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Goldberg-Polin visits Portland for 'One Night...'

Jewish Federation of Greater Portland

The Jewish Federation of Greater Portland hosted "One Night with Rachel Goldberg-Polin" Sunday, Oct. 11.

The event welcomed nearly 300 people to the Mittleman Jewish Community Center for a conversation between Goldberg-Polin and Janine Kurnoff Gottheiner, Co-Founder and Chief Innovation Officer of The Presentation Company in Portland.

"At a time when so many in our Jewish community are carrying grief, fear, and uncertainty, bringing Rachel to Portland felt especially meaningful," Kurnoff Gottheiner said. "She reminded us of the power of showing up for one another, of holding space for both pain and hope, and the strength we find in community."

Goldberg-Polin is the mother of Hersh Goldberg-Polin, z"l, who was kidnapped by Hamas from the Nova Music Festival during the Oct. 7 attacks and was murdered in Gaza in August of 2024. Before and since his death, Rachel Goldberg-Polin has been a noted international advocate for the hostages from the Oct. 7 attacks. Her book, "When We See You Again," was published in April of this year.

See ONE NIGHT, page 2

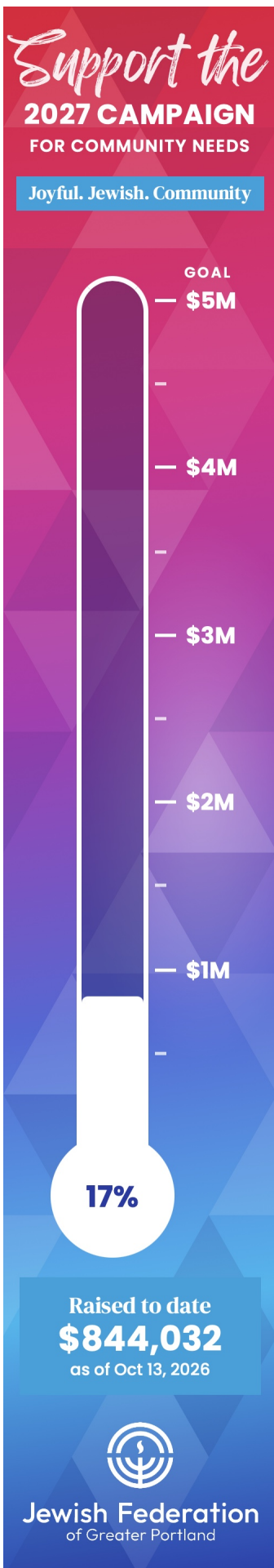


Above: Rachel Goldberg-Polin addresses a packed ballroom at the Mittleman Jewish Community Center Sunday, Oct. 11 during the Jewish Federation of Greater Portland's "One Night with Rachel Goldberg-Polin" fundraiser. Goldberg Polin, the mother of murdered Oct. 7 hostage Hersh Goldberg-Polin, z"l, spoke about the pain and loss the Hamas terror attacks and their aftermath have caused her family. Below left: Copies of Goldberg-Polin's book were distributed to attendees. Below right: Federation Board Chair Leslie Beard opened the proceedings. (Courtesy Jewish Federation of Greater Portland)



INSIDE

Security – page 8 | Parsha – page 9 | Events – page 11



Clockwise from left: Janine Kurnoff Gottheiner and Rachel Goldberg-Polin speak on stage at Sunday's Federation fundraiser. Audience members take in the evening's program. Federation Campaign Co-Chair Simon Gottheiner addresses the crowd. (Courtesy Jewish Federation of Greater Portland.)

ONE NIGHT (continued from page 1)

"The Jewish Federation was honored to bring Rachel Goldberg-Polin to Portland," Federation president and CEO Marc Blattner said. "She had this mesmerizing 'stoic poise' as she shared her experiences and her feelings. You could hear and understand the pain she continues to feel at the loss of her son, Hersh."

Goldberg-Polin, who worked as a Jewish educator prior to Oct. 7, discussed her experiences managing the pain of her son's captivity in Gaza and the grief of his death. She spoke of the support she has felt from Jewish communities around the world before and after her son's murder.

