

THE WEEKLY PRINT

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SEPTEMBER 16, 2026

Supreme Court to hear case of man blocked from holding minyan in his home

Daniel Grand is suing the city of University Heights, Ohio, in a case that has attracted attention from the federal government, Republican lawmakers and Jewish groups

By Marc Rod

The Supreme Court is set to hear a case this winter brought by a man whose hometown sought to block him from holding a minyan in his residence, a case that Jewish community advocates argue could have profound implications for religious Jews as well as those of other faiths.

Daniel Grand, an Orthodox Jewish man, sought to organize a weekly minyan on Saturdays in his home in University Heights, Ohio, because he lives far from any Orthodox synagogue and it was impractical for him to walk to services. But the city issued a cease-and-desist, including a threat of fines or prison time, demanding that he stop holding the services and apply for a permit to operate his home as a synagogue.

Grand applied and paid for the permit and an attorney, but ultimately withdrew the application, in part because he learned he would not be able to continue to live in his home if the permit were granted and he faced what his attorneys described as obstruction by then-Mayor Michael Brennan.

At issue in this case is whether Grand had standing to sue the city before fully seeing through the permitting process; lower courts have ruled that he needed to have the permit rejected before filing suit. Grand, unusually, filed his petition for the Supreme Court to hear his case himself, without a lawyer, at which point the high court took the case up and will hear it on Dec. 9.

Grand's attorneys argue that the city's initial decision to block Grand from holding the minyan was sufficient to create standing for him to sue, and that the harm to him has continued since then. The city alleges that Grand is attempting to force the Supreme Court to "serve as a local planning commission" and assess its local zoning ordinances.

Grand alleges, per a brief filed by his lawyers, that he has faced a "torrent of harassment and religious discrimination" and surveillance by the city and Brennan personally.

The City of University Heights declined to comment on pending litigation. Brennan, citing the advice of legal counsel, also

declined to comment and referred *Jewish Insider* to his attorney, who likewise declined to comment.

Upon being asked by another resident to put a stop to the minyan, the brief states, Brennan personally called to tell Grand he was barred from holding "any type of religious gathering" in his house without a permit and threatened criminal charges. Grand's attorneys allege that Brennan remained personally involved in a campaign to harass him.

Brennan also allegedly turned the hearing for his application into a "public spectacle," ordered police to monitor Grand's home for signs of religious gatherings and urged neighbors to do the same. One neighbor installed multiple security cameras recording Grand's home, footage from which was reviewed by Brennan and city officials, and the city threatened Grand when he attempted to block the cameras.

The city also launched a criminal investigation and charged him with what his attorneys characterize as "spurious"

violations, as well as stopping trash pickup from his home.

Some of the public opposition to Grand's efforts to hold a minyan has appeared overtly antisemitic: One letter to the city about the case complained, "I am not Jewish and I do not want our neighborhood labeled as Jewish."

The city's current mayor, Michele Weiss, is the first Orthodox Jewish woman elected mayor anywhere in the United States and the city has the largest concentration of Orthodox Jews in Ohio.

Solicitor General John Sauer, joined by other Justice Department officials including Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights Harmeet Dhillon, filed a "friend of the court" brief on behalf of the U.S. government in support of Grand.

It argues that the past precedent has been interpreted and applied incorrectly, and that Grand is eligible to apply for legal relief.

"[The city's] demands succeeded, leading petitioner to cancel his prayer group and imposing an objectively reasonable chill on religious exercise," Sauer's brief continues, further criticizing the permitting process that Grand was compelled to engage in, including paying to hire a lawyer. "So long as respondents' actions continue to inflict an objectively reasonable chill on petitioner's religious exercise, he can seek prospective relief today."

Ten Republican senators and more than 40 GOP House members signed a brief supporting Grand, including House Speaker Mike Johnson (R-LA), Senate Judiciary Committee Chairman Sen. Chuck Grassley (R-IA) and House Judiciary Committee Chairman Rep. Jim Jordan (R-OH).

The brief from congressional Republicans highlights Congress' 2000 passage of the Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act (RLUIPA), which aims to prevent discrimination in zoning laws against individuals and religious institutions, including to protect private in-home prayer gatherings. They argued that RLUIPA, which Grand alleges the city violated, was written specifically to allow individuals like Grand to file suit.

"This case shows just how far local

governments are willing to go in riding roughshod over Free Exercise rights — including putting Mr. Grand, an observant Orthodox Jew, to the choice of being punished for praying in his home without a permit or moving out of his home entirely to obtain the required permit," the brief reads. "No American should ever be forced to make such a choice. ... The Court should reverse and restore the promise of RLUIPA to safeguard the religious liberty of all Americans."

Numerous Jewish organizations including Agudath Israel of America, the National Jewish Advocacy Center, National Council of Young Israel, Coalition for Jewish Values, the Louis D. Brandeis Center for Human Rights Under Law, the Orthodox Union, the American Association of Jewish Lawyers and Jurists (AAJLJ), as well as groups representing a host of other religions, have filed briefs in support of Grand.

"Where a municipality or other government agency has either zoning laws or other regulatory regimes that allow them enormous, unbridled, standardless discretion to either grant or deny permits for various kinds of activity, there is an enormous risk, well illustrated by this case, that's going to be weaponized against vulnerable minorities," Richard Rosen, senior vice president for legal advocacy at the Brandeis Center, told JI.

He alleged that the "evidence is overwhelming that the city acted with antisemitic animus," pointing to the appeals from neighbors to the mayor and public antisemitic comments by certain residents. Rosen argued that the permitting requirement, in and of itself, represented a violation of the First Amendment that entitled Grand to sue without any further action.

Nathan Diamant, executive director of the OU Advocacy Center, told JI that the case raises profound concerns for observant Jews, if municipalities are able to ban any religious gatherings in private homes.

"Just think about an unfortunate situation where somebody is sitting shiva, where you're not allowed to leave your home as a mourner," Diamant said. "Now

we're going to say, 'You have to get a permit from the locality in order to have a shiva minyan'? That would be insane."

Daniel Kaminetsky, general counsel for Agudath Israel, likewise warned that a failure by the court to "correct this wrong" could jeopardize Jews' ability to pray in the way they see fit.

