of Syria’s Jewish community who founded the Syrian Mosaic Foundation.

The Dura-Europos paintings, which are the earliest and largest known collection of synagogue paintings in the world, were painted around 244 CE. The seven-metre-high frescoes depict a wide array of Biblical stories: Moses at the burning bush, the prophet Samuel anointing King David, Abraham and the binding of Isaac, and Mordecai riding on a horse led by Haman. The synagogue was filled with dirt just a decade after its construction, by the Roman garrison stationed in the town along the Euphrates to help fortify the city ahead of an invasion. After the city was destroyed, the synagogue was lost to time until it was excavated in the 1930s,

when archeologists discovered that the layers of earth had preserved its extensive wall paintings. Those paintings were later moved to the National Museum in Damascus, and are now housed in a replica of the ancient synagogue where they were created.

“It was just thrilling to see these paintings that I had studied and thought about for so long,” says Joshowitz. David Horovitz, founding editor of *The Times of Israel*, chronicled the

“The Pharaoh and the Childhood of Moses,” one of the frescoes from Dura-Europos.

“It was just thrilling to see these paintings that I had studied and thought about for so long.”

trip; he described an excitement that was palpable: “Somehow, all of our drivers, numerous security people, and several Syrian army soldiers have been drawn to the room, and are staring, as we all are, open-mouthed at the mesmerizing paintings around us.”

Previously able to study the paintings only via photographs that had been taken from the 1930s to the 1950s, Joshowitz says that seeing the paintings in person “gives me a greater sense of what this building was to the people who live there. ... I felt like I’d been transported to this desert town.” As access to Syria and the museum expands following the regime change, Joshowitz hopes that “this incredible Jewish cultural artifact” will be restored as one of the museum’s crown jewels “for both the people of Syria and, really, all the Jewish people.” **JTA**



PHOTOGRAPH BY BRIDGEMAN IMAGES



CULTURE

LITERATURE NOBEL PRIZE WINNER'S LITTLE-KNOWN JEWISH PAST

by **ANDREW LAPIN**

Hungarian novelist and screenwriter László Krasznahorkai was awarded this year's Nobel Prize in Literature.

THIS YEAR'S NOBEL PRIZE for literature was awarded to a Hungarian whose work offers bleak visions of existence, and whose father hid his ancestry from him for much of his childhood.

László Krasznahorkai, the 71-year-old novelist and screenwriter, achieved international acclaim for formally daring books including *Satantango* and *The Melancholy of Resistance*, as well as a series of collaborations with the filmmaker Béla Tarr. He is often compared to master Russian novelists like Dosto-

ievsky and Gogol. The Swedish Nobel jury called him “a great epic writer in the Central European tradition that extends through Kafka to Thomas Bernhard, and is characterized by absurdism and grotesque excess.” Another prominent champion of Krasznahorkai's: the Jewish culture critic Susan Sontag, who praised the infamous seven-and-a-half-hour film adaptation of *Satantango* and deemed him a “master of the apocalypse.”

Krasznahorkai was born in 1954 in the small town of

Gyula, near the Romanian border. As a child, he has said, he had no idea his father hailed from a Hungarian Jewish family. In 1931, as antisemitism was on the rise in Hungary but before the passage of formal anti-Jewish laws in the country, the author's grandfather had changed their family name. “Our original name was Korin, a Jewish name. With this name, he would never have survived,” Krasznahorkai told a Greek interviewer in 2018. “My grandfather was very wise.”

When the author turned eleven, he learned about his Jewish heritage for the first time. “In the socialist era, it was forbidden to mention it,” Krasznahorkai has said about his Jewish ancestry. “Korin” would later serve as the name of the protagonist, a suicidal Hungarian archivist, in Krasznahorkai's acclaimed 1999 novel, *War and War*.

Many of the author's books, written in a challenging post-modern style, are concerned with the effects of political turmoil and national upheaval on everyday citizens, from provincial farm workers to intellectuals. Some, such as *Hersch 07769* and *Baron Wenckheim's Homecoming*, have plots that deal directly with neo-Nazis.

In that 2018 interview, the author, an outspoken opponent of Hungary's authoritarian prime minister, Viktor Orbán, also addressed his relationship to Judaism in characteristically pessimistic fashion. “I am half-Jewish,” he said, “but if things carry on in Hungary as they seem likely to do, I'll soon be entirely Jewish.” **JTA**



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The Kibbitz

Olympian **Adam Edelman** on the importance of sport —
and why Jews should care more about it by **AVI FINEGOLD**



**“JEWISH CULTURE
HAS MADE A
JUDGMENT CALL
ABOUT WHAT IS
A WORTHWHILE
PURSUIT.”**

ADAM JEREMY “A. J.” EDELMAN has turned his passion for sport into a mission to get the Jewish community to care about it as well. The American-born “sliding sports” athlete competed for Israel in the 2018 Winter Olympics in Pyeongchang. He has represented Israel in skeleton and bobsled. When I interviewed him, he was in the midst putting together an Israeli bobsled team for the upcoming Winter Games in Milan and Cortina d’Ampezzo. He spoke to me from Japan, where he was training, building the body that gives him his nickname: The Bear Jew.

What was it like for you growing up as a kid in a Modern Orthodox world who was also very engaged with sports?

I think when my older brother Alex and I started playing hockey for Brookline, [Massachusetts], back in 1994, 1995, we were the only visibly Jewish kids. It kind of continued in that vein for a very long time. Things oftentimes took place or were planned during Shabbos. It really discouraged Orthodox kids from competing in sport systemically because it just wasn’t accessible. Brookline did an amazing job in scheduling around Shabbos for us. They really did a fantastic job at accommodating us and scheduling a lot of our games for Sunday.

I tipped into Olympic sports because of Mike Rosenberg, director of alumni for Maimonides, the day school I went to in Brookline. He had told me back in 2014 that no one had played high-level collegiate sport who didn’t go to Brandeis or Yeshiva University. I found that to be really shocking, and I had this realization that

Jewish kids self-selected out of pro sports. It was, at best, a high school thing: no one was investing the time or resources or energy into a pathway to more professional or elite-level success.

“If a kid goes to their parent and says, *I want to learn the piano*, the parent will go to enormous lengths. But if someone says, *I want to be a martial artist*, oftentimes, a parent from the Jewish community will say there is no future in that.”

You can observe that if you take a look at the major sports. Where are the Jewish NBA players, for instance? It’s not like Jews are just so clinically small that we don’t have people who are six-five, six-six”.

To me, it’s a very poor focus and it pervades the entire Jewish psyche. Let’s be real. If a kid goes to their parent and says, *I want to invest a lot of time and energy into learning an instrument or the piano or a language*, the parent will go to enormous financial lengths, enormous time lengths, enormous energy spent to help their child achieve a certain standard of proficiency in piano, without the hope of joining the Boston Symphony Orchestra. But if someone goes to their parent and says, *I want to be a martial artist*, [or] a taekwondo [fighter], a dancer, whatever the sport is, oftentimes a parent from the Jewish community will tell them there’s no future in that.

How much of this is the old immigrant story, which is: *if we’re going to invest all of our energies into you, it should be a career? You can play the piano as long as you go and get a law degree and you have the piano on the side.*

Parents are vastly influenced by the system in which they grew up, and you’re not going to unwind that mentality. Parents oftentimes are making a judgment call, or the Jewish culture has made a judgment call, about what is a worthwhile pursuit.

I’ll give you a prime example here: Israel’s bobsled team has never received a drop of government funding. Not in twelve years, not a single cent. I paid for my own flight to the Olympics in 2018. That is how disadvantaged the bobsled team is. It has gone further than any other unfunded team in bobsled history. No other team has done what we have done.



Even Jamaica?

Jamaica is massively funded. Jamaica has hundreds of thousands of dollars.

The movie [*Cool Runnings*, about the Jamaican bobsled team] kind of makes it all up: they had donated sleds and equipment and all sorts of stuff. Israel doesn't have one fraction of what that original Jamaican team had.

It's nearly impossible to knock off a legacy nation in bobsled because bobsled costs are six figures a year, at minimum. A \$150,000 budget is a shoestring. And yet, every person I've ever approached about trying to save the bobsled team at various points has

said a version of the following: *Have you asked the Krafts? Have you asked the Wilfs? Have you asked the Aronsons? Have you asked, you know, basically anyone Jewish that you can think of who's been involved in sport?* And the answer from every single one of those people that we've asked has been *no*.

We had approached an NFL owner in 2021/22. We had this Arab/Druze/Jewish team which was, at that point, painfully close to the Olympics, but I was really struggling to support it all. I said to him, *We just need a new sled*. And his wife laughed at us — legitimately laughed on the phone — and

hung up. We fell out of contention on the last day: Jamaica jumped us by 0.1 seconds after they had bought a brand-new sled. We had beaten them through four of the eight races, but they then bought a brand-new sled for \$100,000.

To echo one of the people we approached, they don't see this actually as a problem in the Jewish community, not having Jews compete in sport at the highest level. It's not a problem that they feel needs attention. So if people who are deeply enmeshed in sport culture can't see where it fits within the Jewish cultural framework, making a systemic shift in the minds of parents is going to be very difficult.

So the way that I've approached it is by taking a different tack: it's not *What can this provide for the Jewish culture?* but *What can it provide a human being?* Many people have outlets of chess, they have outlets of reading, have outlets of art, they have outlets of music. For many kids, the best way to learn loss, goal setting, personal development, or to grow in life is through sport. And it has nothing to do with Jewish community and Jewish culture and Jewish values.

Most of the activities you see Jewish people, especially more Orthodox people, doing are very much individual, whereas team sports still lag far behind. Is it because you're often playing against non-Jewish teams and the Shabbat factor becomes an issue, or because it's a much higher bar to commit to a team sport?

I think that we should be far more represented in a sport like tennis, and I don't think we are. My life's effort is to make people healthier, to get people involved in fitness and sport. That's my passion, my love.

Pursuing an athletic goal requires a bit of early intervention to instill

passion, or at least tolerance or drive, to make that a priority in your life. If you're twenty-five and you've never been exposed to the beauty of personal development and doing everything you can to just master your craft, the chance that you just drop everything and say, *I'm going to be like a kick-ass marathon runner?* It's really small. It happens. It really does. People can change their lives around, but it's a really small chance.

What it requires is something cultural. It has to be formative, either in school or among your peer group or from your family life. I think that it's less to do with Shabbos and more to do with priorities.

When they made that joke in the movie *Airplane* about the Jewish sports stars—a passenger asks the flight attendant for some light reading, and she gives him a small pamphlet entitled *Great Jews in Sports*—they weren't really addressing the religious Jews. They were just addressing Jews. I think a lot of Jews use observance as an excuse. A lot of chess tournaments are held on Shabbos, yet we do have quite a few chess players. If there was a demand for it, if there was a critical mass, there would be a league that catered to it. Those are just the market dynamics. No one's intentionally discriminating against Jews.

How much of your choice to do skeleton or bobsled was informed by the knowledge that we're never going to field a full team of hockey players, and how much by finding an unusual sport to diversify?

The issue with hockey was that Israel kind of bounces between B- and C-level. I could be an NHL-level goalie, which I'm not, and it wouldn't make that difference to propel Israel into the top twelve in A-level, which is where it would need to be to make a mark. My energy devoted to that mis-



Adam Edelman competing in the skeleton event at the 2018 Winter Olympics.

sion would not be, in my view, worth that time. I wanted to use my adult years to create a larger change than having just existed in the program.

If you're going to use your life's energy, and you're going to derail a lot of things, it has to be commensurate with the impact that you make. I got the scouting report for skeleton

“Many people have outlets: of chess, of reading, of art, of music. But for many kids, the best way to learn about loss, goal setting, personal development, or to grow in life is through sport. I think we should be far more represented.”

and it said that I would never ever make the Olympic Games no matter what I did. And I thought, *This is the story I want to tell. If I could flip this, then I could go and tell this story forever.* That's my athletic superpower, because the Olympics are 95 percent mental.

