

THE WEEKLY PRINT

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'We won't normalize it': Friends of Ziv and Gali Berman mark twins' 28th birthday in Hamas captivity

As the Israeli twins spend their second birthday in captivity in Gaza, their close-knit circle from Kibbutz Kfar Aza continues a grassroots campaign to keep their story alive — and push for their release

By Tamara Zieve

As Israeli twins Ziv and Gali Berman mark their 28th birthday in captivity on Wednesday — their second since being kidnapped to Gaza from Kibbutz Kfar Aza during the Hamas-led terror attacks of Oct. 7, 2023 — their close-knit group of friends is quietly commemorating the day while continuing their public campaign for the brothers' release.

Known to their loved ones as inseparable, Ziv and Gali are not only the best of friends but also deeply connected to — and the center of — their childhood circle in Kfar Aza. Ziv, the more quiet and reserved twin, and also the funny one, and Gali, the loud, extroverted and charming one, complement one another and gravitate toward each other, friends say. But testimonies from released hostages suggest that the two have been separated from each other while in captivity.

Their birthday, said Inbar Rosenfeld, a lifelong friend of the twins, "makes us stop for a moment and remember, and get

a sense of the time that they haven't been here — and this is the second birthday [in captivity.]"

"It's crazy, it's tough — we never thought we would get to this situation," Rosenfeld told *Jewish Insider* on Tuesday.

At the request of the Berman family, their friends have chosen to forgo large public events to mark the occasion this year. Instead, they are flooding social media with messages and appearing in traditional media to amplify the call for the twins' release. The hope is that, somehow, those efforts will reach Gali and Ziv. "To show they are still with us and we are doing everything for them," said Rosenfeld. Former hostages have shared that media coverage and visible solidarity gave them strength during captivity.

"We hope they are keeping up their spirits and are still optimistic, and we hope that we are managing to convey to them good energy from what we are doing from

afar," Rosenfeld said.

Nineteen residents of Kfar Aza were kidnapped on Oct. 7. Twelve of them were released in the first hostage deal in November 2023, after which members of the kibbutz launched an ongoing campaign for the return of the remaining seven. Emily Damari — whose house Gali rushed to on Oct. 7 so she wouldn't be alone — Doron Steinbrecher and Keith Siegel were released in a ceasefire deal at the beginning of the year. Yotam Haim and Alon Shamriz were mistakenly killed by Israeli fire in December 2023. The Berman twins are the last two residents of the kibbutz still held in Gaza.

A message shared by the Berman family on Wednesday said, "Our beloved Gali and Ziv, how we feared this day would come—a second birthday in hell. You are 28 years old today, though we're not sure you even know it. We watch videos from past birthdays, from the normal world, and our hearts break. You were surrounded by your

closest friends, celebrating in your vibrant neighborhood, drawing everyone to you like magnets. Eating, drinking, being carefree. You have lost your freedom and control over your own lives.”

“We imagine that you have been reunited, that you are embracing each other, encouraging and strengthening one another. We know you don’t understand how you can still be there, or when you will be free again,” it continued. “We promise you this will happen – you will return to the safe embrace of your mother. Hold on just a little longer, survive, and dream of a happy ending. We are calling out: Enough! End this endless war that exacts such a heavy price in hostages and soldiers.”

The campaign for the hostages from Kfar Aza has included printing T-shirts with the hostages’ names, the distribution of magnets, hats, pins, bracelets and bags, and various events, including a beach footvolley tournament and a second-hand clothing sale organized with celebrities. Rosenfeld, a

fitness trainer, has also held special workout sessions dedicated to the hostages.

“There is one goal, to spread and reach each and every person so that they get to know Gali and Zivi,” Rosenfeld explained. “Not just by name and not just by the title of ‘the hostages.’ But so that they really get to know and connect with them.”

Ido Felus, another close friend of the twins from Kfar Aza, said that their second birthday in captivity fills him with a mix of pain and perseverance. “I am sure they are coming back, I have no doubt of that,” Felus told JI.

“Both of them have the best hearts I know,” Felus told JI. “They both love life. They’re different but also very similar. They’re very sociable people, they have so many friends — you could talk to any one and they would tell you about their strong relationship with them because this is the kind of people they are.”

“I can’t believe this is their second birthday in captivity but it gives me more

drive to continue to fight so that they can be here.” Felus noted, “We go through so much every day ... and they are still stuck in Oct. 7, still in that sense of fear, chaos, probably very hungry.”

Both Felus and Rosenfeld said they try not to get caught up in media reports about hostage negotiations, instead choosing to stay focused on their grassroots advocacy.

“I’ve learned that until they’re here I won’t be calm, so of course I see the reports, but I will believe it when I see the picture of true victory — of both of them hugging their mother, Talia,” Felus said.

“And until then I will continue full force — we won’t normalize it [their captivity].”

Felus also underscored the importance of support from Jews around the world: “We know we can’t do anything without you ... you really give us so much strength until we see Gali and Zivi here at home.”

“And if this somehow reaches Gali and Zivi,” he added, “You know that I love you and we’ll do everything to bring you home.” ♦

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Charlie Kirk remembered as a bulwark against antisemitism on the right

Josh Hammer told JI: ‘He was really holding back some really nasty stuff in some very young, far-right online circles. ... Part of me kind of worries, frankly, about what that energy does from here in his absence’

By Matthew Kassel, Emily Jacobs

Charlie Kirk, the 31-year-old Trump ally and conservative campus advocacy leader who was fatally shot at an event at Utah Valley University on Wednesday, was seen as a crucial bulwark against rising antisemitism and anti-Israel antagonism on the far right, friends and acquaintances told *Jewish Insider*.

While he was best known as a fierce and unyielding critic of what he assailed as the excesses of left-wing culture, Kirk, the founder of the youth activist group Turning Point USA, also cautioned against the risks of young conservatives embracing antisemitism and online conspiracy theories about Jews and Israel.