"Where does it end? Where does it stop? Can the government tell me I can't have 10 people over for a barbecue and make a *bracha*?" Kaminetsky said. "That is what we see as being a very slippery slope and a very dangerous path to go down."

He said that Grand "has been injured in that he has not been able to pray in the way he deems appropriate ... and every weekend that goes by is another injury for him because ... the city's not allowing him to do that."

Kaminetsky argued that there is no compelling city interest in preventing Grand from holding the minyan, and that claims that the minyan would create significant traffic or noise were nonsensical given that it would take place on the Sabbath, during which Orthodox Jews do not drive or use other electronics.

Diamant further argued that, if Grand were required to go through a complete permitting process before he could file suit, he could be trapped indefinitely with an unresolved permit application with no legal recourse.

Jewish community advocates supporting Grand highlighted that there are a slew of examples of municipalities using zoning laws to attempt to restrict or prevent Jews from living or worshipping in their communities.

According to Arthur Traldi, chair of AAJLJ's amicus committee, there's empirical evidence that Jewish and Muslim communities "are particularly likely to be targeted, to need access to the courts because they want to do something like what Grand was doing — they want to pray at home with their friends."

He added that Jews and other religiously observant communities "will be watching closely to see what the court decides and how it affects the future of the right to worship freely in your home."

Agudath Israel filed its brief jointly with

groups representing the Catholic and Baptist communities. Kaminetsky said that the joint brief highlights that, while the communities may have different theologies, “we have a lot of common ground ... on

issues that are common to us that we need to fight for.”

Rosen said that a ruling for Grand might lead other municipalities to reconsider their permitting regimes preemptively, in order to avoid future legal action.

Diamant predicted that the Supreme Court is likely to rule in such a way that scales back but does not completely overturn the past precedent that lower courts have said requires Grand to complete the permitting process before suing. ♦

SEPTEMBER 17, 2026

New House bill would allow synagogues to use security grants to hire full-time security guards

The bill would also allow nonprofits to use a portion of federal grant money to pay personnel to administer grant funding

By Marc Rod

Over a year after the deadly firebombing attack targeting an Israeli hostage awareness march in Boulder, Colo., Rep. Joe Neguse (D-CO), who represents the city, and Rep. Don Bacon (R-NE) introduced legislation to modify Nonprofit Security Grant Program conditions to allow grantees to use funding for staffing costs.

Currently, synagogues and other NSGP recipients are allowed to use funding to hire contracted security guards. Under the new bill, the Safe Spaces for All Act, grantees would also be able to use funding to hire full-time security staff, as well as off-duty police officers.

The bill would also allow institutions to use up to 5% of a grant to pay staff to prepare grant applications and administer grants. Supporters of the program have frequently highlighted that the laborious grant application process is a significant obstacle for small congregations and institutions that may not have dedicated grant-writing staff.

“We must do far more to combat the scourge of antisemitism, and to ensure that synagogues, temples and community centers have the resources to ensure that

they are safe as hateful threats and violent actions metastasize in Colorado and across the country,” Neguse, who serves as the assistant Democratic leader, said in a statement. “The Safe Spaces for All Act bolsters security for our communities, and ensures that under these incredibly trying circumstances, members of the community can feel protected and supported.”

Bacon, a retiring House member who co-chairs the House antisemitism task force, said that “every nonprofit, especially faith-based and community organizations, deserves to safely serve their communities.”

“As threats increasingly target our vital civic and religious institutions, this straightforward, pragmatic measure ensures we’re providing the tools needed to keep Americans safe — without creating a new bureaucracy,” he continued.

The Anti-Defamation League, Jewish Federations of North America and the JEWISHcolorado Jewish Community Relations Council are also supporting the bill.

Jonathan Greenblatt, the CEO of the Anti-Defamation League, emphasized that Jewish community defenses must “evolve and escalate” at pace with the threats facing

them, and that security personnel are often “the first person you meet” inside an American synagogue today.

“The Safe Spaces for All Act meets that reality head-on by modernizing the Nonprofit Security Grant Program so at-risk organizations can protect the people they serve,” Greenblatt said.

Eric Fingerhut, the CEO of JFNA, said that community institutions “require flexible, practical tools to keep communities safe” and that the bill “clarifies eligible uses under the Nonprofit Security Grant Program, ensuring organizations can use these resources to address their evolving security needs.”

The Colorado JCRC said that “security is not one-size-fits-all” and that security personnel and grant-management capacity “are just as critical as the cameras, barriers, and other physical improvements.”

The Safe Space for All Act, the group continued, “would provide institutions the flexibility to use NSGP funding where it can have the greatest impact — making the program more accessible, responsive, and effective.” ♦

Jessica Tarlov on her new book, Hasan Piker and the limits of being able to ‘acknowledge without accepting’

Speaking to JI about ‘I Disagree: Winning Arguments Without Losing Friends,’ the liberal Fox News co-host also shared her conflicted views on Zohran Mamdani and how Oct. 7 deepened her Jewish identity

By Haley Cohen

In her new book, Fox News co-host Jessica Tarlov advocates for constructive disagreement — “acknowledge without accepting,” or hearing someone out, hard as it may be, without torching the relationship or one’s own beliefs.

In an interview with *Jewish Insider* ahead of Tuesday’s release of *I Disagree: Winning Arguments Without Losing Friends*, Tarlov pointed to her closely watched sit-down last year with far-left streamer Hasan Piker as evidence that her framework holds even when strained against its limits. Piker was “incredibly nice and gracious,” she recalled, arguing that calls for him to be shut out of Democratic circles are misguided.

The exchange highlights the balancing act central to both Tarlov’s book and her on-air image as the primary liberal co-host on the Fox News talk show “The Five.” But in her conversation with JI, Tarlov, who is Jewish, noted that there is sometimes discomfort in that instinct to engage across lines — the thesis of her book. She said she finds unease in New York City Mayor Zohran Mamdani’s campaign appearance with Columbia University anti-Israel activist Mahmoud Khalil, accusations that Israel committed “genocide” and just how much attention Piker’s commentary is getting in a divided Democratic Party.