As for the Olympics, there's an amazing value it brings: when you step onto a field, it's very hard to be prejudiced against a person that you're looking at competing against. Israel's mortal enemy is Iran. But when I see Iran competing in the Olympics, I don't get twisted with hatred. If anything, it just normalizes the country a little bit in my mind. It acts as a very nice, positive face, unless he's a jerk and doesn't shake the Israeli's hand. But if he puts up a good fight and seems like a decent dude, it actually leaves a pretty positive impression of the country.

The benefit of a competition is that I stay an extra hour after to meet everyone who's at the track. I stay in all the Israeli gear. I meet them, I shake their hand. It's important to put a friendly face on Israel and the Jewish people. That's the power of sport. I'm probably the only point of contact as an Israeli that they'll ever meet. At least they come away with a positive impression in their mind, of a guy who's not trying to go murder a Palestinian. ▀

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SHOULD YOU POSE YOUR QUESTIONS ABOUT JUDAISM TO AI?

Just like Hillel's student, we all have complex questions that we want answered as simply as possible. Here, we consider a question of contemporary relevance and explore how sources both classical and modern address it.

by **AVI FINEGOLD**

LARGE LANGUAGE MODELS (LLMs) — the algorithms that underlie generative AI chatbots like ChatGPT and Gemini — are transforming daily life. Some people already use them as a matter of routine instead of traditional internet searches; many students use them (even when they aren't supposed to) to complete assignments; many companies have dabbled in replacing work traditionally done by humans — especially writing and design — with material produced by them. And a smaller but growing number of people turn to these chatbots for more intimate needs, spanning everything from friendship to therapy. This extends to spiritual and religious life as well. Is it okay to ask a chatbot a halakhic question, and rely on its reasoning for an answer? Are LLMs accurate sources of Jewish knowledge? And what does it mean to ask a machine for Jewish advice rather than turning to books or rabbis?

BABYLONIAN TALMUD, AVODAH ZARAH 7A

The Sages taught: In the case of one who asks a question of a Sage with regard to an issue of ritual impurity and the Sage rules that the item is impure, he may not ask the same question of another Sage and have him rule that it is pure. Similarly, in the case of one who asks a Sage a halakhic question and he deems it forbidden, he may not ask the question of another Sage and have him deem it permitted.

In a situation where there were two Sages sitting together and one deems an item impure and the other one deems it pure, or if one deems it prohibited and the other one deems it permitted, the questioner should proceed as follows: if one of the Sages was superior to the other in wisdom and [his view was shared by a majority], one should follow his ruling, and if not, he should follow the one who rules stringently. **1**

1 THE TALMUD WAS WELL AWARE that, by the time of its redaction in the sixth century or so, there were many competing halakhic opinions circulating in society at large, as well as in the study halls where debates were taking place. A system was required for assessing what one should do in the face of this plethora of perspectives. And so Talmudic rabbis arrived at one major litmus test: the authority of the person issuing an opinion is crucial. Whom you ask matters.

On this view, someone becomes authoritative on the strength of their lineage — whom they learned from — as well as demonstrated facility and virtuosity in their thinking. All of this has a great impact on how we rely on AI. From where does a chatbot derive its authority? Has it been trained on authoritative texts? (We don't really know; all chatbots are proprietary, and the companies that create them do not generally release information about the data they have been trained on.) Has it demonstrated repeated moments of brilliant legal analysis, or at least a consistent pattern of citing sources accurately, and without hallucination?

**MAIMONIDES, MISHNEH TORAH:
“LAWS OF THE SANHEDRIN” 2:7**

[A judge] must...possess seven attributes: wisdom, humility, the fear of God, a loathing for money, a love for truth; he must be a person who is beloved by people at large, and must have a good reputation. All of these qualities are mentioned explicitly in the Torah. **2**

**RABBI YEHUDA
HERZL HENKIN:
“QER’AT HA-TORAH BY
WOMEN: WHERE WE
STAND TODAY,”**

EDAH JOURNAL 1:2 (2001)

Where does all this leave us? Regardless of the arguments that can be proffered to permit women’s *aliyyot* today — that *kevod ha-tsibbur* can be waived, that it does not apply today when everyone is literate, that it does not apply when the *olim* rely on the (male) *ba’al qeri’ah* and do not themselves read — women’s *aliyyot* remain outside the consensus, and a congregation that institutes them is not Orthodox in name and will not long remain Orthodox in practice. In my judgement, this is an accurate statement now and for the foreseeable future, and I see no point in arguing about it. **3**

2 **HERE WE SEE** a second major litmus test: trust. If we think of authority as akin to a credential — proof that someone has attained a certain level of learning — then we can think of trust as the continuing reliability of their judgment. A religious leader is authorized to rule on something because they are ordained; they are trusted to rule on something because their ordination hasn’t been revoked, their past rulings have been accepted as sound and not overturned, and their reputation remains untarnished. Here, Maimonides sums up the position of many earlier sources about what constitutes trust in a halakhic authority. These traits are hallmarks of someone who will offer a sound judgment of a case or a clear reading of the texts.

3 **HERE WE SEE** a real-world example of the dynamics of trustworthiness and authority, and of how they play out in a halakhic framework. This is an excerpt from a response to Rabbi Mendel Shapiro, who published a responsa ruling that, even using exclusively traditional sources, a woman may read from the Torah in a regular Orthodox service. Henkin’s reply: even if Shapiro were interpreting all the sources he cited correctly (which he doesn’t think was the case), no one person can establish a communal halakhic practice on the basis of an untested theory that is not accepted by the majority of rabbis or practitioners.

This has real value for our topic in two ways. It confirms that a responsa isn’t useful unless it is well supported by accepted authorities: don’t think that because you’re brilliant, the rest of the rabbinic community will automatically accept your ideas. And it shows that, even if an LLM were to demonstrate that it did not hallucinate and always provided proper responses that conformed with accepted law, unless the general consensus of authoritative sources accepted that this LLM could be trusted, it would remain a suspect source of wisdom.

RABBI DANIEL NEVINS, HALAKHIC RESPONSES TO ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND AUTONOMOUS MACHINES (2019)

When we say that machines are functioning autonomously, currently we mean this in a very limited sense. Machines are given a task and the capacity to complete the task within certain parameters, usually by following algorithms built on a series of predetermined “if ... then” rules. They are not capable of establishing independent goals or refusing to act on orders that fall within their operational parameters. Nor are they accorded legal personhood, no matter how personal people may get in conversations with virtual assistants.

Just as it would be absurd to punish a courtyard for “stealing” a goat, so would it be absurd to whip an autonomous vehicle in punishment for “murdering” a pedestrian. Legal standing and free will are essential components to moral stature and liability. At this stage, artificial intelligence functions like a tool, and so moral liability must remain with the principal. Or perhaps the machine is more like an animal, in which case its owner is responsible to a greater or lesser extent depending on typical performance. In any event, the machine is not obligated (בר חיובא), as Ravina puts it, nor does it have free will (דאי בעי עבד), as Rav Sama emphasizes. Without these capacities, liability remains with the principal who appointed the agent — the person, not the machine. **4**

4 WHILE THIS RESPONSA, which was adopted by the Conservative movement, is six years old — several lifetimes for AI — it addresses many broad implications of AI for Judaism. In particular, it runs through a series of questions that help us understand what it would look like for a chatbot to become a viable guide to Jewish thought. One crucial element of reaching such a state: taking responsibility for interpretations of Jewish law that a chatbot issues. Rabbis who offer guidance on Jewish matters know the weight of responsibility that comes with offering an answer or solution: they bear responsibility if they make a mistake in reasoning, causing someone else to behave improperly. If chatbots are ever to be viable alternatives, then rabbis must have a hand in training them; there needs to be an autonomous human who ultimately bears responsibility for any advice that is offered.

A. TREVOR SUTTON, “AI AND THE DISCIPLINE OF HUMAN FLOURISHING,” RELIGION & LIBERTY 34:1 (2024)

Long before the advent of generative AI, [recently deceased philosopher of technology] Albert Borgmann...in his book *Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life*...argued that technology has shaped contemporary life around its peculiar pattern. Borgmann suggested that the pattern of technology becomes particularly harmful when there are no means by which one can “prune back the excesses of technology and restrict it to a supporting role.”

Borgmann makes a distinction between “focal things” and “devices.”

A wood-burning stove is a focal thing: it requires skill and bodily engagement through woodcutting, seasoning wood, and fire building. This thing exists within a context of forest, home, family, and community. It leads to social engagement and focus as multiple people contribute to the process...

A device stands in stark contrast to a focal thing. Devices make no demands of skill, strength, or attention. Devices provide commodities for enjoyment without encumbrance or context. The lack of encumbrance makes the commodious consumption of devices thoughtless and dis-

posable. Technological devices produce a commodity without burdening us in any way. Devices are quick, easy, foolproof, and safe. A furnace or central-heating system is a device. These devices provide warmth without any demand from the recipient.

ChatGPT is also an example of a device. This device provides a commodity — summaries, essays, answers — without any skill, preparation, or demand on the user.

Things require skilled and active human engagement; devices require no focus, engagement, or context. Things require practice; devices invite consumption. Things constitute commanding reality; devices procure disposable reality. **5**

Rabbi Joan Friedman

RESPONSA COMMITTEE CHAIR, CENTRAL CONFERENCE OF AMERICAN RABBIS

I HAVE BEEN USING AI in many ways as a rabbi. In particular, I've been using it to create poetry that I use as part of our minyan. For example, I have created poems for the *Asher Yatzar*, for *Kaddish*, etc. These poems are the result of my prompts, and carefully selected themes that I wish to incorporate. I do not believe someone without a sophisticated understanding of Judaism could create what I create. If I write a story or poem with AI, can I take credit for the work, or do I need to indicate that it was created using AI?

We found that using AI is like using a tool, but not in the sense of a hammer. We asked ourselves whether we regard this as if somebody says *I built a house*, does that mean that they physically built it, or that they hired a contractor to build it? And for us, it still seemed closer to having hired a

contractor to build this house: to claim something written with AI as one's own, we found that misleading and *g'neivvat da'at* (intellectually dishonest).

We said we are not making grand pronouncements on AI and large language models, but in this particular circumstance, there is a difference between a person being completely original and a person using AI to create something. And we think that there's a difference, there's a lack of originality that needs to be acknowledged, and not to [acknowledge it] is being deceptive.

AI cannot do what any rabbi does, or any face-to-face person is doing, which is to take into account the circumstances of the questioner and to ask the questioner: *Why are you asking that? What do you need?* And I would not necessarily trust it to carefully capture all of the nuance that a person could.

5 A LUTHERAN PASTOR writing in a conservative think tank journal, Sutton warns of the dangers of relying too much on AI by pointing to the potential loss of human creativity. The distinction he describes here, between things and devices, is tricky to maintain: try telling your grandmother that a washing machine is just a device and if she doesn't "engage" with the laundry she risks all of human creativity. Put another way, the extent to which any individual relates to an object as a device, rather than a thing, may have as much to do with novelty and with cultural expectations as anything inherent to the objects themselves. The printing press, which automated writing, and may seem analogous to Sutton's furnace supplanting the wood stove operator, not only created a massive explosion of Jewish creativity and thought by allowing many more people to read and study written works, it created whole new cohorts of creative skills, like type designers and printers.

Chatbots, arguably, have the same potential. Sutton is right in saying we need to be vigilant and monitor how their use is adopted and evolves. We have to look only to social media to see how our use of a technology can go awry. He is also right that we do not want our generation to be the last to know what human creativity looks like. But he neglects the changing cultural context: just as a person can engage creatively in making or interpreting a printed book as much as a calligraphed scroll, our relationship to chatbots—and the extent to which we are able to engage with them creatively and skillfully—is likely to change over time.

THERE ARE TWO ISSUES underlying the question of whether chatbots should have a role in shaping people's practice of Judaism. One has to do with an LLM's capacity to provide accurate information with clear sourcing, backed up by human authorities—that is, with its capacity to issue answers and interpretations that are authoritative and trustworthy. This is a matter of the *substance* of a chatbot's answer. On that score, there is reason to believe that, eventually, LLM-based tools will exist that can credibly answer specific questions about Jewish practice and thought.