“There is a corner of the internet, of

people that want to point and blame the Jews for all their problems,” he said at a recent event. “Everybody, this is demonic and it’s from the pit of hell and it should not be tolerated.”

Jewish conservatives who were close with Kirk both personally and professionally lamented his death as a major loss for the long-term standing of pro-Israel sentiment in the MAGA movement, citing his continued defense of Israel and recent commentary warning against the embrace of antisemitism on the far right while visiting college campuses nationwide with TPUSA.

Kirk’s impact on the online right’s discourse was significant, and his views on

Israel were closely watched as other right-wing podcasters turned more critical of the Jewish state. In the runup to the U.S. strike on Iran’s nuclear facilities, Kirk drew outsized attention for cautioning the Trump administration against attacking Iran, citing the fallout from young conservatives, who supported the president over his promise to end foreign wars.

But after the attack was successful, Kirk praised Trump’s decision after the strikes degraded Iran’s nuclear threat without the U.S. getting involved in a wider war.

Rabbi Pesach Wolicki, executive director of Israel365 Action, a subset of Israel365, the advocacy group that describes itself as an “Orthodox Jewish institution that believes

that Jews and Christians must respect one another,” spoke to Kirk on Tuesday evening for what he referred to as a “work meeting.” Wolicki said he could not get into details of the call, but noted that the two began communicating regularly as Kirk began facing pushback from the far right for refusing to abandon his support for Israel.

“The fact is, Charlie didn’t agree with every decision that the Israeli government made, but he was one of the most avid defenders of Israel out there,” Wolicki told JI. “Most people’s exposure to Charlie visiting campuses is those viral clips they would release, but 40 to 50% of the questions Charlie would get on campuses for the last year and a half were about Israel. He didn’t go to those campuses to talk about Israel, but that’s where the students would always bring it to. Half the time he was on those campuses, he was defending Israel.”

While he and Kirk did not always align in their conversations about Israel, the GOP activist “was always wanting to learn, wanting to know what the truth is and what are the right ways to answer these questions,” Wolicki said.

“All I saw in every conversation was sincerity and concern and just a love for Israel, even when he disagreed with Israel, even when Israel frustrated him,” he told JI.

Even as Kirk faced criticism for defending Elon Musk after the billionaire tech mogul came under scrutiny for amplifying an antisemitic conspiracy theory, his allies said he had a strong connection to Israel and the Jewish community that motivated his advocacy.

Josh Hammer, a conservative political commentator and a personal friend of Kirk’s, argued that Kirk’s affinity for the Jewish people was grounded in his evangelical Christian faith and the fact that some of his earliest professional mentors were conservative pro-Israel champions like

David Horowitz and Dennis Prager.

Hammer said he and Kirk engaged regularly on the best ways to address rising antisemitism within the GOP, and that he was concerned about how Kirk’s absence going forward would impact that surge.

“He was a young conservative leader, and he very much had his thumb on the pulse of the fact that Gen Z is trending in a not so healthy direction on the Israel issue and on antisemitism in general,” he told JI.

“We would talk about how to turn back the tide against that,” Hammer added. “He was really holding back some really nasty stuff in some very young, far-right online circles. He was doing more than maybe anyone in the country to fight that. Part of me kind of worries, frankly, about what that energy does from here in his absence.”

Kirk, an evangelical Christian, had been working on a book about the Sabbath that is set to be published in December, called *Stop, in the Name of God: Why Honoring the Sabbath Will Transform Your Life*.

“He would turn his phone off and generally disconnect for 24 to 25 hours,” Hammer told JI. “He was someone who genuinely believed not just in the New Testament and part of the Christian Bible, but he genuinely believed in the Hebrew Bible as well. He had a very special place in his heart for those who were called upon to be God’s chosen people in this world. He was of genuine conviction that the land of Israel was promised to the Jewish people.”

Jewish American and Israeli leaders expressed appreciation on Wednesday for Kirk’s support for the Jewish community and Israel, which he visited at least twice on trips he recounted as personally meaningful.

“Charlie Kirk was murdered for speaking truth and defending freedom,” Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on social media. “A lion-hearted friend of Israel, he fought the lies and stood tall for Judeo-

Christian civilization.”

Jared Kushner, President Donald Trump’s son-in-law and a former White House advisor, called Kirk “a close friend and a special human being,” saying he “represented the best of MAGA. Firm in his beliefs, compassionate, curious, and respectful.”

The Republican Jewish Coalition, in a statement on Wednesday, said that Kirk had been “a shining light in these troubled times for the American Jewish community, and we are deeply saddened at his passing.”

“Charlie was a fearless advocate for freedom, a supporter of Israel and the Jewish people, and a friend,” the RJC said. “He was cut down while doing what he loved to do, communicating with the next generation of American leaders on college campuses about the issues that affect us all.”

Halie Soifer, CEO of the Jewish Democratic Council of America, said she was “devastated by the horrific, unconscionable, depraved murder of Charlie Kirk,” adding: “Political violence should have no place in this country, and it’s incumbent on political leaders on both sides of the aisle to make that clear.”

Shabbos Kestenbaum, a Jewish pro-Trump activist and outspoken opponent of campus antisemitism, said that Kirk’s death leaves a vacuum on the right as antisemitic figures including Tucker Carlson and Nick Fuentes find growing audiences.

“Charlie repeatedly referred to antisemitism as ‘demonic’” and “hated it viscerally,” Kestenbaum told JI.

“Behind the scenes, Charlie was working with prominent Jewish individuals here in America to change the narrative surrounding Israel,” he said. “He was a mentor to me and millions all over this country. I fear for the future of the conservative movements’ attitudes towards Israel without Charlie.”

Inside ‘Arthur’s vision’: Brandeis University restructures, looking to be more economical

New reform, spearheaded by President Arthur Levine, will reorganize departments to cut redundancies, prioritize long-term faculty over adjuncts

By Jay Deitcher

The article first appeared in eJewishPhilanthropy.