“How much the discourse is dominated by Hasan Piker and those kinds of discussions is just a general turnoff” of the Democratic Party, Tarlov told JI, “and people don’t necessarily feel like we’re getting the news because there’s so much focus on the infighting.” She pointed to Michigan’s upcoming Senate race between Democrat Abdul El-Sayed and former Rep. Mike Rogers (R-MI) as a key test of just how deep those divisions run. “It will be a really

interesting test as to how divided the party actually is along the lines of this issue — and who comes around to El-Sayed, who goes through with voting for Mike Rogers, or sitting home.”

Despite her willingness to engage with Piker, Tarlov argued the wall-to-wall focus on him has become its own kind of distraction from the issues actually most important to voters.

“I do think the discourse being about him 24/7 is really ignoring what most people are concerned about in their lives,” she said. “They’re thinking ‘my gas prices are up’ and we’re like, ‘Hasan Piker.’ That’s just really missing the mark.”

Last November, when Tarlov found herself seated next to Piker on a panel at Crooked Media’s Crooked Con, she said she was “nervous” going in, given how divisive of an issue his past rhetoric — including justifying Hamas’ Oct. 7, 2023, terrorist attacks and saying America deserved 9/11 — had already become. But she found him friendly, and even took some of his feedback under consideration: “The one thing he did say to me, which did resonate, was that the only criticism of what I do is that I’m too hard on the progressive left. I spent a lot of time thinking about that and ultimately I do think that he’s right.”

“It had been much easier for me to insult AOC for instance and it was kind of low-hanging fruit and there are enough people now who aren’t even necessarily in the far-left party who want things like universal health care. The center part of the party hasn’t been talking about affordability issues in a way that is connecting like Mamdani did in the mayoral election, or that we’re not talking enough about building affordable housing. I thought that was a good note,” she added.

Asked if Democrats should more

vigorously condemn Piker — who has over 3 million Twitch followers — or banish him from party circles, Tarlov rejected the premise.

“The idea of us deciding who has legitimacy or platforming when someone has a platform of that size already is really missing the point,” she said. “I show up everyday and talk to people who I disagree with, in some cases people who believe in things I am deeply against. If you don’t engage you leave open this chasm for other people to fill it. I’m not running to be on Hasan’s stream — I wasn’t invited either — but I do think this idea of we’re not going to platform him when he has a bigger platform than most of the people who are saying they have no interest in having him is a little bit embarrassing.”

“In terms of being more culturally Jewish, I do think Oct. 7 changed everything for many nonpracticing Jews in this country, where it became such a bigger part of our identity, where we’re more attuned to discussions around Judaism and Israel in general and it has made us more interested in being affiliated with the religion. It just becomes a more prominent part of your identity when something like that happens,” Tarlov said.

Tarlov’s prominent role as the only Jewish panelist on “The Five” has coincided with Fox News catching the eye of some liberal-leaning American Jews who felt that in the aftermath of the Oct. 7 attacks, much of the mainstream coverage was biased against Israel.

Tarlov said she brings up her Jewish background on air, including her family’s history of fleeing Europe ahead of the Holocaust and her own run-in with rising antisemitism as a student in London two

decades ago, “because I think it is relevant and I have a pretty mainstream Jewish perspective on what’s going on in the Middle East and what [Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin] Netanyahu has done and the aftermath of Oct. 7,” she told JI. “I draw on it explicitly because I think it’s important for viewers to know there is a Jewish person who is saying this who is not just someone with an opinion and that I have real connective tissue to the religion and to Israel.”

While her cultural connection to Judaism deepened after Oct. 7, Tarlov is no stranger to antisemitism. In her book, she recounts heated politics over Israel during her time at the London School of Economics and former London Mayor Ken Livingstone’s controversial rhetoric during his 2012 campaign to reclaim the office. Tarlov told JI that the period “shaped my current political perspective” and felt like a foreshadowing of the current climate on U.S. college campuses.

“You can draw a straight line from those experiences to what happened at Columbia,” she said. “If there had been an igniting event like Oct. 7 you could easily see how it would spill over into something like that. I’m a little bit embarrassed that I didn’t understand the gravity of it in full back when it was going on. But I definitely see important comparisons — and as someone who likes to look at politics from a sociological lens — how much writing was on the wall. This was really an international movement that got so powerful in what feels like a short period of time.”

“And then working on [then-Mayor] Boris Johnson’s 2012 campaign and following Ken Livingstone, the labor candidate, and seeing him speak at town halls and mosques and how much widespread acceptance there was for antisemitism, was very jarring for me,” said Tarlov. “That stuck with me.”

Tarlov is seeing similar dynamics play out where she lives now, in Manhattan. She writes in her book that “making Jewish New Yorkers feel safe” was on her checklist for the city’s mayoral candidate, and Mamdani didn’t meet it. Eight months after

he moved into Gracie Mansion, Tarlov told JI she’s “conflicted” about that view.

“I think he’s been better than a lot of people expected,” she said. “I’m close with a lot of people in the Modern Orthodox community of Riverdale and I pay a lot of attention to how they’re feeling and where they’re going for their information. If you ask them, they’d say there are [good policies like] universal childcare, not related to the Jewish community. But they feel he’s fallen short when it comes to [other issues]. I’m in the realm of neutral based upon my expectations.”

Still, she noted that “one of the difficult moments for me in his campaign was when he campaigned with Mahmoud Khalil.”

“Khalil represents somebody that infringed upon Jewish students at Columbia’s civil rights,” she said. “I was overwhelmed by the feeling that if that happened to Black students, trans students, any other protected sect that would never have been tolerated. So to see him as a campaign surrogate was very difficult for me. I understand that the Trump administration unfairly targeted [Khalil with deportation threats] and I know that’s the thrust of why he was part of the campaign, and he’s been to Gracie Mansion since then, but that was quite jolting to me.”

Asked whether she agreed with Jewish leaders who’ve blamed Mamdani’s rhetoric on Israel for fueling New York’s rise in antisemitism, Tarlov pushed back, framing the criticism as part of a broader pattern she sees playing out with Piker. “This gets back to the Hasan Piker discourse,” she said. “Everyone is going crazy about his comments and then there’s a lot of footage of other people saying similar things, and people said Hasan was antisemitic for saying that.”

She traced the surge in antisemitic rhetoric more broadly to the aftermath of the Oct. 7 attacks rather than to any one figure. “I wouldn’t put it at Mamdani’s feet like that,” she said, though she added she understood the impulse among Jewish leaders trying to reassure anxious congregants: “People are trying to manage a congregation full of people who are afraid and angry, and a lot of them are

disappointed that there wasn’t a candidate that they were excited about.”