"She has this unique ability to talk about empathy, to talk about grief and everything that she's been through and educate us about how important empathy is and humanity is," Federation Board Chair Leslie Beard said. "In the light of everything that's happening in the world and that has happened, her perspective is important, and I think that as we gathered to listen to her, we all really learned quite a bit."

"What struck me most was Rachel's incredible warmth, generosity, and openness. Despite everything she has endured, she gave so much of herself to us. I felt that from the moment we met, and I think everyone in the room felt it, too," Kurnoff Gottheiner said. "I'm deeply grateful to the Federation for trusting me with this responsibility. It was truly one of the most meaningful experiences of my life."

It's a perspective that many in the audience seemed to share.

"I don't know if I've ever been in a room that has been that still and quiet. I felt like everybody was just like on the edge of their seat just listening to every word," Beard said. "I've read her book, people have listened to it on audio, and she certainly does a lot of podcasts, but there is something about hearing her in person that I think I'm never going to forget."



Heroes Along The Way:

The Americans Who Built the U.S.—Israel Bond

In celebration of America's 250th Anniversary

Monday, November 2 | 7PM

Congregation Neveh Shalom | 2900 SW Peaceful Ln.



Join us for a fascinating talk by Yuval Malchi, a prominent Israeli-American storyteller, public historian, and familiar voice in Israeli media

Discover the extraordinary, unsung Americans who helped shape and defend the State of Israel. From frontline nurses and social workers to covert intelligence operatives and military commanders, this talk brings history to life through gripping personal accounts.



Jewish Federation
of Greater Portland



Click to RSVP

JCO, Federation mark Oct. 7's third anniversary

By ROCKNE ROLL

The Jewish Review

"A day devoted to joy became a day that we struggled to speak about without tears."

This was Congregation Neveh Shalom Senior Rabbi Eve Posen's description of that day that a packed ballroom at the Mittleman Jewish Community Center came together to mark exactly three years after its occurrence at the Jewish Federation of Greater Portland's commemoration event Wednesday, Oct. 7.

"While Jews celebrated and young people danced at a music festival, Hamas terrorists murdered, brutalized, and kidnapped," Rabbi Posen continued. "A day that should have ended with tired feet and familiar songs, ended with families shattered, people missing, and a grief that reached across the Jewish world."

That grief inspired the centerpiece of the evening's program, the world premiere performance of Israeli composer Yaniv Paskal's "Tkuma" by the Jewish Community Orchestra of Portland. The piece is written in three movements; the first, "Song of the Land", was preceded by remarks by Congregation Beth Israel Senior Rabbi Michael Cahana.

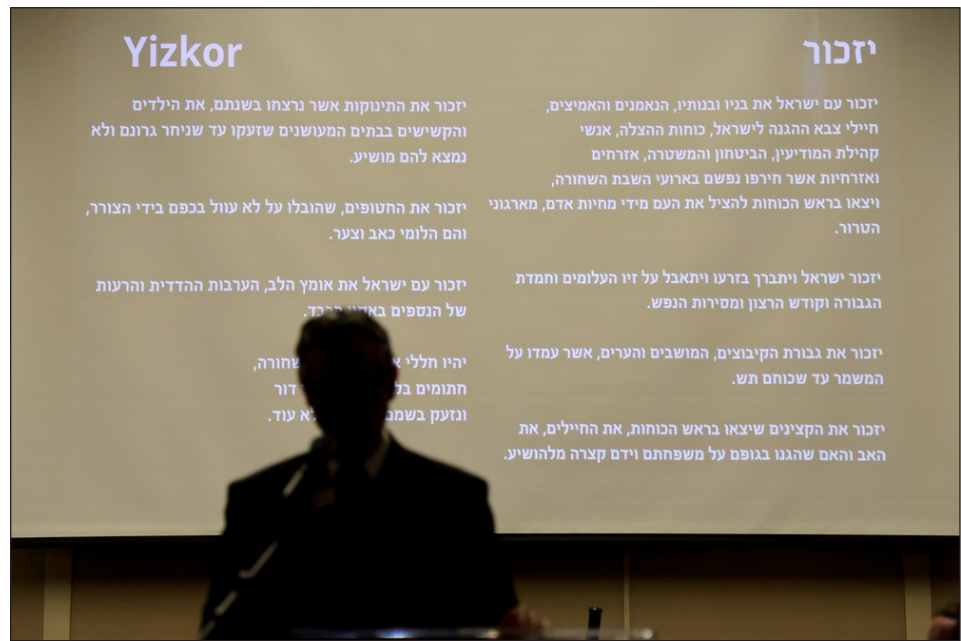
"May the people of Israel remember their sons and daughters, the loyal and the brave soldiers of the Israel Defense Forces, the rescue forces, first responders, members of the intelligence, security, law enforcement, police and civilians who risked their lives during the events of the Black Shabbat," Rabbi Cahana said following a moment of silence for the victims of the attacks.