In 1948, Jews across America banded together to raise funds for Brandeis University, named after Louis Brandeis, the first Jewish justice of the U.S. Supreme Court. At the time, most American universities were affiliated with sects of Christianity, and many allotted only a small number of slots for Jewish students.

“What we did back in the ‘40s was a radical concept,” Eitan Marks, special assistant to the president at Brandeis University, told *eJewishPhilanthropy*. “We said higher education should be for everyone, not just the elite, not just the privileged, not just men, not just white people, but anyone who wanted access to higher learning... That was what we contributed to the landscape in 1948, and what we’re contributing to the landscape today is a renewal of the liberal arts education for the modern age.”

His optimistic outlook about this “renewal” — which follows a period of hard financial times for Brandeis — is one shared by the vast majority of staff at the institution. In March, 87% of faculty voted for the fully implemented restructuring, which is being presented at the National Press Club in Washington on Wednesday. The high spirits radiating through the campus starkly contrast with the views most employees held of the university’s management only one year prior.

Brandeis, like most American colleges and universities, has struggled post-pandemic with low enrollment, rising administration costs and high tuition. Problems exacerbated for higher education institutions after the Trump administration set itself on defunding colleges under the premise of combating antisemitism and left-wing politics. Just last May, Brandeis fired 60 employees, and in the fall, Brandeis

President Ronald Liebowitz resigned after faculty voted that they had no confidence in his leadership, specifically pointing to frustration with his budgeting, fundraising and response to campus protests against Israel.

Liebowitz’s replacement, Arthur Levine, a former president of Teachers College at Columbia University, has proved a much more popular leader, according to Brandeis faculty members, with many affectionately calling the reorganization “Arthur’s vision.”

Getting 87% of university faculty to agree on anything is amazing, Jeffrey Lenowitz, the Meyer and W. Walter Jaffe associate professor of politics and chair of the faculty senate, told eJP. “We spend all day reading journal articles and books and finding problems with other people’s arguments.”

The previous university structure included three core schools: a school for arts and sciences, which served graduate and undergraduate students; a school of business and a school for social policy, both serving graduate students. The restructuring creates four core schools that feature both undergraduate and graduate programs: the School of Arts, Humanities and Culture; the School of Business and Economics; the School of Science, Engineering and Technology; and the School of Social Sciences and Social Policy.

The goal is to have overlap between schools and between undergraduate and graduate programs, with students able to take certain introductory master’s classes that will count towards both their undergraduate degree and a future master’s degree.

Programs with lower enrollment are being reviewed with the possibility of merging with other programs. “We are trying to look at how we can continue to offer as many of the things that we currently

offer for our students, but doing it in a slightly different way in some cases,” Carol Fierke, provost and executive vice president for academic affairs, told eJP. For instance, the school for social policy and the school of business each offered MBAs, but those programs are now merged. Courses will also be shared across majors, so one class may fill multiple needs. Fierke does not anticipate changes will lead to firings, though the university has shifted away from depending on adjunct professors, prioritizing long-term faculty.

“We didn’t do this because of finances,” Fierke said. “We did this because we thought that this was a more exciting way to organize the institution.” But she acknowledges that “we are also hoping that by bringing together some different disciplines, that they will find ways to share courses that are more exciting and possibly could decrease cost.”

As a way to better prepare students for careers, schools will have increased focus on internships and research, with undergrads working side to side with grad students in the university labs, something that has always happened but will now happen more.

The School of Business and Economics launched two new majors during the restructuring: “quantitative economics” and “philosophy, politics and economics,” which bridges schools with students taking classes in philosophy and politics from other departments.

“Our goal is that having these new and interesting majors will attract more students to Brandeis, and it’ll give opportunities to our existing students to branch out in different areas,” Linda Bui, dean of the School of Business and Economics, told eJP. The school also hopes to launch a minor in sports analytics, which would be

an opportunity to engage “students who wouldn’t necessarily think about economics and business into entering into this area.”

When a major is added to a school, it causes ripple effects, Susan Birren, dean of the School of Science, told eJP. Her school is adding an engineering major.

“Everything changes in science,” she said. “This bringing in of new engineering faculty gives us the opportunity to really open up some new areas of research and depending upon who I talk to and what conversations I have, that means that my laboratory will be bringing in new techniques, will be bringing in new ideas, that students will be doing new things. There’s nothing static about any of this. It’s all about not only recognizing that change happens, that change is inevitable and not being afraid of it.”

For the first time, undergraduates will be able to take classes in the Heller School for Social Policy and Management, a graduate program within the School of Social Sciences and Social Policy that allows students to study with leading policy analysts. “This brings undergraduate students much closer to that policy process than they have been in the past,” Sara Shostak, dean of Social Sciences and Social Policy told eJP.

Students will hopefully not notice major changes, Fierke said, but will simply view the university “as one Brandeis.”

The reason staff overwhelmingly supported the changes is that they were involved in the planning, Lenowitz said. “It’s hard to find [an employee] in another university that isn’t going through lots of changes at their university, but [the changes are] usually quite aggressively top down. The way that we’ve done it at Brandeis has been quite consultative, with engaging with faculty quite deliberative, from the moment Arthur got here. It’s something to be proud of, that we are being treated as partners in reshaping the university going forward in a way that it seems quite unique.”

The reorganization was proposed by at the end of January, new staff positions including two new roles — vice provost for undergraduate affairs and vice provost for graduate affairs — were announced in May and the reorganization occurred on July 1.

Future planned changes in “Arthur’s vision” include an improved career center, which “is something that Brandeis has perhaps lagged behind some of the other schools,” Fierke said, and a revised core curriculum set to launch next fall that will

focus on “micro-credentials,” which are sought after in the employment world, such as communication and leadership skills. Additionally, the university is fundraising for a potential Center for Jewish Life in partnership with Hillel. The historically Jewish school has never had a physical building focused strictly on Jewish life on campus.