But there is a somewhat separate issue that is perhaps at least as important, which is a psychological one: What does it mean for a person to be in relationship to a machine, to turn to it with their spiritual, religious, and deeply personal questions? There is real danger in humans developing deep attachments to chatbots—attachments that superficially mimic relationships to other humans, and which can come with all the attendant feelings of dependence and vulnerability. AI cannot and will not ever be a replacement for a real-life relationship with a rabbi, mentor, study partner, or friend. Judaism exists in community. Halakha exists in community. A rabbinic answer, by necessity, takes into account the person asking it and the cultural milieu where it is being asked. Insofar as Judaism evolves, it does so because of social forces and human innovation. This is what Orthodoxy calls *mesorah* (tradition), which values the relationship between teacher and student and seeks to adapt to the changing world. This is the force that drove others to develop their own thriving forms of Judaism. If we hand the reins to AI, then the Judaism of the future will no longer be the living, breathing tradition that we have known for millennia. ■



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Canadian Friends of Hebrew University
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“

I WANTED
TO MAKE SURE
THAT I
WAS
SEEN

”

A GREAT MANY HOPES ARE INVESTED IN
MELISSA LANTSMAN.

TO CONTINUE HER REMARKABLE RISE IN POLITICS,
SHE'LL HAVE TO WALK THE FINEST OF LINES.

A portrait of a woman with short brown hair, wearing a white button-down shirt. She is resting her chin on her right hand, which is adorned with a ring. She is smiling slightly and looking towards the camera. The background is a solid dark blue.

STORY BY
**JOHN
LORINC**

PHOTOGRAPHY BY
**SHLOMI
AMIGA**

EVEN BY THE THEATRICAL CUSTOMS

of Question Period, the exchange felt sharp and personal. It was mid-February, 2022, and downtown Ottawa was a cold mess, teeming with noisy truckers, right-wing agitators, conspiracy theorists, and ordinary people who turned up for a surreal winter carnival after two years of pandemic restrictions. In Windsor and Alberta, meanwhile, protesters, some of them armed, had blockaded border crossings, ostensibly to contest the Trudeau government's move to require cross-border truckers to be vaccinated. While calls to break up the demonstrations by declaring a national emergency were growing louder, some prominent Conservatives, especially then-leadership candidate Pierre Poilievre, were posing for selfies with the convoy leaders. (Ottawa voters did not forget: he was defeated in his long-held riding of Carleton in the 2025 election.)

In the House of Commons, Melissa Lantsman, the newly elected Tory member of Parliament from Thornhill and her party's transportation critic, was grilling Justin Trudeau on the government's vaccine mandate policy for cross-border truckers. The prime minister shot back, condemning Conservative MPs for "standing with people who wave swastikas"—an allusion to the fact that some protesters were waving flags with the Nazi symbol and "Fuck Trudeau" signs.

Lantsman stood to reply with an obvious flush of anger in her face, and accused Trudeau of "[fanning] the flames of an unjustified national emergency."

"Conservative Party members can stand with people who wave swastikas," he shot back. "They can stand with people who wave the Confederate flag. ... We will choose to stand with Canadians who deserve to be able to get to their jobs, to be able to get their lives back. These illegal protests need to stop, and they will."

The speaker of the house warned Trudeau about unparliamentary language. At the end of the session, Lantsman rose on a point of order. "I am a strong Jewish woman and

a member of this House and a descendant of Holocaust survivors," she declared (a reference, Lantsman told me later, to both sets of grandparents). "I have never been made to feel less, except for today, when the prime minister accused me of standing with swastikas. I would like an apology."

Within hours, the rookie MP, scarcely five months into the job, was on Fox News, telling host Laura Ingraham about how Trudeau's "wedge" tactics were sowing division in Canada. Lantsman tried to balance those comments out, later saying in a podcast interview that she supported demonstrators' right to free expression while denouncing the use of Nazi and Confederate flags.

She never did get that apology.

LANTSMAN'S performance in that crucible moment amounted to a parliamentary version of the old job recruiter's adage that you get to make a first impression only once. Of course, it wasn't Lantsman's first speech in the Commons, but the incident sticks out in the memories of some Ottawa watchers: a novice politician rocketing to the centre of perhaps one of the most turbulent political dramas to hit the nation's capital in decades.

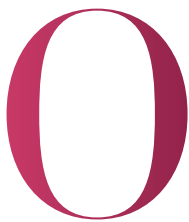
Three years—and one very peculiar national election—later, Lantsman, 41, has seen her political fortunes soar. She sits next to Pierre Poilievre, now leader of the official Opposition, in parliament and serves as the Conservative party's deputy leader, a post normally reserved for old hands. As one of the Tories' front bench MPs, Lantsman embodies the Conservatives' ambition to grow beyond their rural and Western Canadian base. She is suburban, female, gay, married, and a child of immigrants, as well as a naturally skilled orator whose communication chops have allowed her to expand the Conservatives' appeal, especially among younger voters. As pollster Nik Nanos puts it, "For a

Conservative party that wants to win an election, she really plays an important role.”

Yet Lantsman also walks that finest of lines: she’s a high-profile MP in a party that lionized a leader who monopolized the limelight until he lost his exurban Ottawa seat and had to self-exile to rural Alberta. An aggressive debater, Lantsman tends to eschew Poilievre’s sloganeering, his arrogance, and his penchant for personal insults. She also obviously knows how to manage her public persona. While she avoided posing with the truckers, Lantsman did attend a private session with the organizers and several other Tory MPs in 2022. The following year, three Tory MPs made news for meeting with Christine Anderson, a hard-right German member of the European Parliament. Lantsman joined with Poilievre to insist publicly that they didn’t know anything about Anderson’s politics. (She belongs to Alternative for Germany, a neo-fascist party.)

She has also emerged as arguably the most high-profile Jewish MP in Canada—a form of political identity she did not embrace, or even think much about, until October 7, 2023. Indeed, Lantsman’s initial goals in politics orbited around core conservative policies: lowering taxes, making life more affordable, and so on. But after Hamas’s attack, which killed 1,200 Israelis and saw another 251 taken hostage, she realized she had to become more visibly and outspokenly Jewish. “I wanted people to see [I was] a fighter for them.”

While Lantsman is every inch a team player, questions about the stark differences in her and Poilievre’s personas will be moot ... until they’re not. After all, Prime Minister Mark Carney sits atop a minority government that’s only a few seats shy of a majority. He’s been able to push his agenda, partly with the Tories’ support. Although the parties are almost tied in the polls, Carney is far more popular than Poilievre, who faces a leadership review in January and a potentially make-or-break election in the next few years. If he follows the fate of his predecessors, Andrew Scheer and Erin O’Toole, Lantsman may be well positioned to succeed him.



ON A CRISP fall morning, a Tory MP rises in a largely empty House to make a speech, accusing the Liberals of wrecking the long-standing national consensus on the benefits of Canada’s immigration system. Outside, protesters gather next to the Centennial Flame and solemnly read out the names of

children killed in Gaza. A guy who looks like he time-travelled from Woodstock stands near the West Block and shouts incoherently into a microphone. The entrances to Parliament Hill, which lead out to a noticeably occluded Wellington Avenue, are flanked by bollards and rows of canary-yellow metal vehicle traps. Heavily armed security guards patrol everywhere. This is what passes for normal in and around Canada’s House of Commons in 2025.

Perched on a blue couch in her first-floor office of the Confederation Building, Lantsman, having just left Question Period, is wearing one of her signature tailored jackets and reflecting on the position in which she’s found herself. She comes across as personable and chatty. The novelty of serving as a pugilistic rookie MP opposing an unpopular government may have worn off, but Lantsman, who is no stranger to Ottawa’s ways, says she understands the precarity of the job.

“I don’t think anybody ever knows how long they’re going to be here,” she muses. “That’s a fact of life, particularly when the future of your career is in the hands of everyone else.” She described her first few years in the House: “I wanted to make sure that I was loud, I was seen, and I was here to oppose the government when they needed to be opposed. ... That is my singular focus when I’m here in Ottawa.”

Lantsman’s earliest exposure to politics goes back to the 1990s, when she volunteered as a teenager for the campaign of Tina Molinari, a former Thornhill Tory MPP, canvassing in her own neighbourhood. Her parents, both Zionists, had emigrated from Odessa (then in the Soviet Union, now in Ukraine) in the early 1970s, spent a few years in Israel, then moved to Belgium, where her older brother was born. The Lantsmans settled in Toronto, joining one set of grandparents and eventually buying a home in the burgeoning and predominantly Jewish suburb north of Steeles and Bathurst.

Her father, an engineer by training, drove a cab because he couldn’t get certified to practise here, while her mother worked as an accountant. Lantsman says her mother encouraged her to follow her nose, career-wise, but recalls that her family was apolitical, as were her friends from summer camp and various sports leagues. “Politics [was] actually the opposite of a thing in my high school [and] in my household,” she says, describing her folks as “typical immigrant parents who came in and tried to Canadianize themselves. ... They actually discouraged me from spending all of my time in politics because they thought that it wouldn’t lead anywhere.”

Lantsman, however, was hooked from the get-go. “I absolutely fell in love with this thing called politics.” Her friends could see it, too: “It was always her goal, from when we were still in university,” recalls Leah Carr, a tech executive who has been one of Lantsman’s closest friends since high school. “She was very vocal that she wanted to work in government, and she then eventually wanted to be an elected official.”

They volunteered a lot during their University of Toronto days, says Carr: for the UJA Federation, a Birthright leadership training program, and, eventually, the St. George chapter of Hillel. They were both involved with Hillel in 2004, the year of the first Israeli Apartheid Week event. “We were kind of immediately swept into a lot of that conversation at the time,” says another old friend, Andrea

Diamond, now an executive with a student housing platform. “You’re in your early twenties. You have an identity as a Jewish person, and a connection to Israel, and this thing is happening on campus.” It was a galvanizing moment.

Two years later, a stridently anti-Muslim Zionist youth group, Betar-Tagar, organized a “Know Radical Islam Week” as a counter-protest. Lantsman, by then Hillel U of T’s vice-chair, felt the project went against Hillel’s inter-faith collaboration with U of T’s Muslim Students Association. “I don’t think Betar-Tagar necessarily represents the whole picture,” she told a *National Post* reporter. “This week particularly, they’re shedding light on radical Islam. We’re trying to foster a better understanding of spirituality.”

After the hothouse bubble of campus politics, Lantsman landed a position as a parliamentary intern and soon ended up working as a communications staffer for a succession of Stephen Harper cabinet ministers, including Foreign Affairs Minister Lawrence Cannon and Finance Minister Joe Oliver. “She really is a child of the Harper years,” says consultant and pundit Scott Reid, a former Paul Martin political staffer who has known Lantsman for several years. “That’s her conservative compass.” He adds that she was quickly spotted as a talent.

Political staffers are an odd and often unloved invasive species in Ottawa, especially if they’re working on the government side. Frequently starting out as campaign foot soldiers, they’re young, usually single, and expected to be on call 24/7. Despite their age and inexperience, staffers carry the authority of senior ministers when they deal with the seasoned bureaucrats who run the capital and sometimes chafe at being told what to do by twenty-somethings. Staffers also have to contend with friendly fire: dressings-down by shouty ministers, as well as the ever-present threat of being ousted for a mistake that embarrasses the government.

Some, like Lantsman, regard these seemingly thankless jobs as stepping stones to elected office. Working in communications, she gained a reputation for her knack with political messaging and making sure that the government’s pronouncements landed with the Conservatives’ key constituencies. She was also known for speaking frankly to whomever happened to be in the room. “Melissa is somebody with incredible moral clarity,” says Josh Zanin, a government relations consultant with Proof Strategies, who worked as a staffer with her during the Harper years. “She is not afraid to point out an inconsistency when she sees something that means somebody’s being overlooked or ignored or harmed. She doesn’t have a lot of patience for it.”

The Harper ride came to an end in 2015. Lantsman followed the typical path for former staffers by going to work for lobbying firms: first Hill & Knowlton, which she describes as “consulting university,” and then Enterprise Canada, a smaller shop founded by a pair of former journalists. She also sought to build a public persona, writing columns for the *Toronto Sun* that blasted the government on issues that were red meat to the Tory party’s base, such as Trudeau’s decision to vacation at the Aga Khan’s private island.