The book’s core idea is “acknowledge without accepting,” something Tarlov has proven she can do across many political subjects. But does that framework still work when the disagreement is about something like Israel’s right to exist?

Tarlov’s advice is to “find a way to slide in your perspective without making it a knockdown, drag-out fight.” She pointed to a recent appearance by Ryan Grim — the co-founder of the Hamas-sympathetic outlet *Drop Site News* — on “Raging Moderates,” the podcast that she co-hosts with Scott Galloway. On air, Grim referred to Israel’s “genocide” in Gaza.

“The point of my book was for people to have a longer-term perspective on these tough issues and tips and tricks that could help them do better in these fraught conversations,” Tarlov told JI.

“When he was finished talking, I said, ‘I don’t use that term, I don’t see it that way,’ and then moved on,” Tarlov recalled. “So there are ways to acknowledge without accepting, as per the book, but to make sure it doesn’t cut off all conversation.”

“I think you should always have the conversation — I believe in that,” she continued.

“Understanding other people’s point of view is really of value. I also understand how deeply personal [Israel] is for people. It’s a little different than hearing someone’s view of immigration, let’s say, where they want mass deportations. Saying there should be a one-state solution in the Palestinian direction feels different than that.”

“That absolutely does apply to being able to dialogue with people over something like Israel and its right to exist. On an emotional level, I think it is more complicated than your average policy issue but I still think the framework applies, and I did have it in mind as I was writing the book. It’s up there as a top five difficult issue for people to talk about and was pulling my political party — and relationships — apart.” ♦

Keren Hayesod chair to step down after claims he tried to hire unqualified ally of Netanyahu's wife

Hazan's departure at the end of the year leaves the future of the international fundraising group's leadership unclear ahead of next month's Israeli elections

By Justin Hayet

The article first appeared in eJewishPhilanthropy.

In a sudden shake-up at the top of Keren Hayesod, Eli Vered Hazan, the fundraising group's recently elected world chairman, will leave his post at the end of December, just a few months after assuming the role, the organization's CEO, Edna Weinstock Gabbay, told employees on Monday. The departure comes amid growing scrutiny over Hazan's efforts to provide jobs within the organization and funding to figures close to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who had nominated Hazan for his position, sources told *eJewishPhilanthropy*.

Last week, the Israeli newspaper *Israel Hayom* reported that the prime minister's wife, Sara Netanyahu, had pushed Hazan to install her ally, former Likud lawmaker Osnat Mark, as his chief of staff, despite her not having relevant experience. On Monday, Israel's Channel 13 reported that Sara Netanyahu had also demanded that Keren Hayesod — the foreign fundraising arm of Israel's National Institutions — arrange paid speaking engagements for her son, Yair Netanyahu.

The Likud party denied the reports. The party said Sara Netanyahu never intervened in the organization's appointments, speaking programs or anything else and had no contact — direct or indirect — with its representatives, casting the allegations as recycled slander timed to the election cycle.

According to both *Israel Hayom* and a source familiar with the matter, who spoke to eJP on condition of anonymity to discuss a sensitive issue, the proposal to hire Mark drew fierce resistance from Keren Hayesod's major donors and board of trustees, who told Hazan it would not stand

and pressed him to resign, which he initially refused to do.

Hazan, who began the job earlier this month, said in a letter to Keren Hayesod stakeholders, which was obtained by Israel's Netanyahu-friendly Channel 14, that after reflection and out of "personal and family considerations," he would serve only through Dec. 31, 2026.

This incident comes amid persistent allegations of corruption and nepotism against many of the National Institutions — the official arms of the international Zionist movement.

Speaking to eJP, multiple sources, both inside and outside Israel, described a fuller account of the period preceding Hazan's decision to step down.

Hazan was selected for the role under the long-standing custom in Keren Hayesod of deference to the prime minister's preferred nominee, though sources said he was not the only person being considered and that the prime minister's approval is not technically needed for the trustees to hire a new world chairman. Speaking to eJP, another source present at Hazan's interview for the chairmanship role said Hazan pledged there that he had made no promises to the prime minister in accepting his endorsement.

Hazan, Israel's ambassador to Singapore and a close Netanyahu ally who previously served as his policy advisor when Netanyahu served as opposition leader in 2021 and as a spokesperson for the Likud party, was approved in July to lead Keren Hayesod, which reported raising \$207.7 million in 2024.

An internal Keren Hayesod document seen by eJP, dated May 2025, sets out the profile for the world chairmanship: fluent English, deep familiarity with Israel's national institutions such as the World

Zionist Organization, a track record in fundraising and experience in Israel-Diaspora relations. A figure involved in the hiring process said that the board was drawn to the gravitas of an Israeli ambassador, but other sources said that there were hesitations: Hazan lacked the fundraising background and Diaspora fluency to steer Keren Hayesod through a fraught moment.

Netanyahu backed Hazan for the role after first supporting Ofir Akunis, Israel's consul general in New York; the board then approved Hazan unanimously. Hazan took over the reins of the organization from Sam Grundweg, a former consul general in Los Angeles who led the organization for eight years.

On Hazan's first day in office, sources said, Mark arrived at his office alongside Tsahi Dabush, a former journalist and one-time aide to Economy Minister Nir Barkat, and confronted Hazan, who initially refused to meet them. A call to the Prime Minister's Office followed, the sources said, and Hazan was given an ultimatum to proceed with hiring both of them in senior roles within Keren Hayesod. Hazan then emailed the organization's head of human resources to begin hiring Mark.

What followed was what one source described as hours of shouting heard throughout the Keren Hayesod office in Jerusalem. In light of the disagreement and continued pressure by the organization's main stakeholders, Hazan decided to step down, the sources said.

This was not the first time that Mark's nomination for a senior position met backlash. In 2023, the former Knesset member was tapped to serve as director-general of Israel's Ministry of Innovation, Science and Technology, but later withdrew her candidacy following criticism that she

lacked experience in the field. A few months later, a similar incident unfolded as she was selected to head Israel's Consumer Protection Bureau and subsequently rejected on procedural grounds.