The second movement, "The Wandering Jew," followed a prayer from Rabbi Sarah Rensin of Nehamah Jewish Chaplain Services.

"Creator of life, source of healing," Rabbi Rensin said, "grant peace in your great shelter of peace to our loved ones whose lives ended abruptly through acts of senseless violence. With sadness, we recall the joy that they brought into the world. Those voices and faces we will never forget."

Rabbi Posen's remarks preceded the third movement, "Tikvah."

"The Talmud teaches us that the whole tablets and the broken tablets were both



Clockwise from top: Silhouetted against the text of the Yizkor prayer, Rabbi Michael Cahana speaks at the Jewish Federation of Greater Portland's Oct. 7 commemoration event, held Wednesday, Oct. 7 at the Mittleman Jewish Community Center. Cellos of the Jewish Community Orchestra perform Yaniv Paskal's "Tkuma." Rabbi Cantor Eyal Bitton leads the recitation of the Mourner's Kaddish. (Rockne Roll/The Jewish Review)

placed in the ark our ancestors carried. The fragments of what had been shattered, alongside the tablets with which they would move forward. Both remain sacred. Both belong. I keep thinking about what that must have required. Someone had to gather the broken pieces. Someone had to carry them, and the community had to make room for the brokenness," she said. "That has been our work too."

Before leading the recitation of the Mourner's Kaddish, Rabbi Cantor Eyal Bitton, Cantor of Congregation Neveh Shalom, explained the importance of gathering as the assembly that evening was, and why the Kaddish must be recited in the presence of a *minyán*.

"Our tradition teaches us that there are many ways to grieve. There are many ways to mourn. Each different person

can hold different truths at the same time," he said. "But we are asked, we are encouraged not to grieve alone."

The program closed with songs of a different kind: "HaTikvah," the national anthem of Israel, "Oseh Shalom" and "Am Yisrael Chai," as well as comments from the Federation's Board Chair, Leslie Beard.

"I want to leave us with one simple thought: We are not alone," she said. "Oct. 7 changed us. We carry the grief of those we lost, the pain of those who continue to suffer, and the memories of those whose lives were changed forever. But tonight, you'll also witness something powerful: we are all here together."

Find a full recording of the event on the Federation's YouTube page at youtu.be/hAQhwBXQR0g.

Former hostages speak at Vancouver Chabad

By ROCKNE ROLL

The Jewish Review

Rabbi Shmulik Greenberg explained to the audience assembled at the Chabad Jewish Center of Clark County on Tuesday, Oct. 13, that what they were witnessing wasn't just a presentation – it was a miracle.

"This is not just a story we read in the news. This is a living miracle that we have the privilege of witnessing with our own eyes," he said.

He was speaking of the evening's guests, Sasha Troufanov and Sapir Cohen. The pair were kidnapped from Kibbutz Nir Oz during the Oct. 7 attacks and held as hostages in Gaza; Cohen for 54 days, Troufanov for 498. The experience was transformative for both of them.

"Before Oct. 7, I didn't feel a part of our nation," Cohen said.

They were at Nir Oz to visit Troufanov's parents when Hamas terrorists breached the compound.

"In that moment, I took a blanket, I put it over myself," Cohen recalled. "I decided that I didn't want to see anything, and we hid under the bed because there is no place to hide there."