“You can be an undergraduate at Brandeis and work in a lab with a Nobel-winning professor,” Marks, who graduated from Brandeis in 2024, said. “I don’t think you can do that anywhere else.” His undergrad thesis was titled “Building Brandeis: A Jewish-American Movement,” and today he is proud to be part of the movement that began in the 1940s to offer a Jewish contribution to American higher education. This reinvention is the next step, he said, and it should inspire others.

“I see shutting down programs at BU, at MIT, at Harvard, all these other schools, and we’re the only ones who have a plan,” he said. “We’re the only ones with a plan to move higher-ed forward, not just for us, but for the whole higher education project.” ♦

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In new book, former Obama speechwriter calls on Jews to stand proud for their values

Sarah Hurwitz said she hopes her second book, ‘As a Jew,’ resonates with progressive Jews who have distanced themselves from Zionism

By Gabby Deutch

Growing up at a Reform temple in suburban Boston, Sarah Hurwitz learned that Judaism is just “four holidays, two texts and a few universalistic values.”

When she left home, she largely eschewed all Jewish observance for two decades, she reflected in a recent interview with *Jewish Insider*. In that time, she got two degrees at Harvard and reached the pinnacle of Washington success, serving as a senior

speechwriter, first to President Barack Obama and then to First Lady Michelle Obama. If she engaged with Judaism at all, it was with a light touch — she was merely a “cultural Jew,” as she usually called herself.

“I just didn’t realize there was Jewish culture. I just meant, ‘Oh, I’m anxious and kind of funny,’” Hurwitz told JI last month.

Approaching a midlife crisis, Hurwitz found her way to an intro to Judaism class at a Washington synagogue nearly a decade

ago. She embarked on a journey of learning Jewish traditions and studying Jewish texts that sparked her first book, the 2019 *Here All Along*, a joyful and accessible primer to Judaism.

“Its thesis was, ‘Isn’t Judaism amazing?’ Not a lot of Jews are going to disagree with that thesis,” Hurwitz said.

She is doing something different with her new book, *As A Jew: Reclaiming Our Story From Those Who Blame, Shame, and*

Try to Erase Us, which was published this week.

"This is definitely a book with an argument. It is definitely edgier than my first book," Hurwitz said.

That's because in *As A Jew*, Hurwitz is grappling with a question that struck at the core of who she is, or at least who she was until a decade ago. Why, she asks, was she always qualifying her Judaism? She was always a "cultural Jew," an "ethnic Jew," a "social justice Jew," she writes. Hurwitz was never simply a Jew, one word, proud, head tall.

In her new book, as she tackles the millennia of antisemitism that led her to unwittingly minimize her own identity, she is asking questions that others who similarly distort or diminish their Jewish identity may not want to face.

"I was really trying to make others comfortable with me, right? I didn't want them to think I was one of those really Jew-y Jews, which ... why would that be bad, again?" Hurwitz said. "Why did social justice have to be my Judaism? Why couldn't Judaism be my Judaism?"

This doesn't mean Hurwitz is criticizing people who engage with Judaism through a social justice lens, or through culture, or any other avenue besides religious observance. Her own personal Jewish learning journey has not made her an Orthodox Jew. The argument she's making is that Jews should engage with Judaism ... well, Jewishly — by learning what Jewish texts have to say about social justice, rather than taking some universal values like "care for the vulnerable" and calling that your Judaism.

"Social justice is also a gorgeous way to be a Jew when you actually know what Judaism says about social justice," said Hurwitz. "When I was this kind of contentless Jew, I don't really know what I was doing. I was often just articulating my own views and opinions and kind of attributing them to Judaism."

She begins with a basic question: The Holocaust happened because the Nazis hated the Jews. But why did they hate the Jews? OK, the Jews were the scapegoat after World War I. But why the Jews? That unanswered question makes it hard for anyone to identify modern-day antisemitism, Hurwitz argues.

"These poor kids, it's very confusing, because they've gotten Holocaust education, and they're like, 'That's antisemitism education,'" said Hurwitz. "And then you get to campus and there are no Nazis, and you're like, 'What is this?'"

To answer that, she goes back thousands of years. The book examines Judaism in the context of the historical movements that have tried to crush it, or at least confine it: early Christianity, the Crusades, the Spanish Inquisition, the Enlightenment, the Holocaust. Not each of these eras sought to eliminate Judaism, but each one presented a particular idea of the good kind of Jew.

Throughout history, some Jews always tried to adapt to the mores of the day and disavow essential parts of Judaism in order to fit in. The only problem, writes Hurwitz, is it didn't work. You can be Jewish, but not too Jewish. Like when modernity swept across Western Europe in the 19th century, and Jews could suddenly become citizens

of France and Germany — so long as they placed their country's identity above their Jewish identity.

"This book was very much my journey to stripping away all those layers of internalized antisemitism, anti-Judaism, all of that internalized shame from so many years of persecution, and just saying, 'You know what, no, I'm a Jew,'" said Hurwitz.

Hurwitz pitched this book before the Oct. 7 Hamas attacks that sparked a wave of global antisemitism. But she says the events of the last two years have only furthered her argument that Jews throughout history have felt the need to separate from parts of their community to earn the approval of the rest of society.

"Oct. 7 did not change the overall argument at all. It unfortunately, in many ways, gave this devastating, heartbreaking, new evidence from the argument," Hurwitz said.

Hurwitz hopes to reach a broad audience. But she spent a decade and a half enmeshed in Democratic politics professionally, and she particularly hopes to can reach Jews on the left who have distanced themselves from Zionism partly as a condition of their belonging in progressive spaces.