Interestingly, Lantsman occasionally poked at her fellow Conservatives, taking aim at the subsequently dropped #MeToo accusations against Tory leadership candidate

Patrick Brown and calling out then-federal leader Andrew Scheer for his evident discomfort with LGBTQ rights. “Now is the time for some serious introspection on the part of the Conservatives,” she and political consultant Jamie Ellerton, a friend, wrote in a *Globe and Mail* op-ed. “Being stuck in the past will not help them win in the future.”

Unlike an earlier generation of openly gay politicians, Lantsman says her sexual orientation doesn’t really register. “A lot of people paved the way before so this isn’t an issue now,” she says. “I get twice as much, or frankly ten times as much, [email] about being Jewish than I do about anything else. And that frightens me, because I also never thought that I would have to be openly Jewish and put a marker on it as a point of pride.”

She briefly dabbled in Ontario politics, managing Caroline Mulroney’s unsuccessful leadership campaign.

(Lantsman says Caroline’s father, former prime minister Brian Mulroney, called out of the blue and asked her to take the job.) She then took on “issues management” in the Tory war room during Doug Ford’s first campaign, in 2018. While Lantsman could have had an influential role in a new Ford government with a large majority, she didn’t care for provincial politics, which felt, after Ottawa, like a bit of a backwater. “I frankly just wasn’t interested in working in that orbit.” (Ford and Poilievre have since become very public rivals, and Lantsman seems to have picked a side.)

About two years later, Peter Kent, the former journalist and Thornhill MP, announced his retirement after thirteen years in office. Lantsman wanted that job — had wanted it for a long time. If working as a political staffer is tough, the role of MP can be even more of a grind, especially in Opposition. But there was little debate about seeking the nomination, says Leah Carr. “She never said, *Am I crazy? Should I keep doing this?* Like all successful people, [she] continuously questions [her] path and [her] goals.... But those conversations never ended on *No, you shouldn’t do this.*”



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Thornhill's Tory MPP Gila Martow also wanted the position. Lantsman, who still had a limited public profile but plenty of chutzpah, let it be known that she planned to win. "In a nomination battle, you call everybody you know, everybody you ever played softball with or went to high school with, or your mom ever got her nails done with," she says. "I just outworked them."

Lantsman won the seat in the 2021 snap election and had such a firm grip on the riding by the 2025 race that the Tory war room sent her to forty-one ridings to stump for other candidates.

E **MERGING FROM A RACE** they were supposed to crush, the Conservatives won lots of new seats and garnered over 40 percent of the vote — an almost unheard-of feat for a party that ended up on the losing side. Yet the emotionally fraught campaign was all about Donald Trump and his fifty-first-state trolling; despite the Tories riding high in the polls for much of 2023 and 2024, by the time election day came around, many centrist voters felt Poilievre was far too Trumpian for their liking and backed the Liberals. Since taking office, however, Prime Minister Mark Carney has governed like an old-school Red Tory who has gladly shed almost all of his predecessor's atmospherics.

Ken Boessenkool, a veteran Harper policy adviser, likes to joke mordantly that Carney, heading into last spring's election, was like a "candidate made in a lab." He had the résumé, the vibe shift, and the perfect proxy villain to take on in Poilievre. With Trudeau history and the leadership in the bag, Carney quickly axed the (carbon) tax, and thus effectively stripped Poilievre of the two punching bags that had made his victory look so much like a sure thing. The former central banker, as Boessenkool says, "was the candidate. It wasn't what he proposed at any moment in the campaign. It was who he was."

What's a Conservative to do, given that the Liberals have, since then, helped themselves to some of the Tories' favoured talking points, such as removing regulatory obstacles to major natural resource projects and ending the so-called catch-and-release bail system? "We're very happy to see Liberals take on Conservative policies," Lantsman told the CBC over the summer. "I don't think that's a repudiation of policy at all." But nor is it a go-forward plan for a political party trying to define itself as an alternative to the current government.

Darrell Bricker, CEO of Ipsos Public Affairs, expects that, in the coming months, the Tories will hammer the Liberals on issues such as housing, affordability, and crime. But he points out that his firm's latest public opinion research shows that Canadians, unlike in 2022 or 2023, are not in an especially partisan mood right now. This is at least in part because of the shadows cast by political chaos in the US. "When you go out and do polling on what people think of

the current Liberal administration under Mark Carney, "he says, "the first thing you discover is that they basically believe they elected the right people to manage this moment."

The Conservatives, under interim leader Andrew Scheer, spent the first several months after the election trying out, and often dispensing with, attack lines against the Liberals, such as the EV sales mandate, which Lantsman in the House derided as "insane." But they also quietly supported key pieces of Carney's plan to fire up major nation-building projects that will, in theory, compensate for the Trump administration's blows to the Canadian economy.

Poilievre stepped back into the spotlight after his September by-election. He's now flanked by a giant shadow cabinet (it's twice the size of the Liberals' actual cabinet) and a team of conspicuously diverse deputies that includes Lantsman as well as veteran Edmonton MP Tim Uppal (who is Sikh) and the hard-right former leadership challenger Leslyn Lewis (who is Black). In Question Period, the new MP for Battle River–Crowfoot has been grilling the government on issues such as temporary foreign workers, the ballooning deficit, and Carney's travel habits. After Parliament resumed in September, he briefly dialled down the acid insults ever so slightly. But by mid-fall, Poilievre once again was back in the mud, trolling about DEI and (baselessly) accusing the RCMP of having run a cover operation for Trudeau instead of charging him with crimes. Those attacks brought plenty of pushback. Lantsman, meanwhile, talked mainly about the Blue Jays as Tory heavyweights sparred over Poilievre's fitness for duty.

When I asked Lantsman to itemize the problems that loom largest for her in the coming months, she said the government's "vulnerability is largely what it was before the election — a housing crisis where young people don't ever believe they'll even be able to afford a home, let alone the supply-side issues [such as] immigration, wage subversion in the workforce, a massive amount of foreign labour coming here, effectively being treated as slave labour." (Poilievre has since said the federal government's temporary foreign worker program should be eliminated outright.)

Such arguments have found a receptive audience among many Canadians. But the elephant in this room is to what extent are they being fanned by what's happening in the US, where masked ICE agents are capturing undocumented workers in Home Depot parking lots as part of the Trump administration's campaign to deport millions of immigrants. Lantsman, however, rejects the suggestion that the politics of immigration in the US is influencing the politics of immigration here. "We're a very, very different country," she says. "Everybody got here. I'm a product of somebody who got here. But there is a real conversation about resource scarcity, spaces in hospitals, housing availability and affordability."

Nor does she think the Trump administration's surreal approach to science, public health, and vaccinations has spilled over the border, despite the fact that record-breaking

measles outbreaks this year in southwestern Ontario and Alberta hint at rising vaccine hesitancy. Lantsman herself is not a vaccine skeptic: she got the COVID-19 jab and publicly wore a mask during the pandemic — positions that not every member of her party shared. Yet she remains sharply critical of how the federal Liberals handled the outbreak with preventative measures such as the closure of elementary schools.

When I pointed out that public health officials in that highly uncertain moment didn't have a road map, Lantsman replied, "If this were to happen again, I would want that road map, because I think there were a lot of mistakes made [by] a lot of different people. And what's worse about all of those mistakes is that it was used as a political tool by one side to demonize another" — the reference is to Trudeau's putdown of anti-vaxxers — "and that's just not something I'll get behind, not as a politician and not as a woman. I have family members who decided not to be vaccinated, and like other decisions in our families, we don't point fingers at each other." The reality, of course, is that the deluge of pandemic misinformation and opportunistic rhetoric from the anti-vax political right did, in fact, divide many families.

As for Canada's record on Israel, rising antisemitism, and the war in Gaza, Lantsman — who represents the riding with the highest proportion of Jewish residents anywhere in Canada — is unsurprisingly critical. She regards the Carney government's move this fall (alongside Australia, the UK, France, and Portugal) to recognize Palestinian statehood as nothing but a "reward" for Hamas. "The bigger concern for Canadians," Lantsman continues, "is what [the war] is doing here to our population, on our streets, to communities. I think the government, for a long time, found a way to play both sides. They said one thing to one group of people for a long time, and another thing to another group of people, and hoped that that would appease everybody." In her view, Ottawa's primary responsibility is to ensure that all communities, regardless of colour or faith, are safe. "That," she contends, "is not happening today."

In a 2023 Facebook post, Lantsman wrote that "vile antisemitism, Islamophobia and anti-immigrant views aren't welcome in my politics." These days, she also takes care to stress that she's not only focusing on attacks on synagogues or Jewish day schools. "I frame it around religious freedom, because I think it's a big component of what we're missing



in this country: the freedom to practise your religion while still integrating into Canadian society. I can relate to other religious people better knowing that they're facing some level of persecution in this country." The line about religious freedom is an active Conservative talking point these days, and dovetails with rhetoric from MPs like Leslyn Lewis, who talks frequently about attacks on Christian churches.

Notwithstanding the party's posture, Lantsman's views are evidently conditioned by her own experience of the past two years. Lantsman has had round-the-clock RCMP protection for much of this period. She's one of

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the only non-government MPs who's had that level of security, although many Liberal MPs were on the receiving end of relentless abuse and harassment from convoy anti-vax activists. While the home she shares with her wife in Toronto has not been targeted, Lantsman says she's been on the receiving end of many threats, although she won't disclose the details. She contends that she gets targeted more by the left than the right, but acknowledges that antisemitism today “exists right across the spectrum.”

Lantsman's position on Israel, says David Cooper, senior lobbyist for the Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs (CIJA), “is obviously different from some of her Jewish counterparts in the Liberal party.” The Tories' stance, he continues, echoing a comment she made to me in our interview, “is [that] we need to be enforcing the existing [hate] laws, not putting new legislation forward.”

Bernie Farber, founding chair of the Canadian Anti-Hate Network, points out that among many Jews, Lantsman's and the Conservatives' take on Israel and the war on Gaza resonates. But, he adds, “public opinion and Jewish public opinion is, if it's not turning away, it's certainly turning to questioning. People that I once knew that were very

solidly pro-Israel have begun to say to me, *What do we do? How do we deal with this?*”

Public opinion research conducted in early 2024 by the University of Toronto's Robert Brym confirms Farber's assessment. “On the whole,” his survey found, “Canadian Jews have experienced a reduction in their emotional attachment to Israel because of the Israel-Hamas war and the rightward drift of Israeli government policy.”

For a party that has sought to appeal to Jewish Canadians since Harper was prime minister, that drift seems like a problem.

ON A FRIDAY IN LATE SEPTEMBER, I met Lantsman for lunch at the Bagel World near her constituency office in Thornhill. In a place like this, she's treated like a celebrity, and has to make numerous stops at tables as we're shown to a quieter spot in the back. A waiter comes up and, evidently continuing an earlier conversation from another day, fills her in on his son's decision to go to Western University's Ivey Business School. “I didn't stage that,” she says, a bit sheepishly, after he leaves, and then adds, “I wish I had gone away to university.”

When I canvassed various Ottawa watchers about where she fits into the party that Pierre Poilievre built, I heard a range of theories: that she's a kind of foil to Poilievre and his Nixonian resentments, or that her political role is to show that the Conservatives are actually more inclusive. “She's one of their most effective communicators,” says Scott Reid. “Look, she can be acidic sometimes in her partisan focus. Arguably, that's part of the job [and] it is almost inevitably part of the current political milieu, particularly for Conservatives. But she still manages to capture some of that ‘happy warrior’ [persona]. You know it, the cameras click off, the microphones go down, and a smile comes to her face.” He says she reminds him of politicians like Brian Mulroney or John Baird — politicians who could, as the saying goes, disagree without being disagreeable.

In an age of virtually unprecedented polarization — a time when many politicians and their social media signal boosters actively encourage voters to see politics as a war rather than a contest of ideas — the happy warrior skill set seems like a necessary corrective, particularly for a party that's led by a guy who was punished at the polls partly for his contemptuous demeanour.

I asked Lantsman, who was picking through a plate of pumpernickel bagel with tuna salad on the side, about this matter of their sharply contrasting political personas.

“I think he's good for the country,” she said of Poilievre. “I think he's good particularly for our party.”

“You're very different politicians,” I replied. “It's really striking.”