"One of those terrorists came towards me and just punched me straight to the face while the others were preparing their weapons," Troufanov said.

Cohen was placed on a motorcycle and taken to Gaza. Troufanov tried to make a break for it.

"I managed to push them and started running. I remember the terrorists shooting at me from behind," he said. "I heard the bullets just whistling near me I remember the shouts in Arabic all around me."

A bullet shattered his left



From left, Sasha Troufanov and Sapir Cohen at "Finding G-d in Gaza's Tunnels" at the Chabad Jewish Center of Clark County Tuesday, Oct. 13. (Rockne Roll/The Jewish Review)

leg, leaving him unable to stand. Eventually, he too, was taken to Gaza on a motorcycle, as was his mother. His father was murdered on the kibbutz.

Cohen recalled her first days of captivity.

"I was with two other hostages. One of them was a man who just laid down all the day and closed his eyes, and the second one was a young girl, maybe 16 years old," Cohen recalled. "I remember that when I saw her, she was crying and she was shaking, and then she said to me something that, after, I felt completely different; she told me that all her family was in the kibbutz on Oct. 7 and she said, 'Sapir, I'm not sure that I have family anymore.'"

Troufanov, meanwhile, was entirely alone except for his kidnappers. They eventually had to take him to a hospital to treat his shattered leg.

"They didn't speak any English. I didn't know Arabic at

this point, so I couldn't even communicate with them," he said. "They put me in a small storage place in the hospital itself. And then came a nurse. I remember the look in his face when he needed to take care of me. He was so disgusted. He didn't want to do it, but they forced him to because they wanted me to heal from my injuries, to serve as a hostage."

The Israel Defense Forces came very close to his position during a raid, but they were not able to find him. Troufanov and the terrorist responsible for him hid out in a building as the IDF patrolled the area.

"The terrorist came close to my ear and whispered to me," Troufanov said. "'You can do whatever you want. You can pray. You can hope. I don't care. As long as there is no rain to serve as a cover for us to run, we are staying in this place for this night as well, and you will probably get killed here.'"

Troufanov said he prayed for rain – rain which soon appeared, and he was taken away again to a house with a wooden cage he was kept in. Later, he was moved into a tunnel nearly 100 feet below ground.

"Immediately when you walk in, you can feel the smell. It's so stinky. It's a mixture between mold, humidity, and feces," he said. "The hardest things for me were the silence and the darkness. In this tunnel, I spend many hours, sometimes even weeks, by myself without anybody. And in the tunnel, there is no sound at all. You can hear a cockroach walking on the floor."

Cohen was released after nearly two months. The people she had been held with were not so lucky.

"I discovered that eight of the hostages that I met in Gaza were killed," she said.

Cohen connected with Troufanov's mother, who

continued on next page

continued from previous page

learned that her husband was dead and her son had been kidnapped.

I decided that the best thing that I can do is just to go and to live with her in the same hotel and to be like a family for her," Cohen said. "I remember that sometimes she came to me and she said, 'Sapir, I don't want to live anymore. It's too much for me. I have nothing in this life.' I didn't know what I can say to someone in this condition, so I started to promise her grandchildren."

Five months after the attacks, Palestinian Islamic Jihad released a video which included Troufanov. Cohen said it was a day of celebration for her and Troufanov's mother.

"Sasha mentioned me in this video, so I was very excited. But three months

later, they published the second video, and in this video, Sasha didn't mention me," Cohen recounted. "I spoke with [his] mother about it. She said, 'He had to say what they told him to say.' But I said, 'no.' I knew that Sasha wanted to release me. And when he came back, I asked him about it, and he said this sentence: 'Sapir, I didn't want you to wait for someone that will never come back.'"

Troufanov said that the day of his release was emotionally complicated, because it was also the day that he confirmed that his father was dead. But his experiences stayed with him.

"I remember that when he came back from the captivity, the first sentence that he said to us is, 'Mama, I know that God exists,'" Cohen recalled.