"I am hoping that I can speak particularly to Jews who maybe have identified as Democrats, who are a little bit more on the left, and I can tell them why I am a Zionist. I can tell them why I think it is so important that Israel exists," Hurwitz said. "I can make that argument, and I'm hoping that it will be credible coming from me, in a way that maybe it wouldn't from others." ♦

The 'good news' and 'not so good news' about Jewish giving from historian Jack Wertheimer

In a wide-ranging interview, Wertheimer discusses his new book, 'Jewish Giving, Philanthropy and the Shaping of American Jewish Life,' and the philanthropy trends people might be overlooking

By Nira Dayanim

The article first appeared in eJewishPhilanthropy.

Faced with a daunting list of challenges — the COVID-19 pandemic, Hamas' Oct. 7 terror attacks and Israel's ensuing wars, and the surge in antisemitism that accompanied them — Jewish philanthropy has been forced to react rapidly in recent years.

If anyone can provide a deep context about the long arc of Jewish philanthropy and the forces at play in this fraught moment, it is Jewish historian Jack Wertheimer, a longtime close watcher of giving trends, whose 18th book, *Jewish Giving: Philanthropy and the Shaping of American Jewish Life*, was released in July.

Through hundreds of interviews with professionals in the field, Wertheimer provides an in-depth cross-section of the current world of Jewish funders, grantees and nonprofit professionals. At the same time, the work offers a wide scope, examining the trajectory of the field from the colonial era to today.

Recent challenges have led many to question Jewish philanthropy's relevance and ability to meet the current moment. But Wertheimer, taking the long view of history, paints a more nuanced and positive picture of the field and its ability to adapt.

Wertheimer spoke with eJewishPhilanthropy following the release of the book about current trends in philanthropy, communication gaps between grantees and grant makers and the inspiration behind the book.

This interview has been lightly edited for length and clarity.

Nira Dayanim: As a community, we're at a time of significant and often volatile change. Faced with that, it can be difficult to see the forest from the trees,

if you will. Having written this book, what are some of the changes in the Jewish philanthropic space over the last few years that you think people might be overlooking or missing in the midst of the chaos?

Jack Wertheimer: That's a great question. In part, it's premature to answer because we don't have a lot of data yet, specifically about post-Oct. 7 developments in the philanthropic world. But the turmoil, if you will, in American Jewish life didn't begin on Oct. 7, it goes further back than that. The upsurge of antisemitism was evident already. There was all kinds of other turmoil that we experienced as a result of COVID-19 and the extent to which that shook things up too. So, there are certain data points that we don't have available yet to measure precisely what's happened philanthropically. That said, there have been broader trends that have been indicative of what's been happening in American Jewish life.

To begin with, a basic issue, the sums of money that Jews are giving to Jewish causes has increased quite dramatically. By my estimate, in the early 2020s, it was at least double what it was thought to be in 2014. We don't know what it was in 2024 let alone 2025 yet. But in 2020-21 or so, my best estimate is that somewhere between \$13 billion and \$14 billion was donated by Jews to Jewish causes, which includes Israeli causes. That is considerably more than the sums that had been donated as few as six or seven years before. That's the good news story.

The not so good news story is that the base of donors who are contributing that sum is continually shrinking. More and more money is being raised from fewer people. What has dramatized this, to my mind, is the 2020 Pew study, which found for the first time in many, many decades, probably

historically, only a minority — 48% of Jews who were surveyed claimed that they had given to a Jewish cause during the previous year. That may have changed post-Oct. 7, we don't know yet. There is anecdotal evidence of Jews who were giving most of their largesse to nonsectarian causes who have begun to shift since Oct. 7, giving more of their largesse to Jewish causes. That gets to the question of sums of money, but we also don't know whether a higher percentage of Jews have been giving to Jewish causes than when the Pew study was conducted in 2020. That's also indicative of what's been happening in American Jewish life, where you have a stronger core of more committed people, on the one hand, and a significant population of Jews who seem to be drifting further away and losing interest in American Jewish life. So in that sense, philanthropy serves as a bellwether of the developments that we know have been going on.

What I've tried to do in the book is not to isolate Jewish giving, or, Jewish givers from the recipients, from the grantees, but to see them in the round. The sums of money that are being given are also having an impact, obviously, on the grantees. What we have seen is the continuing proliferation of grantees in American Jewish life. Right now, there's a lot of concern about just how many organizations are involved in combating antisemitism, and to what extent they're competing with each other, cooperating with each other, stepping on each other's toes. But that's not a new complaint. There have been similar complaints about other areas in American Jewish life, where the proliferation of Jewish organizations has led to such a level of decentralization that we don't know to what extent the entire enterprise is inefficient. Right now the focus is on possible inefficiency in addressing antisemitism, but in other periods of

time, as I point out in the book, there were concerns about inefficiencies in providing social services, providing shelter for the homeless, finding food support and so on for Jews and Jewish immigrants in an earlier period of time. But that's kind of built into the American system of volunteerism, where the ethos of America is that you volunteer to support or to not support, to be involved or not to be involved. And while some people find this very disturbing, this is the reality of American life, not just American Jewish life.

ND: So building off of that, in the book, you describe this catch-22 that some legacy Jewish institutions face, where many 21st-century Jewish philanthropists prize innovation and view established institutions as perhaps too inflexible to make it, while at the same time limited funding is a contributor to that inflexibility. I've also heard numerous times about this sense of "great waste" or redundancy of efforts in the world of Jewish philanthropy and nonprofits. It seems there's a push and pull amongst philanthropists on whether it's better to splinter or consolidate. And I'm wondering what you make of it. Which is closer to true?

JW: Well, to answer that question, we also have to be sensitive to what we mean by philanthropists. Staffed foundations primarily have been the most concerned about this issue of redundancy, but we have to understand that the foundations represent a relatively small minority of the dollars that are raised to support Jewish causes. Most Jewish philanthropy is given by people of some means, but not of staggeringly huge means. By that, I mean people who are capable of giving \$10,000, \$20,000, \$50,000, \$100,000 annually. And that makes an enormous difference. They are the ones who support and sustain the main institutions of Jewish life.