“I like people,” Lantsman responded with a shrug. But then she quickly pivoted to perhaps safer ground: “I like the fact that you can come from nowhere in this country [and end up in Parliament]. I don't think that's ever lost on me.” ▀

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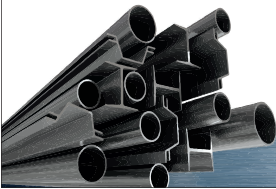
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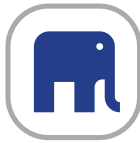


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Kat Romanow Pane Toscano

by COREY MINTZ

FOOD HISTORIAN Kat Romanow fell so in love with chopped liver and challah that she became a Jew.

“I converted, not for a partner, but because of food,” says Romanow, co-founder of The Wandering Chew, a Jewish food culture project. “Food is what got me into Judaism.”

Romanow had been studying religion and anthropology at Concordia University when the idea of focusing on Jewish food, improbably, grabbed hold of her. She had grown up Catholic and was raised in an Italian family — why not study either of those? “I have my theories about why I didn’t go that way,” says Romanow, hesitating a moment before explaining a painful crossroads in her family’s history.

Romanow’s maternal great-grandfather, Donato Monaco, immigrated to Canada from Italy in the 1920s. In 1932, along with brothers Vincenzo and Antonio, he opened the Corona Bakery, baking bread and pizza, and delivering it around Montreal by horse.

On June 10, 1940, as Mussolini was declaring war against Britain and France, Vincenzo was making his rounds. Vincenzo was arrested by the RCMP and his horse left to wander the streets, cart in tow. The three brothers were sent to an internment camp in Petawawa, Ontario. Like some 24,000 Japanese Canadians, German Canadians, and Italian Canadians, the Monacos were held under the War Measures Act, suspected of being fascist sympathizers and denied the right to trial.

EATING OUR FEELINGS

Donato's sixteen-year-old daughter, Mary, took over operations of the bakery. Eventually, a judge interviewed Vincenzo and found him "entirely innocent of any subversive act or intentions." More suspicious was Vincenzo and Donato's accuser, Augusto Bersani, a former minister of their Protestant church. Bersani's name came up frequently enough in the judge's interviews that he examined all cases in which detainees had been fingered by the former minister. Cast out of the church for allegedly embezzling funds and falsifying birth records, Bersani appeared to have been using his role as an RCMP informant to seek revenge on those he felt had wronged him.

Visiting the families of interned men, initially posing as a helpful friend, Bersani told Mrs. Monaco, "Remember when I was put out of the church? I suffered. Now your husbands are suffering."

Just before Christmas of 1940, Donato and Vincenzo were released, though Antonio was held until 1943. The false imprisonment of a family's entire generation of men is not something that happens without leaving deep wounds.

Donato's son Leonardo worked in the bakery until it closed in 1995. Romanow grew up in the adjoining house; her grandfather made teething rings for her out of bread dough. "They were shaped like a bagel and were baked until quite hard," she remembers.

It was a multigenerational home; the grandparents lived one floor above her. Every Sunday, they'd all have lunch together, the table set with spaghetti

and tomato sauce. Sometimes there would be braciola, thinly sliced beef wrapped around cheese and herbs and simmered in tomato sauce. Always, there was the same bread. It was known then as zulu bread (see recipe on the next page for why we wouldn't call it this today): a slightly sweet, oval loaf with a lightly golden crust and a soft and airy crumb. Occasionally dipped in sauce, it was primarily eaten on its own, sliced and spread with margarine.

At Concordia, Romanow studied under Jewish feminist activist Norma Joseph. "I thought I should know more about the religion I was always told Christianity/Catholicism was descended from," Joseph told Romanow that she could study Jewish foodways and something clicked. From there she spent a summer at Brandeis University, after which she knew she wanted to convert.



"Alongside the research we were doing, we also went to Shabbat dinners, synagogues, and visited other Jewish institutions in the Boston area. After being immersed in Jewish culture and practice, I felt a connection to Judaism and began to explore conversion."

In the years since, she's had time to reflect on why she embraced the food and faith of Judaism, rather than the traditions she was born into. It goes back to her great-grandparents' unjust imprisonment and the mark it left on her family.

"From what I understand — and it's hard because my family never talks about this — on my mother's side, there was a shift to downplay their Italian identity and be more Canadian English. I don't exactly know what they were intending. So even though being Italian is a big part of my identity, at the same time, there

were mixed messages from my mom, who would say, *Don't marry an Italian*. Or my grandmother: she would always talk about 'the Italians,' not including herself."

These days, challah is Romanow's preeminent bread. On Fridays, she'll bake a loaf, working to perfect her braiding technique. As a Shabbat ritual, she enjoys a hunk spread with butter, shares it with her four-year-old, then makes French toast with it over the weekend. During the week, her default bread is baguette, readily available in corner stores around her hometown of Montreal.

"It would be a very sad life without bread," says Romanow. "Whether it's slathered in a good jam for breakfast, or having a sandwich, or Friday night dinners. Not being able to do those things, there would be a bread-shaped hole in my life." ■

PANE TOSCANO

While challah and baguette play a huge part in Romanow's life today, no one forgets their first love. The bread of her imagination, the bread of her heart, is the zulu bread that was the staple of her childhood. Unfortunately, the family recipe for it is lost. But working together, we've found, tested and adapted a recipe by Lynne Feifer that feels close.

Finding no reference to zulu bread outside of a couple of Quebec bakeries still making it today (spelled zoulou), I reached out to a chef friend, Dario Tomaselli. He'd never heard of it, and neither had the bakers he asked in Italy. He says *zulu* is often slang for "rough,"



This Tuscan bread, in Romanow's childhood, was usually eaten on its own; it's also delicious dipped in sauce.

suggesting the term was likely used as a synonym for "unsophisticated," a derogatory reference to the ethnic group of South African origin. We might do better to call it a Tuscan bread, while including a footnote about its history.

This recipe has a relatively low hydration rate (the percentage of liquid in dough, as measured by weight) of 39.2 percent, and is a testament to the magic of turning flour and water into bread. The dough takes a few hours to rise: perfect for weekend mornings when you can start a baking project before everyone else wakes, and have it warm and ready to eat around lunchtime.

INGREDIENTS

356 g (1 ¾ cups) warm water
5 g (1 ¼ tsp) dry instant yeast
5.3 g (1 ½ tsp) salt
2.5 g (½ tsp) granulated sugar
2 g (½ tbsp) olive oil
550 g (4 cups) all-purpose flour, divided in two

INSTRUCTIONS

In a small bowl, combine warm water and yeast. In the bowl of a stand mixer set up with the bread-hook attachment, combine salt, sugar, oil, and half the flour. When the yeast has bloomed (the grains will puff up and rise to the surface), pour it into the flour and turn the mixer to the lowest speed setting. After a few minutes, when the water is incorporated, add the remaining flour; continue mix on low speed for seven minutes, until a smooth, sticky dough forms. Let the dough rest for five minutes, then transfer to a lightly greased bowl. Cover with a cloth and leave to proof at room temperature for two hours. When it has doubled in size, tip the dough onto a parchment-covered cutting board and shape into an oval. (I form the ends into pointed tips to match Romanow's description of the bread's shape.) Let the dough rise for another 40 minutes, uncovered.

Place a baking sheet in the oven and preheat to 450°F. Sprinkle a bit of flour over the loaf. With a sharp knife (or razor blade if you have it), make a vertical slash along the length of the loaf's top, leaving a couple of inches at each end. Transfer the parchment with dough to the hot baking sheet. Bake for approximately 25 minutes. The bread is ready when the surface is copper-coloured and a knock on the bottom sounds hollow.

Slice and eat immediately.

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It's No Fairy Tale

Can an anthology of century-old Jewish stories help us understand our own times?

by PHOEBE MALTZ BOVY

"WE TELL OURSELVES STORIES in order to live." So, famously, opens Joan Didion's 1979 book, *The White Album*, written while she was examining hippie-era California. This is also the core message of Jack Zipes's new anthology, *Never-Ending Tales: Stories from the Golden Age of Jewish Literature*. For this is, on the most fundamental level, Zipes's thesis: at times when simply living while Jewish was perilous, Jews told Jewish stories in order to assert their right to exist. He writes, "Storytelling and the publishing of

stories became a means through which Jews could share their problems among themselves." It's a book about storytelling as a communal survival strategy.

Zipes, an emeritus professor of German and comparative literature at the University of Minnesota specializing in folklore, uses the anthology's brief introduction to explain how the stories that follow "formed a resistance to the antisemites." The purpose of sharing these stories with contemporary readers is to demonstrate "how Jews, whether religious or secular, found ways to survive

and to find hope." While the stories may already be known from previous translations, Zipes has newly anthologized them in order "to demonstrate how Jewish folk tales and fantasy writing can help us comprehend how deeply the Jewish Question is entwined in cultural history."

This is not the first time Zipes, who is Jewish and originally from New York, has covered this type of source material. In a 1991 book called *The Operated Jew and the Operated Goy: Two Tales of Anti-Semitism*, Zipes had the brilliant

idea to juxtapose an antisemitic 1893 short story (Oskar Panizza's "The Operated Jew") with a Jewish author's 1922 satirical retort (Salomo Friedlaender, "The Operated Goy"). The first is about a Jewish man — effectively an anti-Jewish caricature — who gets himself cosmetically turned into a German gentile, culminating in a wedding scene with a Christian bride, whereupon the groom reverts to his natural state. The second has a German gentile surgically Judaizing himself in order to snag a beautiful Jewess. (There are countless beautiful Jewess trope stories that have been written over the years, courtesy of both Jewish and gentile authors. This is the only one, to my knowledge, in which Sigmund Freud himself makes a cameo.)

"The Operated Goy," unlike its inspiration, ends with the operation taking hold: "Now Mr. and Mrs. Moishe Kosher are living today as committed Zionists in a country villa near Jerusalem." And the reason I know this is that *Never-Ending Tales* begins with a reprint of those two stories in translation. The purpose of the book is twofold: to put together a larger collection of texts in the same vein as Friedlaender's, and to do so in 2025. Every history book is about both the time of its focus and that of its writing, and this, though not a history book in the disciplinary sense, is no exception.

The anthology's focus — the "golden age" in question — mainly spans the 1870s to the 1930s in Central and Eastern Europe, with occasional appearances of England and the United States. The chronology and geography thus go from the era of pogroms to the rise of Nazism. It's possible to argue, as this book does, that this stretch constitutes *the* peak period of Jewish literature (Marcel Proust was active at the time), but it's an unusual interpretation. It's certainly a bold assertion when one considers the familiar canon

of postwar English-language authors like Philip Roth, Saul Bellow, Susan Sontag, and Mordecai Richler. It's not that big-name writers are absent from the era Zipes is interested in: Sholem Aleichem and I. L. Peretz are in the mix. But this feels more like a claim about the sociopolitical importance of the stories themselves than a dispassionate assessment of their merits.

And that's fine. As a matter of strict critical assessment, maybe "golden age" is a bit strong, but those years were crucial for the emergence of Jewish modernity. Questions about what it meant to be Jewish — questions that would have made no sense to ask in previous eras — emerged, were debated within the community and beyond, and swiftly took on life-or-death urgency. While these matters got debated in the political sphere, in governments and newspapers, they were also the subtext to much of Jewish fiction, which is where this anthology enters the picture.

**Zipes's thesis:
at times when
simply living while
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order to assert
their right to exist.
It's a book about
storytelling
as a communal
survival strategy.**

Zipes defines "the Jewish question" as follows: "After the so-called emancipation of Jews in Europe and elsewhere, should Jews be accepted as full citizens and allowed to live as they wish in different nation-states throughout the world, or should they be eliminated, or confined to monitored regions?" That's a fine definition, but the most important thing about the Jewish question was that there was — and still is — a "Jewish question." Consider who it is who would ask this, as a question. Jews do not ask "the Jewish question." We contemplate and argue about what it means to be Jewish, but that is not what "the Jewish question" refers to.

To speak of a "Jewish question" is to speak of a Jewish problem. It's a vantage point that rejects just letting Jews be. Rather than allowing Jews to adhere strongly to Judaism or to mix fully with the mainstream population depending on any individual Jew's inclinations, askers of the Jewish question view this as a matter to be determined externally. And sometimes, historically, the answer to the Jewish question has been a simple *no*.