"At first, I was so, so des-

perate. I couldn't cope. I remember for weeks I just was so miserable. I said to myself, 'What happened to me? Why did God put me to this challenge?' I didn't even believe in God at that point, but I still questioned him," Troufanov recalled. Suddenly, something within myself said, 'You must find something positive to think about. It doesn't matter what but try to reflect about something good.' I remember I took time for myself, closed my eyes, and just started to think about my mother and Sapir, my father that I didn't know was dead, and my grandmother. I knew they were hostages, and I started to wish them well. I wished them everything good that I could have think of, something that would help them go through this ordeal... When I opened my eyes, I felt so much strength within myself. Although I prayed for somebody else, it strengthened me, and it was obvious from the beginning. So, I decided to do that every single day, many times, and every difficult challenge that I need to face, I remember that the first thing I did is

just pray for God to help me go through that."

Cohen had not been much for prayer before her kidnapping, either, but in the month leading up to Oct. 7, she had been experiencing mysterious health issues and anxiety. She started to recite from *Tehilim*, the book of Psalms, each day – specifically Psalm 27 – each day for a month.

"I decided to focus on the words that I'm saying," she explained. "I realized that the chapter is not about a complete recovery; it's related to war and God saving from enemies, I just ask myself, 'from which war am I going to be saved?'"

The couple – who were on the verge of breaking up before their captivity, Cohen explained – are now married, have become Shabbat observant (which Troufanov had not been before) and are on tour sharing how their experiences have strengthened their connection to each other and their people.

"Everybody has a different direction they took in order to find their path to Judaism," Troufanov said. "But we need to stay strong."

PJA Open House is Oct. 25

Portland Jewish Academy

Portland Jewish Academy will host a K-8 Admissions Open House at the school Sunday, Oct. 25 from 10 am-noon.

Guests will be able to try interactive classroom activities with their children, meet teachers who inspire curiosity and challenge students to grow, explore PJA's rich, integrated curriculum and hear from students and parents about learning and belonging at PJA.

Interested families can RSVP online at pjaproud.org/open-house.

Free subscription:
jewishportland.org/subscribe



Chaval al hazman

חבל על הזמן

Literal translation: "A shame about the time."

Meaning: Used to describe something amazing, impressive, or excellent. Similar to saying "Awesome!" or "It's the best!"

Schmoozapalooza is Sunday, Oct. 18, at MJCC

By **ROCKNE ROLL**
The Jewish Review

Schmoozapalooza, the Senior Prom for seniors hosted by Jewish Family & Child Service, is back for a fourth year.

This year's event, themed around the "Roaring 20s" is scheduled for this Sunday, Oct. 18, from 1-4 pm at the Mittleman Jewish Community Center in Portland.

"We are once again partnering with the MJCC and we just love that partnership. We both have a real commitment to building a community where older adults feel included and celebrated," JFCS Director of Communications and Engagement Robyn Taylor said.

As with previous editions, the event is supported by a donation from Marcy Tonkin.

"Marcy Tonkin has sponsored this event every year and she continues to, and we're just so grateful for that because it gives us a chance to do this really big fun event for the community," Taylor said.

Unlike previous years, this edition will feature a live band, with The Carroll Raaum Swing Orchestra lending its Big Band-Era sound to the event's 1920's atmosphere. Named for its founding director, the late clinical research psychologist Dr. Carrol Raaum, whose interest in music therapy led him to create the orchestra.

"My interest in conducting a swing orchestra extends beyond the usual entertainment, dance or jazz styles," Raaum said on the band's website. "My interest tends more toward the healing power of music, on an individual up to a cultural level."



Above and below: Attendees cut a rug at the Third Annual Schmoozapalooza senior prom, held by Jewish Family & Child Service Sunday, Oct. 19, 2025 at the Mittleman Jewish Community Center in Portland. This year's edition will feature a 1920's theme and a live band. (Rockne Roll/Jewish Review file)

"This is the perfect band to play this event," Taylor said. "We're really excited."

If you've got a zoot suit or a flapper dress in your closet, this is the time to break it out. If not, no worries — come as you are and enjoy a flapper-themed feathered headband or bowler hat, as well as the costume accessories available at the ever-popular photo booth.