Foundations play a very different role, and that's one of the one of the other areas that's often not understood. Foundations see themselves as the so-called "passing gear." They provide the opportunity to innovate and to take risks in investing in risky enterprises. That is separate from the vast majority of Jewish organizations,

some of them with a long history, a 100-year history, if not more than that. Other organizations have been established much more recently, but all of them are dependent upon philanthropists who sustain them, who see the value of the work that these organizations do. What has to be added here is that in supporting some of these organizations, these philanthropists also become "machers" in those organizations. They get catapulted into status positions within those organizations. And while some people may frown upon that, I don't. One of the motivations of people who give philanthropy is that they are seeking status, among other things. And there's nothing wrong with that, from my point of view.

To come back now to the foundations, they are interested in innovation, primarily, not in sustaining. What gets really complicated, because there's no way to trace this easily, is that many of the people who establish foundations are also sustainers of existing organizations, but they don't necessarily support them through their foundations, but rather by writing checks, personal checks. It's very difficult, if not impossible, to really trace that. So while we know a large foundation might be giving in support of a particular initiative, we don't know what the board members, let alone the founder of that foundation, may also be giving through personal checks to sustain institutions such as that person's local synagogue, local day schools, federations, social service organizations, organizations involved in combating antisemitism. That money is not channeled through the foundation, but the same people give from different pockets, if you will.

ND: So with larger funders, it's different arms of the same organism acting differently?

JW: Yes. And one could also speak here about a division of labor that's taking place. There are funders who are particularly interested in sustaining institutions that they value. They are frowned upon by some people who study philanthropy because they're not being strategic, because they don't have a great initiative that they're supporting. But from their point of view, they're supporting their local synagogue, they're supporting their local day school,

they're supporting their Federation, and by doing so, they're supporting Jewish life. That's their strategy, and there too, I don't frown upon that at all, even though there's some who study the field who do frown upon that kind of non-strategic giving. But again, we have to understand that there is a division of labor, and were it not for this, American Jewish life would collapse. It can't be sustained just by the foundations. And the proof of that came during COVID-19 because foundations suddenly realized that they had to be sustainers too, otherwise the summer camps and the JCCs and the day schools and synagogues would collapse.

ND: In your book, there's a chapter titled "What grantees and grant makers say about each other." I found that really interesting as someone who also spends a good amount of time listening to both. In the process of writing this book, what are some of the biggest disconnects you've noticed between the two? What aren't people saying to each other? Why?

JW: What became clear to me was that there are expectations that grantees have of their grant makers, which are not realistic. Grantees often hope, for very understandable reasons, that their grant makers will provide continuing financial support. That's just not realistic for many foundations which have a limited sum of money to distribute and are interested in continually finding new worthwhile initiatives to support. If they continue to support the same organizations and the same projects, then they're obviously not going to have the funds available to support new types of causes.

The other thing that's often been stated is that grantees often come to funders with a laundry list of possible projects. "These are different things that we could do. Why don't you tell us what you'd be interested in funding?" That's not exactly the way most of these foundations, especially staffed foundations, operate. They usually have very specific strategies that they develop on their own, and then they seek out possible grantees who can enact those strategies for them. So there's a misunderstanding often on the part of grantees about the role of large funders, especially of staffed foundations.

On the other side of the equation, there

also are frequently voiced complaints — and this is not unique to the Jewish sector at all — that the demands of funders for the time and investment of energy and coming up with new proposals often is not commensurate with the funding that's available and is unrealistic about the staffing that not-for-profits have, because the staff members don't have time to fulfill all of the requirements that funders are asking them to do just in order to apply for a grant, let alone to eventually demonstrate the way the grant has been used.

The other point that I would add to this is that there are relatively few people who've sat on both sides of the table and understand or see things from both sides. And what became dramatic to me was the few examples of people who told me how shocking it was to suddenly be placed in a very different situation. In other words, someone who worked for a foundation suddenly was working for a grantee organization and was surprised at what was being asked of this particular person by funders. That's a long-winded way of answering your question.

ND: Something I found particularly interesting in the book was the discussion of staff conformity at foundations. Specifically you touch on generational gaps and how they impact how foundations operate. I'm wondering if you can tell me a bit more about how that shapes the philanthropic ecosystem for better and for worse.

JW: I can speak about the more recent past. The unknown is the extent to which there has been a responsiveness on the part of foundations to this concern that I've raised and that others have raised also, and that they're working harder to educate their staff members, and therefore some of the issues that I heard about when I interviewed people, three, four five, six years ago, whether they've lessened as a result of that. Certainly, one of the ways in which the ecosystem has been affected is that professionals working for Jewish not-for-profits have been leaving because the culture in which they have been working has been unpleasant, has been

stressful.

I spoke with people, and I quote such individuals — people who've been professionals working for Jewish organizations for decades — who have said to me, "I can't believe how I'm spoken to by younger people who are relatively fresh out of college, have very little experience with the Jewish community and treat me as if I'm a moron, and they know all the answers." That is demoralizing, clearly, and the responsibility of the staffed foundations is to educate their younger staff members that they don't know it all, and that there is a wisdom that long-time professionals working for Jewish organizations have that they may be able to learn from. But until that happens, clearly there will be some people who just will give up and decide to find employment working for nonsectarian organizations where they're treated more respectfully. So that's certainly one way in which the ecosystem has been affected. But I don't want to overdo this or exaggerate this, because there have been concerted efforts to try to address this particular challenge.

The other aspect of this is the unpleasant experiences that professionals working for Jewish not-for-profits, have with some funders who throw their weight around and have unrealistic expectations of how they want to be treated, and who, in some cases, as I write about, behave in an abusive fashion. There, too, a lot of work has been going into both educating funders as well as enlisting funders to speak as peers to others who may be misbehaving. So this is a work in progress.