Hazan's departure leaves the future of the organization's leadership unclear. As

Keren Hayesod and the other National Institutions work closely with the Israeli government, the organization's trustees may wait until after next month's elections before appointing a new chair.

Yet if a new chair is not selected by Jan. 1, the position will be held — in an interim

capacity — by Yaakov Hagoel, the chair of the World Zionist Organization, a situation that Keren Hayesod's trustees would look to avoid, a source within the group said. ♦

SEPTEMBER 16, 2026

Fatema Al Harbi on joining Noa Tishby's campus tour to combat extremism in the Middle East

Al Harbi, the Gulf affairs director for a Middle East group building bonds between young Israelis and Gulf leaders, is spreading her message alongside Tishby on several college campuses

By Haley Cohen

Growing up in Bahrain, Fatema Al Harbi absorbed years of anti-Israel propaganda, but she says the mood in her home country has since shifted markedly, with ordinary citizens no longer seeing Israel as the Middle East's foremost threat — a distinction they now assign to Iran.

Now serving as Gulf affairs director for Sharaka, an Israel-based organization that aims to develop bonds between young Israeli and Gulf leaders, Al Harbi's journey from Israel critic to advocate is central to her pitch as she joins a four-day cross-country campus speaking tour that kicked off on Monday.

The tour, which also features Jonathan Elkhoury — a Lebanese-born Christian and LGBTQ+ activist whose family fled Hezbollah rule for Israel — and Israeli-American activist Noa Tishby, is being produced by Tishby's nonprofit, Eighteen. The interfaith trio is scheduled to address students at University of Colorado Boulder, Emory University, the University of Texas and Florida International University.

Al Harbi spoke with *Jewish Insider* on Tuesday, the sixth anniversary of the signing of the Abraham Accords, about her experience as a Bahraini Muslim woman publicly supporting Israel, and how the regional landscape has shifted since the historic signing.

Jewish Insider: Why did you decide to do this tour, and did you have any reservations?

What do you see as your specific role in the tour's lineup — what can you speak to that Jonathan and Noa can't? What do you think is most important that American students understand?

Fatema Al Harbi: I didn't have any [doubts] about joining. It's the opposite, I was really excited to be part of this. In the end, we are [all] fighting against loud, extremist voices so we have to come together. I have to speak for my region. So many voices are taking over our region — impacting our country in a bad way. It's important to have a platform to speak up and show the reality myself, as a Muslim, as an Arab, about what's going on in the region. This is important to share, especially across campuses.

I'm going to speak about my story: growing up and how I was impacted by propaganda against Israel and Jews. Most Arab countries 20 years ago were affected by Islamism and propaganda from Al Jazeera. Today, nobody trusts [Al Jazeera] in Bahrain, and also it's banned.

I had so much curiosity about Israel. Seeing the country changed my mind [about the views I grew up learning].

[Today] so many people are aligning with political Islamism and it's affecting America but also affecting us back home.

Ji: The tour stop at Emory lands on the Accords anniversary — how do things look different now than the signing day in 2020?

FAH: Things are so different. Six years ago,

the Abraham Accords weren't very popular at home. Now [support] grew. I'm not saying there's 100% approval, but it grew. Everyone wants our country to choose peace over anything else.

Ji: How would you characterize the dynamics within the Gulf Cooperation Council right now on the question of normalization with Israel — is there a shared view among the Gulf states, or are you seeing divergence?

FAH: Of course there are different opinions. There are a lot of opinions towards normalization but in the end, the GCC always comes together. There is always a meeting point.

Ji: Saudi Arabia remains the biggest question mark in the region. Do you think it is moving toward eventual normalization, or has it been pushed to a more hard-line stance post-Oct. 7?

FAH: It's a tricky question. I think it's a matter of when, not if. Saudi Arabia was coming closer to normalization but unfortunately after Oct. 7, it was pushed back and you could feel it. Things are changing now, for example, the war we are experiencing. Saudi Arabia is getting attacked from Iran and also from the Houthis. The attacks could change a lot in the region, not just for Saudi Arabia but for all GCC countries. I think one of those things will be normalization with Israel.

I think we'll have to wait and see what

will happen in the next few months, or even years.

JJ: *Bahrain was hit by Iranian missiles amid the recent escalation. Has that changed how ordinary Bahrainis view the relationship with Israel?*

FAH: [In the past] many people came to me after speaking about the Abraham Accords and normalization with Israel and [voiced] a lot of opposition. They said the enemy of the Middle East was Israel. Now after seeing the war — the moment Iran had the chance to attack us in Bahrain, they did — so many people are coming to me saying they realize the enemy of the Middle East is actually not

Israel, it's Iran. Our country, our economy, everything has been affected [by Iran].

JJ: *What does day-to-day life look like for you as a Bahraini woman who's publicly aligned with Israel? Has your outspokenness changed how you're received in your community? What about across the Gulf more broadly?*

FAH: Thankfully, I live in a very safe country with strong laws that do not tolerate hate. [Even for] online attacks, I could take them to court or to the police. So the good thing is that not a lot has changed for me in Bahrain. I've lived a normal life since the Abraham Accords and until now.

The only thing that changed is how people perceive the Abraham Accords, which is a recent change because of the war.

JJ: *Do you think your neighbors truly share your views on Israel, or are they afraid to speak up because of legal implications?*

FAH: I think it is mostly because of the laws. But most Bahrainis are very kind-hearted. They don't have loud violence or hatred. If someone wants to show their hatred, they will find a well-mannered way to do it. We're an island; people are more chill than in other countries. ♦

SEPTEMBER 16, 2026

Houthi gains leave Saudi Arabia short on options and looking to Washington

Analysts said that while Israel could help Riyadh in combating the attacks, any cooperation is likely to be limited and politically fraught

By Matthew Shea

Saudi Arabia's escalating conflict with the Houthis has revealed just how challenging it has become for the U.S. to deter the Iran-backed terrorist group, former officials and regional experts say, as Houthi gains along the Red Sea raise alarms about global shipping and give Tehran fresh leverage.

Analysts said that while Israel could help Riyadh in combating the attacks, any cooperation is likely to be limited and politically fraught.