At its extreme, maybe even its core, the Jewish question is about Jews' humanity. Are Jews people like others, or humanoid infiltrators? Chances are that you, a reader of *Scribe Quarterly*, don't need convincing. Chances are that you know nice Jews and not-so-nice Jews, the gamut. There's a decent chance you're Jewish yourself, and would find it inconceivable to doubt that Jews are human beings. But others have not always been so sure.

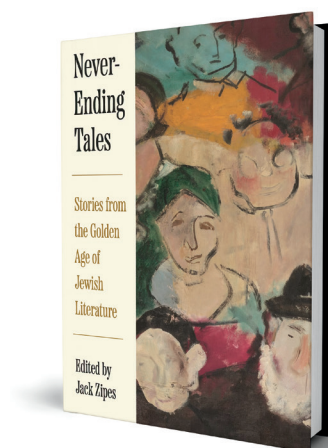
NEVER-ENDING TALES puts the tales themselves front and centre — which is to say, it doesn't include a lot of information about the stories, the places and times in which they are set, and their original publication. A section at

the end provides short biographies of the authors and editors whose work appears, and there is a modest array of footnotes, but the background information is limited. If the book is used in an educational context with a teacher filling in the blanks (it's published by an academic press), this is not a problem. But for a reader picking up the book outside that setting, the absence of context has the effect of gesturing at a unified Jewish past. You might be in Poland or England, in the eighteenth or twentieth century, given the range of where stories were either written or set. It's a portrait of a civilization at a crossroads.

What sort of portrait do we get? One in which, notably, the lure of the outside world always coexists with its dangers.

Several of the stories touch on interfaith romance, with central or side characters converting for the purpose of marriage. This may seem shockingly modern for that time — or not, depending on one's familiarity with the plot of *The Fiddler on the Roof* (based on stories by Sholem Aleichem set in turn-of-the-twentieth-century Russia), in which one of Tevye's daughters marries out.

S. Ansky's "The Pentinent" is about a Jewish man who abandons his Jewish wife and child, takes up with (and bigamously marries) a Christian woman, only to have end-of-life regrets about abandoning the Jewish people. (As a Jew, I'm perhaps meant to be moved by this, but I am wondering why he expressed no remorse at ditching his family, or rather, why the story doesn't concern itself with that aspect of his trajectory.) Along similar lines, Dovid Bergelson's "The Convert" tells of an unpleasant Jewish woman who becomes a Christian to wed and henpeck the man she loves, who happens to be of that faith. Hugo Bettauer's 1922



**NEVER-ENDING TALES:
STORIES FROM THE GOLDEN
AGE OF JEWISH LITERATURE**

Edited by Jack Zipes
Princeton University Press

December 2

The City Without Jews, a short satirical novel about Vienna expelling its Jews and then experiencing expeller's remorse, includes an ongoing romance between a young Christian woman and a now-exiled Jewish artist, who poses as a Christian Frenchman to return to Vienna and be with her.

The unifying element in this collection of short stories is thus an intermarriage plot. There is also an eerily later-twentieth-century-seeming passage about how the gentile women of Vienna had outright preferred Jewish men for their sobriety and talents in the bedroom. You could be in a Philip Roth novel or a Woody Allen movie or a *Seinfeld* episode. Or more recent still: the hit Netflix series *Nobody Wants This*, about a "shiksa" who falls in love with a rabbi, launched in 2024 but exists in the same symbolic universe.

Intermarriage was always at the core of the so-called Jewish question, and also a challenge to essentialism. If Jew and gentile were meant to be these

wildly different entities, what was to be made of the fact that they sometimes coupled off and had kids? For so many reasons, intermarriage works as a lens for understanding how Jews and non-Jews understood the boundaries of Jewishness.

AS A COURSE READER, *Never-Ending Tales* would be fantastic. As a stand-alone book for someone interested in Jewish fiction or folklore, however, it might have benefitted from a narrower focus, either thematic (free idea: intermarriage!) or in terms of the number of stories included. There is no shortage of worthy material. The two operation stories at the start are crucial, and *The City Without Jews* is a piece I'd never heard of and now cannot stop thinking about. It's both intensely anti-antisemitic, defending Jews' presence in Vienna, and at times so pro-Jewish it veers into promoting antisemitic stereotypes. Jews, in the story, are the people who keep cultural institutions and luxury shops in business. A mixed honour. Paul Schlesinger's "The Enemies" (ca. 1920), about two Jewish soldiers, one French and one German, dying side by side during the First World War, has no shortage of contemporary relevance, as well as an epic punchline.

There were other stories that, while worthy, seemed less distinct. I — someone who has unusually high stamina for this sort of thing — got bogged down in the stories of rabbis and golems, which started to blend together. In the aggregate they do, however, evoke the pogrom era, and how it felt for Jews to live as prey.

There are a couple of moments in the book that come across as well-intended inclusivity efforts that, each for their own reasons, don't quite work. First, the inclusion of a "ca. 1950–1960" story about a sorcerer, as "Told

by a Yemenite Jew to Rachel Seri,” adds chronological, geographic, and gender diversity, with Seri one of two women presented in the book as authors of the stories. But I’m not sure what bringing in the postwar Mizrahi experience in such a limited manner adds to a project very much about something else. It feels out of place, and invites questions about what wasn’t included: Why not Ethiopian Jews? Why not short fiction from 2011? Precisely because there’s no monolithic thing, no such thing as *the* Jewish experience, parameters help spell out what a project is and isn’t covering. Including 1870 and 1930, England and Russia, is already quite a lot.

The second such concern pertains to the other female author, or maybe-author, Helena Frank, to whom Zipes attributes the book’s epigraph: “Jews will be Jews while the world lasts, and they will become, through suffering, better Jews with more Jewish hearts.” This is taken from Frank’s entry in the anthology, the 1912 story “The Clever Rabbi.” In the introduction, Zipes lists Frank among the anthology’s “less well-known writers.” But her bio in the book describes her as “a British translator [who] was not Jewish,” which got me curious about this fascinating-sounding woman I had never heard of. I looked her up and soon enough found (via Project Gutenberg) an edition of *Yiddish Tales*, one of her books of translation mentioned in that bio. There, she is listed as the translator of an author-unknown Yiddish story, “The Clever Rabbi.”

Why does any of this matter? It’s not that I object to crediting translators, or to non-Jews translating from Yiddish. Rather, it’s that Frank is presented as this obscure Jewish woman author — bearing the same surname as perhaps the best-known female Jewish author of all time — finally getting her due.

The anthology helps illustrate continuities within the history of antisemitism. The Jews in these stories were not all-powerful, far from it. But antisemites saw them as a menace.

The inclusion of two pieces of non-fiction, notably Theodor Herzl’s 1896 “The Jewish Question,” an essay-length excerpt of the beginning of *The Jewish State*, struck me at first as an odd choice. Anyone in Jewish Studies will probably have already encountered this text. And anyone who happens to have picked up a book of anti-antisemitic fables will be wondering why a polemic is in the mix.

But by the time I got to it, I saw that it was a clever wink of a choice in light of all the literal fairy tales that precede it. For if you didn’t know that the state of Israel existed, if you really were reading all these materials in a context-free space-and-time vacuum, you would naturally assume that it was yet another galaxy-brained musing by a Central European Jew. Indeed, “If you will it, it is no fairy tale,” on the title page of Herzl’s classic Zionist novel, *Old-New Land* (*Altneuland*), is easily the most famous Zionist literary quotation. Only the section heading word “Essays” announces that this

is the realm of non-fiction. Coming on the heels of the mythic creatures and improbable coincidences of the short stories that precede it, Herzl’s depiction of a Jewish state in the land of Israel seems equally bonkers. Yet Israel exists.

With Herzl out of the way, the American Jewish scholar Leo W. Schwarz’s essay, “The Essence of Survival,” a contemporary-seeming-for-1935 musing on post-emancipation Jewish history, brings *Never-Ending Tales* to its conclusion. It’s a thought-provoking analysis of Jewish modernity, but has the air of a top-notch lecture in a survey course. It functions mainly as a way of avoiding the charged historical personage of Theodor Herzl from having the last word. A book ending with Herzl might seem to be presenting Zionism as the end point of Jewish history. And since a Jewish state did not wind up demolishing antisemitism, perhaps it seemed correct to wrap up the anthology on a more ambivalent, detached note. Detached, that is, because Schwarz was a scholar, but also because he was American, a lucky thing for a Jew to be in 1935.

But ending with Herzl would have been the more provocative (in a good sense) way to go. It was my first time reading Herzl since the events of October 7, 2023. First, too, of course, since the Gaza war, and Israel’s unprecedented ostracization. What struck me now was how thoroughly Herzl was writing from within his own context, that of a Europe unwilling to fully accept its own Jewish population. His naïveté regarding how the local Arab population would come to regard a Jewish state in Palestine is as striking as the clear-eyed precision with which he described the predicament of his own people, which would only get more dire. (Herzl died in 1904.) It’s a strange experience, reading someone at once so right and so wrong,

for reasons he could not have anticipated. To read Herzl in the mid-2020s is to emerge with more questions than answers. That Herzl did not simply solve the “Jewish question” is maybe the strongest evidence that this was never a question that Jews had the power to solve.

AS ZIPES CONVEYS in his introduction, the so-called Jewish question is still with us. But the stakes and dynamics have changed with world events: “Now the Palestinians seem to occupy the role of oppressed, while Israel appears to be the oppressor. This is one of the sad paradoxes of post-Holocaust history. What is a Jew to do when roles are reversed?”

The way the existence of Israel changed Jewishness is obviously not something a book about Europe from 1870 to 1930 can address head-on. What it can do, helpfully, is remind us in the here and now exactly how *foreign* Jews were viewed as being in Europe for much of that period. Antisemitism was about eliminating the “Semitic” or “Oriental” presence from European lands.

There is a subtext one sees in some anti-Zionist rhetoric that Jews had lovely lives in the diaspora, outside the odd microaggression, cheerily existing as Germans, etc., of the Jewish faith, until a fascist madman took power. The creation of Israel, therefore, would seem like an overreaction to a historical discontinuity. The takeaway from *Never-Ending Tales* is not that Israel’s creation was the end-of-history capstone to Jewish modernity. Rather, it’s that Jews’ status as full Europeans was new, tenuous, and continuously under attack well before Nazism.

More broadly, *Never-Ending Tales* offers models for resisting oppressive regimes. No, Trumpism is not Nazism; I leave it to the political scientists to decide how they wish to

classify Trumpism with respect to fascism. But it is hard not to think of the 1938 remarks of Yale Divinity School professor Halford E. Luccock: “When and if fascism comes to America it will not be labeled ‘made in Germany’; it will not be marked with a swastika; it will not even be called fascism; it will be called, of course, ‘Americanism.’”

Whatever Trumpism is, and however unsettling it is to Canadian Jews as Canadians, it is not an anti-Jewish eliminationist movement. That does not mean contemporary resonances are absent. *The City Without Jews* is most notable for being a Jewish writer’s 1922 dystopian description of what would in fact soon happen: Vienna (and not just Vienna) expelling (and not just expelling) its Jews. A 2004 film, *A Day Without a Mexican*, has basically the same plot as *The City Without Jews*, but with a different minority group set in a different locale (modern-day Los Angeles). In 2025, *The New York Times*

Never-Ending Tales
is a portrait of
a civilization at a
crossroads.
What sort of
portrait do we get?
One in which,
notably, the lure
of the outside
world always
coexists with its
dangers.

revisited this movie because some of the events described were playing out in real life, in the form of immigration enforcement raids.

That said, *Never-Ending Tales* is also relevant for the obvious reason: antisemitism is back, if it ever went away. Antisemitic incidents regularly outpace other forms of hate crime, despite our small numbers. Hateful speech on social media, whether by humans or bots, has it in for Jews disproportionately. Anti-Jewish sentiment remains a way of revving up all manner of crowds. With that in mind, the anthology helps illustrate continuities within the history of antisemitism. Antisemites of yore may not have been reacting to the actions of the not-yet-existent Jewish state, but they absolutely saw themselves as fighting their oppressors. The Jews in these stories were not all-powerful, far from it. But antisemites saw them as a menace.