The afternoon is for ages 60 and up, but the list of those who make it go spans a much larger age range.

"It's a real community effort. We have a lot of volunteers that help, who are giving their time and energy to make it special," Taylor said. "We also have a lot of the seniors bring family members, so it does become intergenerational."

Most importantly, Schmoozapalooza is a major way that Portland's Jewish



community celebrates its seniors, particularly the Holocaust survivors living in the area.

"Especially in the Holocaust survivor community, nobody had a prom. A lot of people in the general senior community were like, 'we never had a chance to go to the prom.' So that was really how this was born four years ago," Taylor said. "It

was built with talking about the challenges of loneliness and social isolation with older adults. It's really about celebrating them and not focusing on the challenges of aging but recognizing that everybody needs these opportunities to get together."

Preregistration is free, required and available at jfcs-portland.org/senior-prom-2026.

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NEXT ISSUE

Issue date Deadline

OCT 22 OCT 19

Security Corner

Fall is security inspection season

By JESSICA ANDERSON

For several years, Secure Community Network has held a long-term vision of creating an objective evaluation process for its security programs. This has been years on the making and starting this month, the Portland program will be the first in the U.S. to undergo this review. Why Portland? We were one of the first communities to adopt the SCN initiative, and with only two security directors in over seven years, we have had great continuity, and your current director has been in place for several years.

I mentioned in my last column that this inspection process is part of a greater effort to designate the SCN Security Initiative as an “anti-terrorism” tool. The first step is demonstrating how the various elements of the security program (training, adopting processes, etc.) achieve this. The second step is demonstrating that SCN has a process of evaluation and revision. I will not pass this inspection with 100% success. SCN knows that some of its current standards are impractical, unable to be met, and need reworking. This inspection process will help document that. They will start to see similar patterns revealed after the initial handful of inspections. This process will help guide SCN in the revision of its standards, in line with the goal of achieving full DHS certification, for which designees must demonstrate confidence of continued effectiveness.

Each security program covers a different-sized com-



Jessica Anderson is the Portland-area Director of Community Security. She was previously an FBI agent for 24 years. This position is funded by SCN (the official safety and security organization of the Jewish community in North America) and a local three-way partnership of the Jewish Federation of Greater Portland, Oregon Jewish Community Foundation Endowment Fund and multiple Jewish organizations in the region.

munity: they are headed by a different security director, and they have different backgrounds and skill sets. All of this creates a unique environment in which to work, and this translates to nuances and variations in how security programs are managed and executed. When SCN first started developing security programs, there were significant differences in programs and how each was run. Each director was pretty much figuring things out on their own. To minimize differences between programs, SCN has begun developing a set of standards by which each SCN security program will be held.

These standards are designed to be specific, measurable, actionable, and relevant, and the process is intended to provide guidance and clarity on the fundamental traits of a successful security initiative. This ensures that both established and brand-new security programs — and the professional security directors who run them — will have clear guideposts, benchmarks, and expectations. This ensures a quality product is delivered to the Jewish community they serve and provides a

concrete method to evaluate the effectiveness of each security director.

The standards cover a broad swath of requirements that include Management and Operational Standards. Management Standards are everything from who is running the program, how they report to higher authorities and function administratively. Another element is community engagement — how is the director communicating with various groups, both within the community and outside? How extensive are public safety and interfaith relationships? Relationships are the key to a successful director, and they must show they have developed these, communicate with various community groups, and establish liaison relationships. The standard requirements include demonstrating that a risk analysis has been completed for every organization and a plan to address those risks.

Operational Standards relate to how we execute the day-to-day work. This includes responding to incidents, communicating with law enforcement, and sharing information with partners. We're

See **SECURITY**, page 10

The bumpy road from Adam to Avraham

By DR. YOSEF ROSEN
Noah (Genesis 6-11) - Recap

First the flood, then the tower: this week's Torah portion narrates two core stories that bridge the timeline between Adam and Eve (last week's parsha) and Abraham and Sarah (next week's parsha). We begin with a world whose human inhabitants have almost completely gone to ruin.