Saudi Arabia on Tuesday issued an alert for a possible attack on the holy city of Mecca amid escalating strikes by the Houthis, a U.S.-designated terrorist group. A day earlier, Vice President JD Vance said the administration was "on top" of the issue and confirmed the U.S. is in direct talks with the group, following recent clashes between the Houthis and the Saudi-backed Yemeni government in which the Houthis seized the port of Mocha, Perim Island inside the Bab el-Mandeb Strait and the Hanish archipelago to the north, giving them control of an alternative shipping route to the Strait of Hormuz.

Experts told *Jewish Insider* the Houthis' latest advances are the product of years of preparation, Iranian support and a willingness to absorb losses that would force other militias to the table.

"The Houthis have exploited the lack of a cohesive opposition inside Yemen to prepare for this situation, Iran has resumed aiding them with weapons and advisors, and they benefit from only having to fight one foreign enemy at a time," Jonathan Ruhe, a fellow at the Jewish Institute for National Security of America, told *JJ*.

"The Houthis are also very risk-acceptant and willing to tolerate losses that have compelled Iran and other proxies into ceasefires. U.S.-Israeli operations could likely exploit the Houthis' latest advances, but Saudi air and naval power have never shown any serious capacity to degrade the Houthis militarily."

Steven Cook, a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations, said the Houthis have "acquired a lot of weapons and weapons technology from Iran. Yemen's government-backed forces are not that good. Saudi Arabia and others don't

want to go in on the ground. The U.S. doesn't want to commit ground forces. Air power can only do so much."

Edmund Fitton-Brown, a former British diplomat now at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, said the Houthis "have been building and pre-positioning" while the internationally recognized Yemeni government's forces "are weakened by loss of cohesion, following the dispute over southern secession and the departure of Emirati forces."

Experts said Houthi advances to capture Mokha and territory near the Bab el-Mandeb Strait are particularly concerning for Washington and American partners who have counted on the waterway as an alternative to the Strait of Hormuz amid roiled energy markets. Analysts also noted that the disruptions provide Iran leverage in the broader conflict with the U.S.

"It is a concerning development," Cook said. "Somewhere between 15-20% of global trade passes through the Red Sea ... And the Houthis sitting on the Mandeb Strait

certainly gives Iran leverage. One of its allies can throttle the global economy.”

“It is important to underline that even if there is an agreement on the Strait of Hormuz, it doesn’t mean that the situation in the Mandeb Strait will be resolved,” Cook added. “The Houthis have their own beef with Saudi Arabia and the current round of fighting is connected to, but not directly related to, the situation in the Strait of Hormuz.”

Ruhe agreed that the advances near Bab el-Mandeb “give Iran indirect leverage by rattling global markets and threatening the best energy export alternative to Hormuz.” But he emphasized that the Houthis are “far more independent of Tehran than Hezbollah or other proxies,” adding that “they are focused on expanding control inside Yemen and fighting the Saudis, so they prefer not to risk direct U.S. and Israel involvement for the time being, even if Iran might press them.”

In response, Saudi Arabia has reportedly sought U.S. assistance, however, reports indicate President Donald Trump is uninterested in getting involved. Reporting from Israeli media in recent days has also suggested that Saudi Arabia may be quietly exploring potential Israeli assistance as the two countries have established contact through CENTCOM. Analysts said that such cooperation between Jerusalem and Riyadh is possible and would be helpful, but argued it is unlikely to come to fruition.

“[There are] rumors abound about the Saudis asking Israel for help,” Cook said. “It is possible. If the rumors are true and it is now public, I expect vigorous Saudi denials, but the Israelis have capabilities that the Saudis could use. If it happens, I expect that the Israelis will want something in return, which will likely be related to the Palestinians or public acknowledgement of Israeli help.”

Ruhe similarly noted that while Israeli assistance could help Riyadh, he argued that Saudi Arabia is focused on

U.S. assistance, stressing that the U.S. and Israel remain “stretched thin” militarily.

“Logically, Israel could assist with military intelligence, which is a particular Saudi weakness,” Ruhe noted, “but Riyadh seems to be looking squarely to Washington for assistance. For now, at least, the U.S. and Israel are stretched thin, and don’t want to divert resources and attention from Iran and other fronts. For the United States, this includes precious air-to-ground munitions and interceptors. Ideally, CENTCOM-led multilateral maritime task forces could assist with freedom of navigation, but this has proven difficult even in less trying times.”

Alexander Gray, who served as chief of staff on the National Security Council during Trump’s first administration, said that he believes the U.S. will ultimately get involved and “provide various types of support” to Saudi Arabia, noting that Washington has “long been a primary security partner of the Kingdom.”

“The Houthi threat is real and serious, primarily to Saudi Arabia, its energy security, and the global commercial traffic going through the Red Sea,” said Gray. “The U.S. has long been the primary security partner of the Kingdom, and President Trump and the Crown Prince have developed a strong relationship that serves the interests of both countries. Ultimately, I anticipate the U.S. will provide various types of support to KSA to ensure that additional strain will not be placed on the global energy supply chain.”

However, some experts warn that Washington’s current approach risks reinforcing the sense that the Yemen front is Riyadh’s problem to manage, rather than a key piece of the wider confrontation with Tehran.

“My biggest concern is that the Trump administration does not seem to understand the extent to which the Houthi problem is part of the larger challenge posed by Iran,” said Matthew Levitt, a

senior fellow at The Washington Institute for Near East Policy. “The administration no longer has a senior special envoy for Yemen, and officials describe the Houthi escalation as a primarily Saudi problem rather than a regional challenge. The Houthis have their own interests, but they are also important members of Iran’s proxy alliance, as evidenced by Houthi cooperation with Iraqi Shia militias in their July drone attack on Saudi Arabia.”

The flare-up is also the first major test of the Mecca Joint Defense Agreement, a NATO-style mutual defense pact signed in August under which Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and Turkey guaranteed each other’s defense. However, Islamabad and Ankara have so far stayed on the sidelines.

“The Mecca agreement was never primarily about collective defense against Iran and its proxies, but rather about signaling to Washington, New Delhi, and others,” Ruhe argued. “Over the past year, Riyadh’s growing isolation drove it into the arms of two partners who have their own reasons for joining the Mecca accord, none of which include getting dragged into Yemen’s forever war.”

Fitton-Brown argued that the failure of Pakistan and Turkey to mobilize underscores what several analysts describe as the gap between Saudi Arabia’s ambitions for the pact and its real-world value when put to the test.