ND: This is an uncertain moment for the Jewish community, and many are searching for clarity about what lies ahead. While it's impossible to predict the future, when you think about the moment that we find ourselves in, in the Jewish nonprofit space and in the communal ecosystem, what points in history come to mind, and what do you think we could stand to learn from them?

JW: Obviously, what I'm going to say now is speculative, because I'm not a prophet. Much depends on how Jews will respond in

the longer term to the crises of the current decade — and by crises I'm referring first to COVID, which we still haven't fully recovered from, especially in terms of mental health issues, certainly the surge of antisemitism and anti-Israelism in this country, and third of all, the crisis of Israel and the relationship with Israel. We know that there has been a segment of the American Jewish population that has been rallying to greater interest in being Jewish as a response to these crises. The Jewish Federations of North America has labeled this a "Surge" of interest, and there is evidence that some institutions have seen an upsurge of interest of Jews who want to learn more about their Jewishness, about Judaism, about Israel, about the Middle East, about American Jewish history. There's also evidence that particularly amongst the younger cohorts of Jews, there is either a distancing from Israel, for a whole range of political reasons, or a sense that, that "what's happening in the streets and the universities of this country, is just so disturbing that that I just want to step away from the whole thing." That kind of mentality.

What we don't know is the proportions between these two — the proportion of the "Surgers," as opposed to those who are distancing themselves, if not checking out completely. It's difficult at this point to predict that. That having been said, on an anecdotal level, there are remarkable incidents that we hear about of people coming out of the woodwork during COVID-19 and certainly after Oct. 7, who had not given before, who were eager to give to federations as an example, eager to give to Jewish organizations, eager to give to Israeli organizations. So in terms of philanthropy, we've seen that kind of surge of interest amongst people who had not been on the radar of many Jewish organizations in the past. We hear about an upsurge of interest in conversion to Judaism, in some cases, on the part of non Jewish spouses of Jews who want to publicly identify more strongly with with Jews, and at the same time, we also hear about or read about some disturbing data about Jews who are, as I've used this term several times, already distancing themselves because the whole thing is just

too overwhelming to them or too disturbing to them. So I wish I could give you an upbeat answer to your question about what the future holds. We're seeing both of these trends occurring, and at this point, it's hard to anticipate which one will be the dominant trend.

ND: My biggest takeaways from reading your book was the way that Jewish philanthropy has acted historically as an ark for Jews in distress abroad, and helping Jews domestically overcome barriers due to discrimination. Today, it feels like we're faced with amorphous challenges, likely because in many cases we don't yet have the solutions. For you personally, does having a sense of the broader history of this topic make you more or less hopeful that we can meet today's challenges?

JW: When it comes to philanthropic giving, there's reason to be hopeful about the generosity of a certain sector of Jews who are prepared to give to aid Jews abroad, specifically in Israel, and are prepared to give to support organizations that are addressing antisemitism and anti-Israelism in this country.

But there's a whole other challenge that we face, which some would claim is the much greater challenge. That is the challenge of what used to be called Jewish continuity. That term has fallen into disuse, but certainly there is a challenge of educating and providing a compelling experience for younger Jews so that they will choose to join in and participate and remain engaged with Jewish life. And there are some sectors of the Jewish community that are far more focused on that than on antisemitism. For example, that's an area where the Orthodox

community has shown its strength. The Orthodox community is much more likely to invest its philanthropic support in its Jewish educational institutions than is the case with non-Orthodox groups, the Conservative movement, the Reform movement, Reconstructionist movement, these movements have had far more difficulty attracting support.

The question that I have in my mind is whether, in light of the of the deep concern that Jews are feeling about the Jewish future, whether they will rally and come to the conclusion that the best investments are in the education and the engagement of the younger generation of Jews, who, after all, represent the future.

ND: So the last question that I always like to ask is, if there's anything that I didn't.

JW: The one question I was expecting you to ask me, which you didn't, is, "Why did you write this book?"

ND: I'd love to know the answer.

JW: So I wrote the book in part because I tend to do research and write on topics that I'm curious about, in other words, that I want to learn about for myself. That's been the case with other things that I've written also, and I've been curious to understand what this whole enterprise of Jewish philanthropy is all about.

But the second reason that I wrote about it is because there was a time in which Jewish philanthropy was something that the Jewish community felt very proud about, and I write about this in the introduction to my book. Non-Jews also have expressed admiration, as they still do, for not only the sums of money that Jews are prepared

to to invest in Jewish institutions, but also the mechanisms that have been created by the community to enrich Jewish life in the United States.

But in recent years, rather than looking upon this whole area, the Jewish not-for-profit area, with pride, there's been a lot of negative commentary that's been offered about it, that we're living off of the 20th century, and the institutions of the past are not meeting the needs of the current century. They're 20th-century institutions, and the money that's being invested is being wasted. There are two opposite types of arguments being made. Jews are giving too much money for Jewish causes. They should be much more concerned with tikkun olam and saving everybody else in the world. Or Jews are giving away too much of their largesse to nonsectarian causes, not paying enough attention to Jewish causes. But the good feeling, the positive feelings that Jews have had about the philanthropic causes and the Jewish ecosystem that it supports, seems to have dissipated. So one of my other motivations was to try to understand what has been created in this country and what continues to be sustained in this country. And my conclusion, as you will note in the last paragraph of the book, is that I think it's really quite impressive what has been accomplished by the American Jewish community, which is not to say that there aren't areas that warrant criticism. We've spoken about some of them today. I certainly write about some of them. But the infrastructure of Jewish life and the supporters of Jewish life, I think, deserve to get their due, their credits. That's one of the reasons I wrote this book. ♦

Lawler challenger Peter Chatzky says Israel violating U.S. arms sales laws

The Democratic candidate also said he does not believe that far-left NYC mayoral candidate Zohran Mamdani is 'taking actions I would claim to be antisemitic'

By Marc Rod

Peter Chatzky, the deputy mayor of Briarcliff Manor, N.Y., and the latest of seven candidates to join the field of Democrats hoping to unseat Rep. Mike Lawler (R-NY) in New York's Hudson Valley region, is standing out from the field with the comparatively critical stance he's taking toward the U.S.-Israel relationship.