Last week we heard about several individuals who did wrong; this week we hear about systemic corruption: "The earth became corrupt before Elohim, and the earth was filled with violent crime" (Gen. 6:11). God decides to destroy this corrupted world by flooding it. The Hebrew root used in that verse for "became cor-

rupt," *vatisshakhet*, returns two verses later when God announces Their plan to "destroy" its inhabitants along with the earth: *mashkhitam*.

But rather than start again from Adam, God chooses Noah and his family to renew the human project. Noah is instructed to build an ark, gather representatives of every kind of animal onto it, and seek refuge in it while the waters inundate the planet. When the waters recede and the earth dries, God establishes the rainbow as a sign of promise to never again destroy the world by flood. We are then walked through a genealogy of Noah's descendants, extending up to six subsequent generations. Along the way, it describes the cultural developments of these times, including hunting, monarchy, and city

building, and sets us down in a world of diverse peoples: "From these the nations were separated on the earth after the Flood" (Gen. 10:32).

The final chapter tells the famous short story of the Tower of Babel. The Torah returns to a time when humanity shared a single language and settled together in the land of Shinar. With fired bricks and bitumen for mortar, they begin building a city and a tower whose top will reach the heavens, hoping to make a name for themselves and prevent their dispersal across the earth. God comes down to inspect their work and sees in their unity the potential for limitless human accomplishment, deciding to confound their language so that they can no longer understand one another.

Construction ceases, and



Dr. Yosef Rosen is the Director of Jewish Life and Learning at the Jewish Federation of Greater Portland.

God scatters them across the earth, bringing about precisely what they had hoped to avoid; the city is called Babel, a name the Torah

See ROSEN, page 10

One mitzvah can be the beginning at Chabad

By RABBI CHAYIM MISHULOVIN

The Jewish Oasis

Cullen was on his way to start a new job when something unexpected caught his eye: a nearly 60-foot sukkah stretching along the sidewalk outside Jewish Oasis in Portland's Pearl District. He stopped to take a closer look. Within minutes, he was shaking the lulav and etrog, experiencing a Jewish tradition he had never encountered before.

"I've lived in Oregon for six years, and this is the first time I've ever seen Jewish people," he told us.

What began as a chance stop on his way to work soon became much more. That evening, Cullen returned for

Sukkah in the City's celebration, where he met about 150 people. Days later, he came to synagogue for Simchas Torah. And he came back again.

In more than 20 years in Portland, I've seen countless meetings, surveys, and initiatives aimed at strengthening Jewish engagement. Yet too many struggle to produce lasting results.

Meanwhile, Chabad continues to grow around the world. What is the secret?

The Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, z"l, leader of Chabad, taught that we don't need to wait for Jews to join an organization or commit to religious life. We go out to meet them, wherever they are, and offer them the op-

portunity to do a mitzvah.

Shake the lulav and etrog. Put on tefillin. Light Shabbos candles. Every mitzvah matters in its own right and can open the door to another.

Chabad's distinctive approach is bringing mitzvot within reach of every Jew through a personal, welcoming presence that remains available long after an event ends.

George Rohr has helped establish Chabad centers on college campuses, bringing Jewish life directly to students. The Rohr family has made extraordinary philanthropic investments in Jewish life, including Chabad outreach around the world.

George put it plainly: "For anyone for whom a healthy

and vibrant future of Judaism is important, the best investment you can make towards that end is with Chabad."

This understanding is shared by donors of all sizes who recognize the lasting value of making Jewish life accessible.

At Jewish Oasis, Cullen's story is not an isolated one. These encounters happen regularly, thousands of times across Oregon's 16 Chabad centers and millions of times around the world.

One mitzvah can be the beginning of something much greater. If we want to strengthen Jewish continuity, we must invest in a Jewish presence that brings mitzvot within reach of every Jew.

SECURITY (continued from page 8)

required to ensure all organizations have training and risk assessments and meet cyber security and emergency planning standards. It's a lot of obligations, and there are challenges to creating enthusiasm in organizations to be able to meet them. Organizations have more than just security issues to manage, and everyone has only so much bandwidth.