“It reveals it as the loose alliance that it is,” he said. “Pakistan and Turkey have no intention of sacrificing troops in Yemen. The Saudis look desperate: weak in the face of Iran; weak in the face of the Houthis; desperate for help from the Americans, alienated from the UAE, desperate for new allies but those allies are at best fair weather friends. A US-Saudi-Emirati-Israeli reset may be their best bet — the U.S. also badly needs them not to weaken or fail — but it won’t be an easy sell with [Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman].” ♦

Talmud Daily offers free guide to the text, offering newcomers an on-ramp for serious study

Initiative timed to end so participants can join next cycle of daily Daf Yomi study program

By Jay Deitcher

The article first appeared in eJewishPhilanthropy.

Cracking open the standard Talmud — coming in at 2,711 double-sided pages — presents a daunting challenge for many Jews. To offer an easy introduction to the central text of Rabbinic law, Rabbi David Bashevkin, the founder of the religious engagement website 18Forty, recently launched Talmud Daily, a free 40-week, daily video breakdown of the Talmud, which he says he's treating like a tour through a theme park.

"A lot of times there's a tram or a train that takes you around the park to point out where everything is," Bashevkin told *eJewishPhilanthropy*. "This is where the bears are; this is where the giraffes are and then after you do the train ride, you can go to each exhibit or decide [to] leave the zoo."

Bashevkin began the expedition in late August with a journey through the history and terminology of the Talmud followed by discussion of key themes, including prayer, holidays, family law, business, theology and ritual purity. Episodes are taped in Bashevkin's Teaneck, N.J., home, with the rabbi flanked by posters of Batman and Superman.

Each Monday through Thursday study session runs roughly 10 minutes, and Friday's episodes are long-form interviews with experts chosen not only based on the guest's knowledge, but their digital accessibility: each needs to have classes and content readily available online. As of Monday, 7,500 users have signed up for the program.

The program takes inspiration from the simple and accessible way Britain's former chief rabbi, the late Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, broke down the Five Books of Moses, Bashevkin said. Talmud Daily is dedicated to the former head of the Orthodox Union, Rabbi Moshe Hauer, who died of a heart

attack last October and was a figure known for his empathy and ability to connect with Jews across the religious spectrum.

Hauer's "spirit hovers over the entirety of" Talmud Daily, Bashevkin said, and the rabbi was "constantly pushing" Bashevkin to "think about how [he] can take [his] platform and use it as a vehicle to show [people] the doorway for how they can find their place in Torah life and Torah study."

Talmud Daily is "an innovative, user-friendly way to explain what the Talmud is along with the key concepts of the tractates," Raanan Agus, one of the founding sponsors, along with his wife, Nicole, told eJP. "The project unlocks this fundamental book for a much larger number of people than those who study it today. Additional founding sponsors include Micah Philanthropies, Janet and Lior Hod and family, George and Pamela Rohr, and Reuven Moskowitz and family.

The initiative is set to end in June alongside the conclusion of *Daf Yomi*, the 7 1/2-year cycle where participants study the Talmud one page per day. In recent years, *Daf Yomi* study has surged due to growing accessibility of texts through Sefaria and of podcasts including *Tablet's* "Take One *Daf Yomi*."

People see the excitement of *Daf Yomi* and "feel left out of these celebrations" because they don't have the background to be able to jump right into Talmud, Rabbi Gil Student, a rabbinic advisor to Talmud Daily, told eJP.

"Talmud Daily is a way for [people] to participate in their own way, to expand their horizons, learn more without going to a place that they don't feel comfortable because of the lack of background," Student said. It offers an "on-ramp" to the next cycle" of *Daf Yomi*, which begins immediately after the current one ends.

"Daily learning is a brilliant, though

sometimes difficult and often maddening approach," Liel Leibovitz, the host of "Take One *Daf Yomi*," the podcast he launched with Bashevkin's help in 2020, told eJP. Leibovitz was also the first Talmud Daily guest.

The *Daf Yomi* method of breaking study down to short sessions works because instead of opening the Talmud and "turn[ing] the page and get[ting] immediately overwhelmed by this ocean of knowledge and references and complications, the *Daf Yomi* method says, 'You know what, here's what you have to do. It's very simple. It's just one page a day.'" Leibovitz said.

The same way people around the world are studying identical pages of Talmud every day for *Daf Yomi*, Talmud Daily will offer a feeling of community, Student said. "Even though the Talmud Daily people are not meeting each other, the very act of listening to the same podcast and partaking the same themes every day creates a community of conversation."

The Talmud is often "misunderstood," Student said. "The Talmud is not actually a book... It's really a record of conversations over hundreds of years." Because "that kind of text is so unfamiliar" to many Jews, studying the Talmud "requires a switch in your thinking, going away from reading page by page, line by line, like you read any novel, to thinking non-linearly, and that requires certain amounts of training and certain amounts of background."

Just like someone can't join "an elite unit [of the army] without training for at least a year," serious Talmudic learning takes training, Leibovitz said, and getting in the habit of engaging with the Talmud on a daily basis "changes your heart and your mind."

Each episode is short, to adapt to a modern lifestyle, Bashevkin said. "Ten

minutes is just relating to the average attention span. Getting your day started, you can do it while sipping a cup of coffee.”

The course duration has deep meaning, too, he said. “Moses got the Torah in 40 days and 40 nights on Sinai. I figured, I don’t know if I could do this [initiative] in

40 days and 40 nights, but if you give me 40 weeks.”

After the terrorist attacks of Oct. 7, 2023, Jews are looking for “a reset for the Jewish people to relearn our common language of thought and practice,” Bashevkin said. Recently, antisemites have started disseminating age-old propaganda about

Jews using Talmudic secrets to dominate the world.

“The purpose of Judaism is not to fight antisemitism,” he said. “We fight antisemitism so we can focus on the purpose of Judaism, and to me, [that is] what Talmud Daily is all about. This is what we’re fighting for.” ♦

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Erielle Reshef’s journey from Israeli TV to MS NOW

Reshef, an Oklahoma native, said her time growing up in the close-knit Oklahoma City Jewish community played a major part in her identity

By Haley Cohen

MS NOW anchor Erielle Reshef never planned to become a television journalist. After completing a master’s degree in diplomacy and conflict studies in Israel in 2010, she happened to be watching an English-language news program whose anchors were about to go on maternity leave. Her husband wrote down the email address on the screen and pushed her to apply.