Though Chatzky called Israel a "critical ally of the United States," he told *Jewish Insider* in a recent interview that he believes, from public information and reports he has seen, that Israel is violating conditions in U.S. arms sales law relating to humanitarian aid and international law — requiring the suspension of arms sales.

The district, New York's 17th, has one of the largest Jewish constituencies in the country. Lawler has made his support for Israel a centerpiece of his time in Congress, and most of the Democratic candidates in the race are showcasing their pro-Israel bona fides.

"[U.S. support for Israel is] incredibly important to people in this district, many like me, many are Jewish. Many have family in Israel," Chatzky said. "I think all of us in this district believe that Jews have a right to feel safe, particularly in Israel, and I think U.S. policy has to recognize that. I think the safety of the Jewish people, the safety of an ally, is paramount, and should be paramount in everything we do."

At the same time, Chatzky said he believes findings from international observers and media that Israel is in violation of U.S. laws conditioning arms sales on adherence to human rights law and support for humanitarian aid. He said he's also been concerned by pictures and video coming from Gaza.

"Israel has a 100% right, 1,000% right, to defend itself. I recognize war is brutal," he said. "We have an obligation in the U.S.,

we have a legal obligation, we have a moral obligation, to uphold our own standards, our own laws. ... I think the U.S. could be doing a much better job, and we should do it with every ally. This is not an Israel-specific thing. Every ally should be held to our high standards of morality and support for humanitarian aid."

Chatzky said that the U.S. should be "maximizing efforts to provide humanitarian aid" and doing "all we can" to protect innocent civilians.

He said that the issue is "sensitive" in the district, and that there are some constituents who are not willing to engage with any criticism of Israel or suggestion of wrongdoing. Chatzky said he has family in Israel, but said he has not had the opportunity to visit the Jewish state.

He said he would not support efforts to impose specific conditions on arms sales to Israel that aren't applied to any other U.S. allies, though he said he might support efforts to expand congressional oversight over such matters globally.

Chatzky said he supports a two-state solution, but that such an outcome depends on having representative governments that are willing to negotiate — something that is not currently the case in Gaza.

" Hamas is certainly not representative of all the people who are living on the Gaza Strip, the Palestinians. I don't think they have the same sort of democracy-focused interests that true leadership would require to establish that two-state solution," Chatzky said. "It's still a lofty goal. It would be great. I don't have the magic formula to get there next week."

Asked about the U.S. strikes on Iran's nuclear facilities in June, Chatzky said he doesn't feel there has been enough "transparency" or "reliable information" available about the strikes, their effectiveness

and the impact of those strikes on civilians. "It's hard for somebody who doesn't have access to all the privileged information to know what the facts are," he continued.

He said he supports a negotiated solution to deal with Iran's nuclear program, adding "nobody really wins if a nuclear war is initiated anywhere. And I think America always has to take whatever steps they can to limit that."

While Chatzky said that he "can't really defend" Democratic New York City mayoral candidate Zohran Mamdani's refusal to fully disavow calls to "globalize the intifada," he said that Mamdani "does seem to have tremendous support among some Jewish leaders."

"I haven't seen him taking actions I would claim to be antisemitic," he continued. He said he thinks Mamdani understands and will do what is necessary to protect the Jewish community in New York City. "Making assumptions that he would somehow ignore such a significant chunk of his constituency — I'm not seeing anything in that in his campaign so far."

Asked about the rise of antisemitism domestically more broadly, Chatzky said that "we have to take a critical look at everything governments are doing and make sure they're not even accidentally inspiring more antisemitic behavior."

"We have to just be careful about the policies we're putting in place and who we're blaming," he continued. "We're currently in an America that seems to be bent on divisiveness and finding people to cast blame on. And I'm worried some of the antisemitism we're seeing is because of that sort of national attitude of 'Who's the bogeyman in this instance?' And we have to avoid that at all costs."

Chatzky, in his campaign, is highlighting past confrontations with President Donald

Trump's business as a private citizen, mayor and deputy mayor of Briarcliff Manor, N.Y. At different points in time Chatzky and the town successfully blocked or forced the Trump organization to modify plans for development and major events at Trump's golf course in the district.

"I am the only one who's actually battled toe-to-toe with Donald Trump," Chatzky said.

Chatzky argued that he's also the only candidate in the Democratic field with a decade of experience in elected office and 40 years of experience running a business,

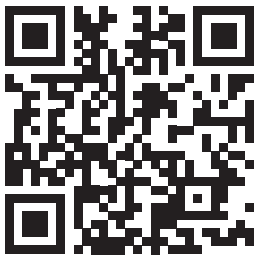
having founded a tech company.

He said that a crucial job for Congress will be to rebuild the institutions and reputation of government disrupted by Trump and his administration. He said he also wants to see the U.S. build its social safety net, something he said he's always done for his own employees in his business career.

At the same time, he said he's had experience at the local level working across the aisle with Republicans and with colleagues to his left, explaining, "it's about building coalitions, which I think is badly needed in American national-level politics

today. I think we all have to start speaking together much more comfortably."

As of the end of the third quarter, Chatzky fell in the middle of the pack of Democratic candidates in fundraising. Rockland County legislator Beth Davidson led with \$855,000, followed by national security veteran Cait Conley with \$816,000, Chatzky with \$680,000, nonprofit executive Jessica Reinmann with \$535,000, former FBI agent John Sullivan with \$301,000, former journalist Mike Sacks with \$212,000 and Tarrytown village trustee Effie Phillips-Staley with \$152,000. ♦



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