When I came across the concept of the Jewish question in the early 2000s, as a graduate student learning about European Jews’ emancipation, it seemed a thing of another time. Surely today’s modern societies were simply too heterogeneous to view Jews as The Other. That way of seeing things had to be specific to European environments where most everyone was the same thing apart from this handful of people who were another one, namely Jewish. Or, fine, maybe WASPy postwar country clubs. But in contexts where all sorts of religions and physical features abound, and overlap, how could “Jewish” not just be one category among many? How could we still be a question, let alone of interest to anyone other than ourselves? Zipes does not answer this, nor would I expect that of him. *Never-Ending Tales* offers the uninitiated, as well as the initiated, an excellent survey of where we ourselves are coming from. ■



The Enemies

by PAUL SCHLESINGER

IT SO HAPPENED THAT, during the World War, two mortally wounded Jews were brought into a hospital, both within the same hour. One was a German — the other was a Frenchman. Their beds adjoined each other. For a long time they lay tossing about, wracked by fever and pain. The Jewish chaplain fluttered from one to another, trying desperately to get them to accept each other as Jews. Before he left them, he said:

“I cannot possibly spend any more time with you. Therefore I beg of you — talk to each other. Both of you are Jews, even though one is French and the other is German. Surely, as Jews you both share the same whole-hearted devotion to your fatherlands and to your parents, you are tormented by the same longing for your wives and children at home, by the same anxieties, and the same suffering, and soon both of you will stand before the same God. There certainly must be some virtues as well as vices that you both have in common. Therefore, I must plead with you — unburden your hearts to each other.”

The Rabbi went away. The two Jews lay silent for a long time. The Frenchman, who began to feel somewhat better, moved his parched lips: “What have we got to say to each other anyway?”

The German did not answer.

“No doubt you are right for not talking to me. But I believe I am justified in wanting to talk to you. Therefore I say: ‘A curse on you Germans for attacking us! A curse on your Hun Kaiser who has ravished Belgium, whose soldiers murder little children and rape women! A curse on all of you!’”

After saying this, the Frenchman sank wearily back on his pillow. Then the German replied:

“You sound like one of your newspapers. Could I expect you to be otherwise? I never had any great love for our Kaiser, nor for what he said and did. I also never really believed very much in what our newspapers wrote. But if I have to believe any of them, I certainly choose to believe our German newspapers more than yours. If I have to obey and sacrifice myself for anybody, then I certainly prefer to do it for the Kaiser rather than for any one of you. For after all, he is a German. His language is my language, his virtue is my virtue, and his guilt is my guilt, and for it alone I am prepared to atone.”

So the two wounded men fell silent again. Night fell, and when the dawn broke, it found them both in a weaker condition. Once again the Frenchman began to speak:

“What do you fat Germans know about our crystal dear ideas? I know that I am dying now, but even in this hour they still flash clear in my mind. I experience the forked lightning of the soul. It illuminates the whole world, which is thus made endurable, civilized, and free!”

“I too am dying,” murmured the German. “The twilight envelops me. I am getting lost in the mist. I feel so much alone! But I will return home now. I will be home soon. It is quiet and warm there. I do not want to think anymore — only to continue feeling — to feel like a German.”

The Rabbi, who just entered, overheard these last words, and he said to them:

“Why do you persist in quarreling in this last hour? Can’t you find something kind to say to each other? You are both Jews.”

At this the Frenchman said:

“Don’t Christians murder one another?”

And the German, his voice already sounding lifeless, added:

“They have drummed into our heads for too long a time already that brotherly love is an achievement of the Gospels....”

Several hours later, one followed the other into the slumber from which they would never awaken.

“Can’t you find something kind to say to each other? You are both Jews.”

A young blond medical assistant who had been listening to the discussion of the two dying men approached the Rabbi and said:

“Please explain to me ...”

“What?”

“The Jewish riddle.”

The Rabbi turned away from the dead, and followed by the doctor, left the barracks and went out into the fresh air.

“To be a Jew means to live another life not your own. To begin in another, to be fulfilled by another until completely possessed. At times it seems to me as if we were not at all ourselves. No sooner does the Gentile smell something than we begin smelling it too. Just look at the landscape about us, at the vegetation, the animals, the people and the city and surely you will become strangely enchanted by it all. Now who do you think experiences this landscape better and more thoroughly — the native who since childhood has lived in it, who perhaps knows no other,

or the one who in passing derives pleasure from it in the sudden recognition of a newly experienced charm? His own charms are hardly revealed to the native. Woe to him if they were! He lives according to the genius of his climate. What he experiences and creates takes place in the style and the tradition of this climate. Because the commonplace and the insignificant are at work within him, therefore the unusual and the great must emerge, opening up new sources of self-development. The alien, on the other hand, cannot react the same way. He can only have impressions of this world that is so alien to him, he can only describe it, translate it, write about it, sing of it.

“We Jews are everlasting strangers everywhere. There has never been a people in the world that has produced in ratio to its population so many musicians, actors, artists, writers as have the Jews. And yet there has never been a people in the world, having such a large number of musicians, actors, artists, and writers that has produced so little for itself. When we Jews sing about other peoples and other lands, we sing with a painful devotion, a deeper fervor, and a more dusky passion than when we sing about our own. Indeed, it appears as if all things achieve their fullest expression and their greatest charm through our efforts. The entire world concedes this and therefore cannot dispense with us.”

“And how do you think it will be when the Jews return to Palestine?”

The Rabbi smiled and said:

“Boring, my dear doctor.” ■

Excerpted from Never-Ending Tales: Stories from the Golden Age of Jewish Literature (2026) edited by Jack Zipes. Reprinted by permission of Princeton University Press.

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Councillor; Marilyn Iafrate, Ward 1 Councillor

Second row, left to right: Gino Rosati, Local and
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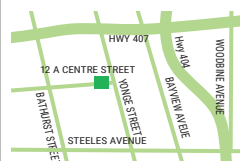


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BOOKS, MOVIES,
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OF NOTE

Poetry and Ping-Pong to Make the Most of Long Winter Nights

BOOKS / NON-FICTION

On Sisterhood and Survival

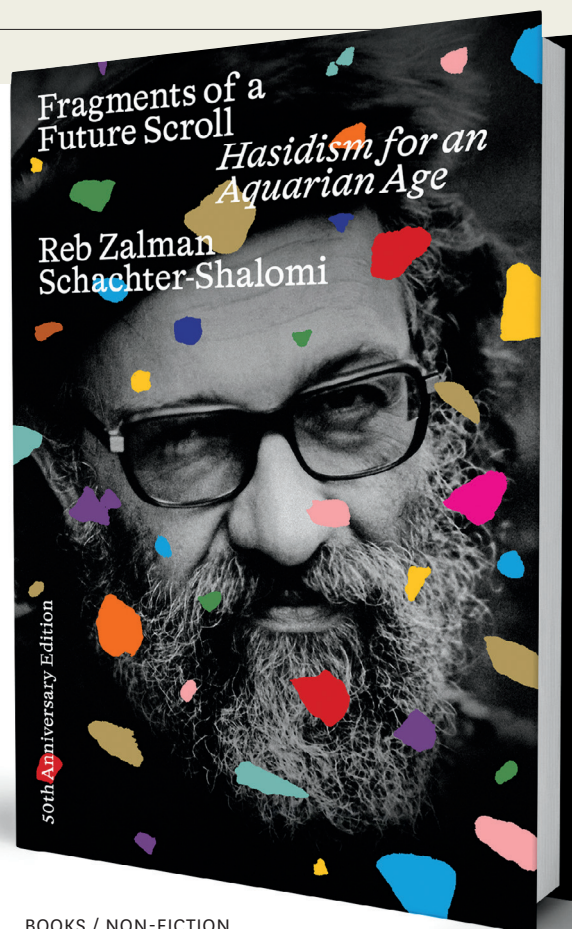
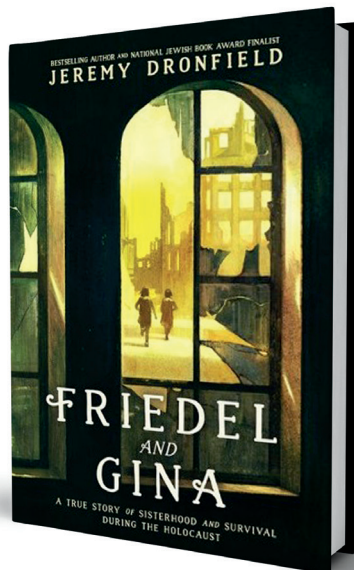
A HISTORIAN, author, and former archeologist, Jeremy Dronfield has a reputation for blending technical accuracy with compelling and emotional stories. In an earlier book, *The Boy Who Followed His Father into Auschwitz*, Dronfield demonstrated his knack for telling real, hard, stories of surviving

FRIEDEL AND GINA

Jeremy Dronfield

Quill Tree Books
March 10

the Shoah for young-adult readers. This new work follows twin sisters whose childhood in Germany collapses with the rise of Nazism. At only fourteen years old, the sisters are forced to cope with deportation, ghettos, and concentration camps all by themselves. *Sophia Hershfield*



BOOKS / NON-FICTION

Portrait of the Rabbi as a Young Man

RABBI ZALMAN Schachter-Shalomi (1924–2014) — better known as Reb Zalman — interwove his devotion to Lubavitch Hasidism (he was one of the first *shluchim*, or emissaries, of the Lubavitcher rebbe) with a zeal for spiritual innovation, ecstatic prayer, and environmental consciousness. He founded the Jewish Renewal movement, and his impact (much like the rainbow-striped tallit he popularized) is now ubiquitous. *Fragments of a Future Scroll*

FRAGMENTS OF A FUTURE SCROLL

Zalman Schachter-Shalomi
Ayin Press
December 30

was his first book; originally published by a small press in 1975, it has long been out of print. The rollicking, mind-bending text is Zalman's initial attempt at describing Judaism's unfolding place within an emergent "planetary consciousness" — and the capstone of nearly twenty years of spiritual exploration he conducted in the course of serving as Hillel director in Winnipeg. This fiftieth-anniversary edition presents an updated version of the original, alongside essays by Shaul Magid, Tirzah Firestone, and others to guide modern readers as they (re)discover this extraordinary text. *Zachary Kauffman*

BOOKS / FICTION

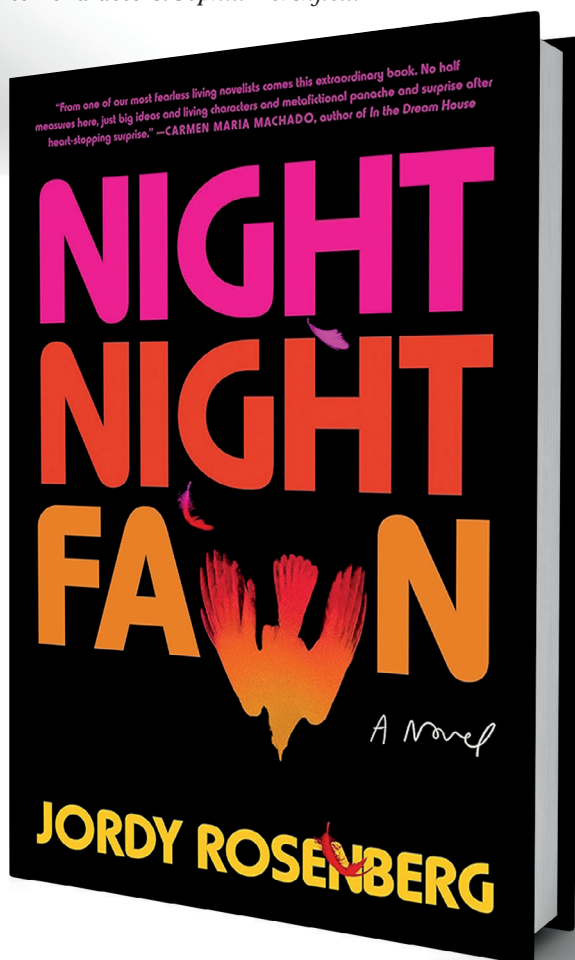
Memoir Mania

MEET BARBARA ROSENBERG: a yenta, a homophobe, and now a terminally ill woman, writing the story of her life from her Manhattan apartment. Blending her retelling of her marriage, career,