Reshef, who had never worked in a newsroom or even read from a teleprompter, went in for a screen test. She was hired by the now-shuttered IBA English News, Israel’s Channel 1, the next day.

That chance opportunity launched a career that has taken Reshef from her hometown of Oklahoma City to local television, international news and eventually ABC News, where she spent eight and a half years, including as a national correspondent. Already accomplished in her career — having been one of the first reporters on the scene at the 2018 Tree of Life synagogue massacre in Pittsburgh — Reshef made another major leap last June.

She left the relative comfort of a network news reporting job to join MS NOW, formerly known as MSNBC, where she is now a fill-in anchor for daytime cable news shows for the first time. Along the way, her upbringing in a small but tight-knit Jewish community, her Israeli family ties and her

years living in Israel have remained central to how she understands both the world she covers and her role as a journalist.

For Reshef, 42, those identities don’t conflict with journalism but are part of what she brings to the job. In an interview with *Jewish Insider*, Reshef said her Jewish values — particularly curiosity, rigorous debate and a commitment to understanding people on the margins — are the “scaffolding” of her journalism.

Reshef began reporting in Israel after she received a master’s degree from Reichman University in Herzliya. In her first newsroom job at IBA English News in Israel, where she covered the upheavals of the Arab Spring, Reshef reported from the Gaza border and anchored the night Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak was deposed.

But before she lived in Israel, where her father is from, her roots were planted in Oklahoma City, where Reshef was raised and where she later returned to report (reporting that won her a Heartland Emmy in 2017). Living in Oklahoma — and being part of a smaller Jewish community — deeply shaped her identity as a journalist, Reshef told *JL*.

“There’s nothing quite as special as being able to come back to your hometown and be a local journalist,” said Reshef. “I felt incredibly fortunate to be able to dig into the stories that really matter to the people that I grew up with. As far as being a Jew in

Oklahoma City, it’s a small but mighty community. My mother was the head of the Jewish federation for several decades. I felt like the fact that it was a small Jewish community set me up to really understand my own faith and traditions in order to be able to explain those to my friends around me who had never been exposed to Jewish life.”

Those instincts now inform how Reshef approaches her newest professional chapter at MS NOW, a network whose audience skews progressive at a moment when such spaces have become increasingly critical of Israel. Since joining MS NOW last year, Reshef has sat behind the anchor desk across many of the network’s programs, including anchoring “Money, Power, Politics with Stephanie Ruhle,” “On The Line with Alicia Menendez,” “MS NOW Reports” and “The Moment with Katy Tur.”

Reshef does not view her background as something she needs to soften or hide. Instead, she told *JL* that her intimate knowledge of the region is an asset in a newsroom — while emphasizing that her ultimate obligation is to facts, rather than to a particular political or national perspective.

“I won’t hide my identity,” she said. “It’s a benefit in a newsroom to have someone like myself who has intimate knowledge of the conflict through my education and through living in the Middle East, living in Tel Aviv,

and experiencing the realities on the ground and forging friendships with not only Jewish Israelis but Palestinians and Arab Israelis. The most important thing to me in the pursuit of journalism is truth and fact. Any concerns that I may have had post-Oct. 7 with editorial approaches or coverage, whether it be at my previous network or current, have not been because I'm Israeli or Jewish — it has to do with being a journalist that's committed to facts."

"I will allow the values of Judaism and the traditions and familial ties to guide my humanity in this business but ultimately I'm a journalist that's committed to fact and truth," she continued.

Reshef arrived at MS NOW as the network underwent a name rebrand last year under its president, Rebecca Kutler. Kutler said at the time that the network's focus on news and commentary with a liberal perspective would remain intact.

"I find MS NOW to be a place where — yes, there are progressive voices — but a place that's tethered to facts," Reshef said. "Separate from that idea, I think it's vital that we stay in the room and don't retreat from places where we think we don't have favor."

"It's fun to be part of a dynamic, ever-changing company in the context of a shrinking media landscape," she added.

Reshef said her reporting has been met with broad audience approval.

"There's a preconceived notion that people are inherently adversarial. What I'm finding is people want to find common ground. Part of my job is to challenge assumptions that are widely held but are not rooted in fact. When I do that, I have never experienced direct pushback in the newsroom."

Online, her experience has sometimes been different. "For instance I covered the terror attack [in March] on a school and synagogue in Michigan — and in the week of that, I experienced vitriol online labeling me with all kinds of stereotypes, solely on the basis of who I am. That is an online reality so many journalists, and so many industries, face."

Reshef has also earned strong praise from her colleagues. Scott Matthews, SVP of newsgathering for MS NOW, told JI, "Erielle is a natural storyteller. Her roots in local journalism show in the care she brings to each assignment, she gets close to the story, listens carefully, and never loses sight of the people at its center."

Since the Hamas-led Oct. 7, 2023, attacks in Israel, Reshef has not only balanced her identity in the newsroom but also had to navigate the realities of raising two Jewish boys, ages 11 and 7, in New York City. A self-described "fiercely protective Jewish mom," Reshef said she feels a responsibility to "raise my boys to develop the mental fortitude to be true to who they are, to do

what is right and stand in their convictions, but they also have to have the knowledge to back up their beliefs and practices."

"That's a metaphor and parallel to how I see my responsibility in journalism," she added. "It should be a net benefit to bring Jewish values and a Jewish voice to the newsroom, while also keeping an open mind and recognizing that we can all stand to learn from each other."

Reshef describes her career story as a "tale of being nimble": starting with covering the World Cup on Israeli television without ever having watched soccer, to now anchoring on cable news.

"It's been great, at my career stage, to be tackling a steep learning curve and to be constantly absorbing more information and to be voraciously consuming news again in a unique way," she told JI.

"Personally, I could have been very comfortable staying where I was," Reshef said. "I was appreciated at ABC News. I had a great job. But I sensed in myself the fire to keep growing and to overextend myself. I've never been one to shy away from challenges. But it was tough to jump ship from a place that was comfortable after eight and a half years. The risk was well worth it, it has been incredibly rewarding." ♦