As security directors, we're expected to meet these standards and articulate and document how we are trying to

achieve them. The key is to make sure organizations know what is available to them and be ready to help them achieve their goals when they are. The expectation is that we will be fully evaluated at least every three years, and ongoing check-ins for compliance will ensure revised standards are met. I look forward to sharing the results of this review with you. I am confident in the work I have been providing, and I hope that is borne out in this inspection process.

ROSEN (continued from page 10)

links to the Hebrew verb *balal*, "to mix" or "confound." Babel is the Hebrew name for Babylon, linking the great ancient city of Babylonia to the confusion of languages and the dispersal of humanity. From this same region, the Torah now introduces Abraham and Sarah, whose family begins a journey from Ur of the Chaldeans toward Canaan, and whose story begins next week.

Deep Dive: Reading Rainbows

Despite containing many a colorful story, the whole Hebrew Bible speaks of rainbows in only two contexts, one well-known and one partly censored. In this week's parsha Noah is shown a rainbow in the sky as a divine sign that there will never again be an ecological catastrophe as severe as the flood. The rainbow promises that the storm has passed and mankind will be protected from further destruction. Noah's response to this divine guarantee of protection is telling: rather than gathering his family for reflection and planning, rather than laying the groundwork for a renewed society, he turns to wine—seeking perhaps to blur the edges of his trauma rather than process it. After spending a year at sea with no one but his family and the world's zoo, his first thought is to pour himself a stiff one—how relatable. He plants a vineyard. Not wheat for bread, not vegetables for sustenance, but grapes for wine. The rainbow's promise of protection, it seems, was not enough to inspire true renewal.

There is only one other rainbow in the Hebrew Bible, and it's a lot less well-known. It's a rainbow that appears "By the Rivers of Babylon" to Ezekiel, a priest violently displaced from Jerusalem by the Babylonian empire (around the 6th century BCE). The first diasporic Jew, Ezekiel, could have turned inward, could have focused only on how to protect his traumatized community in Babylon. Instead, he lifts his eyes and sees something astounding: a vision of the divine presence on a chariot, wrapped in the same rainbow that had once promised Noah mere survival. Ezekiel sees that the Divine has now become mobile (a "god-mobile"!) and can be encountered anywhere, even far from Jerusalem. For Ezekiel, this rainbow becomes something more—not just a sign of protection from previous traumas but a symbol of

new models of Jewishness, not just a promise of protection but an experience of sacred presence in unexpected places. For Ezekiel, the rainbow transforms from a sign of what won't happen (no more floods, no more exiles) into a vision of what can happen (encountering the presence of the sacred anywhere). His rainbow doesn't just guard against past traumas; it illuminates new possibilities.

For theological reasons, though, Noah's rainbow became the preferred reference point for the Jewish practice of blessing rainbows. The Babylonian Talmud (Berakhot 59a) records Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi's view that one should bow when they see the rainbow. After all, Ezekiel describes the Divine radiance as resembling a rainbow and responds to its appearance by falling on his face. Seeing a rainbow, on this reading, offers an experience akin to encountering the Divine presence—an overwhelming experience that one can only respond to by bowing in humility. But other rabbis were not too keen on the optics of bowing before a rainbow, since it could look like worshipping the rainbow itself. Instead of bowing, they instituted a blessing, one that Jews still recite today when they see a rainbow: "Blessed are You...who remembers the covenant, is faithful to His covenant, and keeps His promise."

Here, Noah is the sole reference-point for the blessing, as the rainbow of Noah is a sign of God's covenant with the natural world, a symbol that God will never bring full climate catastrophe again. The rabbinic discussion thus draws Jewish practice away from Ezekiel's revelatory understanding of the rainbow to Noah's covenantal one.

We can bless the rainbow for the promise made to Noah and still look at it with Ezekiel's eyes (though the later rabbinic tradition warns one not to gaze at the rainbow just as one would not gaze at God). After the storm, we need both the reassurance that life can continue and the imagination to discover sacred possibilities in a changed world.

Noah's rainbow assures us that life can continue after catastrophe; Ezekiel's rainbow asks us to build a Jewish life that can encounter God where we have landed, even when we cannot return to the world we have lost.

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