NIGHT NIGHT FAWN

Jordy Rosenberg
One World
March 3

and dramatic aspirations with her chaotic, embittered reflections on Karl Marx, philosophy, and the Jewish diaspora, she tries to come to terms with her two greatest disappointments: an estranged trans son, and a best friend whose betrayal still haunts her. Author of *Confessions of the Fox*, Jordy Rosenberg is known for tackling the messy intersections of family, identity, and regret through sharply written characters. *Sophia Hershfield*



BOOKS / NON-FICTION

A Mystic Among Marxists

GREATLY UNDERAPPRECIATED during his lifetime, Walter Benjamin is now regarded as one of the most significant thinkers of the twentieth century. Born in Berlin in 1892, Benjamin was a literary critic, philosopher, cultural theorist, and kabbalist. His most famous essay, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” explored how then-new technologies, like photography and cinema, were changing not just art but the way we see and experience the world. A Marxist with mystical leanings, Benjamin’s work defies easy labels: part poetry, part theory, always searching for the hidden meanings in everyday life. This new biography proposes to situate Benjamin within his Jewish heritage and the turbulent politics and philosophies of the twentieth century. *Sophia Hershfield*

WALTER BENJAMIN: THE PEARL DIVER

Peter E. Gordon
Yale University Press
February 24

POETRY

Subversive Ancestry



MY GREAT-GRANDFATHER DANCED BALLET

Misha Solomon
Brick Books
March 15

THIS POETRY COLLECTION by the Montreal writer and Concordia University scholar, who has been published in every Canadian literary journal imaginable, envisions alternative realities for a queer ancestor. The highly personal collection of poems moves between multiple locations and time periods, including New York City and Romania, as well as Solomon’s contemporary experiences living in Montreal. In his master’s thesis, where he developed this work, Solomon wrote that his hope was to create “metapoems that explore my queer longing” through an innovative Jewish lens. *Jonathan Rothman*



POETRY

Joy, Grief, Repeat

THIS IS THE THIRD BOOK by the Toronto-based poet. Her last one, 2020's *Nautilus and Bone*, took the form of an "auto/biography" of Yiddish-language feminist poet Anna Margolin, and became the first poetry book to win both top prizes at the Canadian Jewish Literary Awards and US-based National Jewish Book Awards. In *Sublunary*, themes in Richter's previous work, like memory, grief, and absence, re-emerge — this time woven in with references to mythology and Jewish folklore. Always

SUBLUNARY
Lisa Richter
University of
Alberta Press
March 10

present: the struggles of holding life's strangeness alongside its joyful and bewildering elements.
Jonathan Rothman



BOOKS / CHILDREN

Here Comes the Sun

IN THIS DARKLY MAGICAL FAIRY TALE, the children of a town awake to discover that both the sun and their parents have disappeared. They band together to search for the sun, and walk the streets of the gauzy, dreamlike Nighttime City, encountering strange creatures and neon-lit zoos, new smells and sounds, but no sun. Eventually, one brave girl suggests, if the sun is nowhere to be found, they may have to create one themselves.

HOW THE SUN WAS WON
Tom Haviv and
Jessica Tamar Deutsch
Ayin Press
March 3

The book is written by a co-founder of Ayin Press, Tom Haviv, and illustrated by the celebrated visual artist Jessica Tamar Deutsch, best known for her beloved *The Illustrated Pirkei Avot*; *The Lost Princess*, a retelling of a classic Rebbi Nachman of Breslov story; and many Jewish zines. *Zachary Kauffman*



BOOKS / CHILDREN

Smells Like Home

THE YIDDISH-SPEAKING Garlic Eaters exist blissfully in an allium-based utopia. They live underground in a garlic-bulb house, busy themselves with garlic-centric tasks, dress in garlic skins through the day, and snuggle into garlic cloves to sleep through the night. They are, as the young people say, living their best life. That is, until a rather large mole forces the Garlic Eaters to bolt (forgive me, dear reader) from their pungent abode, and the family must begin the journey to find

THE GARLIC EATERS
Madison Safer
Ayin Press
March 17

a new home and community that can accept them and their favourite food just as they are. Readers absorb Yiddish vocabulary, lessons about alienation, and messages about staying true to yourself along the way. *Zachary Kauffman*





BOOKS / CHILDREN

A Kaleidoscope of Traditions

FROM WHIMSICAL Judaica to hand-painted nesting dolls, artist, toy maker, and author Suzy Ultman brings joy and colour to everything she does. She is no stranger to children's books, with titles like *Shabbat Shalom* and *I Like Your Chutzpah* in her oeuvre. With bold design and playful storytelling, *How Do You Jew?* promises to celebrate the many ways Jewishness



HOW DO YOU JEW?
Suzy Ultman
Rise X Penguin Workshop
February 10

is lived today across traditions, identities, and communities around the world.
Sophia Hershfield



MUSIC

Singing in the Study Hall

RABBI DEBORAH SACKS MINTZ'S voice is like an acoustic deep-tissue massage. "Lincoln's Nigun," for instance, kneads deep into your kishkes, breaks you down, and then lifts you back up again. The eleven new melodies in this album combine the traditional Jewish liturgy with the spiritual fervour and low-grade ecstatic hum of the beit midrash. As usual, the ensemble recordings are supported by a rich chorus of community singers. Sacks Mintz, the Director of Tefillah and Music at the Hadar Institute, is an educator, musician, and facilitator of Jewish communal prayer. She (along with Joey Weisenberg and others in the Rising Song orbit) is part of a cohort of musicians weaving the soundscape of twenty-first century communal worship, and redefining the possibilities for what modern prayer can and should feel like. In recent years her melodies have been picked up by communities across North America and Israel.

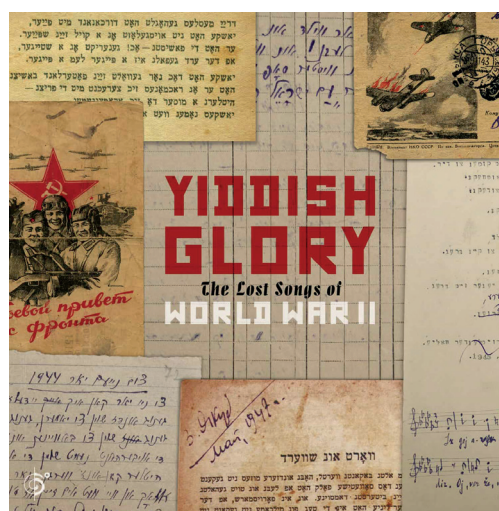
SONGS FROM THE BEIT MIDRASH
Deborah Sacks Mintz /
Rising Records
February 11

Zachary Kauffman

MUSIC

Sounds of Survival

THE MUSICAL PROJECT, touring live presentation, and ongoing research initiative is back with a fresh batch of recordings of Yiddish songs written during the Holocaust and recovered decades later by University of Toronto professor Anna Shternshis. The first instalment, *The Lost Songs of World War II*, was nominated for a 2018 Grammy Award. This follow-up includes another 25 tracks, many with themes of pushing back against censorship. *Jonathan Rothman*





FILM / COMEDY

Politics with Heart

ELLA MCCAY

Directed by James L. Brooks
In theatres December 12

BEST KNOWN for his contributions to television as a co-creator of *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* and *The Simpsons*, Brooks hasn't steered a movie project in thirteen years. His upcoming political dramedy drama tells the story of an idealistic thirty-four-year-old lieutenant governor of an unnamed state who is about to take over the governorship from her mentor, the long-time incumbent. Emma Mackey plays the titular Ella, and is joined by an all-star ensemble including Jamie Lee Curtis, Woody Harrelson, Albert Brooks, Ayo Edebiri, and Kumail Nanjiani. At a time when division and cynicism often dominate our news cycle, a film that humanizes people in politics may be especially welcome. *Sophia Hershfield*

FILM / SPORTS

Ping-Pong Putz

IN HIS FIRST theatrical release since his very-Jewish drama film *Uncut Gems*, director Josh Safdie tackles the strange and wonderful world of competitive ping-pong. Loosely based on the life of professional table tennis player Marty Reisman (played by Timothée Chalamet), the film is the most expensive project yet by indie studio A24. It remains to be seen if Safdie can prove himself without his brother, and if the film is really worth its \$70-million price tag.

MARTY SUPREME

Directed by Josh Safdie
In theatres December 25

Either way, *Marty Supreme* promises to be one of the most intriguing indie releases of the year, and a strong candidate for a Christmas Day pairing with some lo mein. *Sophia Hershfield*



FILM / BIOPIC

Sequins and Sad Songs

NOBODY LOVES a Neil Diamond tribute band more than Neil Diamond: in 2000, he surprised one such band, *Super Diamond*, onstage in Los Angeles, and he's

SONG SUNG BLUE

Directed by Craig Brewer
In theatres December 25

made an extended cameo in a comedy featuring another. That devotion to all things Diamond is the jumping-off point for *Song Sung Blue*, a dramatic take on a beloved 2008 documentary about a husband-and-wife Neil Diamond tribute act. Starring Hugh Jackman and Kate Hudson, the film promises to lean into sequins, heartbreak, and the glittery blur between real life and rock-and-roll fantasy. *Sophia Hershfield*



PHOTOGRAPHY: TOP LEFT, 20TH CENTURY STUDIOS; TOP RIGHT, SARAH SHANTZ/FOCUS FEATURES; BOTTOM, COURTESY OF A24



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CARMEL, 38
VANCOUVER
BY MIRIAM
LIBICKI

A JEWSPANESE ROOTS QUEST

Neither my father nor my mother have been to their ancestral homelands. My dad is a third-generation Japanese Canadian. Never been to Japan. My mom is a first-generation Ashkenazi Israeli. Never been to Poland or Belarus. I recently dove deep into family history, and travelled to Japan and Europe in the last year. I'm the first person in my immediate family to travel to both places.

The way that we envision family trees is we think that's you, your parents, their siblings, their kids, and then it grows out. But that's not how it works in Asia.

In Japan, the official tree is called your Koseki. If you are the eldest son, you will inherit the property. So the tree's really top-heavy, like this.

I compared the addresses on the Koseki to the telephone directory today, and noticed that a bunch of people with the same last names were still living there. I had to send letters, all in Japanese, to these addresses. And I said, "Hi! I'm your cousin from Canada."

The Kato family answered. This is my Jichan's mom's side. It was a full-blown, hours-long, sit-down meal. It was very formal, and it was great.

At the top of a forest hill overlooking the village, Mr. Kato showed me how to pay my respects to his family tomb.

The Koseki gives the facts like birthdates, death dates, names, and locations of the Japanese side of the family.

But the Koseki can't give context. No stories. Completely opposite to my Jewish side, where all I've got are stories and the dates and places are iffy. Before I travelled to Poland, I just had names of people and villages, and a couple of photos.

Despite having survived the Holocaust, my Safta's brother Moshe died in an East Berlin hospital in 1946.

To my knowledge, I'm the first person in my family to visit him in Weißensee Cemetery. Safta vowed to never return.

There's a picture of my Safta standing with my uncle looking back at the grave.

Based on the tombstones that were behind them, I stood in the exact spot and tried looking back at the same angle. That's how I was able to triangulate where he was.

He was stuck under ivy and had been completely grown over because his tombstone had fallen face down.

I brought stones from my family home in North Vancouver. My mom picked out the stones and I brought them with me to Europe.

I lit incense from my Butsudan, my ancestral Buddhist shrine, and rested them on the stones. I prayed in a mix of Japanese and Hebrew.

This process has created a bit of a lightness for me. I was carrying a lot of trauma on both sides of my family

Before, there were all these question marks around my head. I have no idea where I come from and my parents also have no clue where they come from.

I'm now making a career shift. I'm going into genealogy.

I want to help people discover their roots because I know firsthand what it has done for me and my mental health.

The trauma isn't completely gone, but it's lifted, and I feel more zen.



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jabramson@waverleycf.com

1. DRIP (Dividend Re-Investment Plan)

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