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THE WEEKLY PRINT

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NOVEMBER 12, 2026

Brad Lander's 'self-identified communist' comms director: Wealthy Jews acting as vulnerable minority 'make me sick'

Jesse Myerson urged abolishing borders and countries, equated 'globalize the intifada' with 'Am Yisrael Chai' and criticized the Maccabees for practicing 'genital mutilation'

By Will Bredderman

Rep.-elect Brad Lander's (D-NY) new communications director is a "publicly self-identified communist," who has denied Israel's right to exist and equated the slogan "Am Yisrael Chai" — a Hebrew phrase meaning "the people of Israel live" — with "globalize the intifada," and called for the abolition of all national borders.

News that Jesse Myerson would become the incoming congressman's messaging chief was first reported on Tuesday in *Politico New York*'s morning newsletter. The outlet highlighted Myerson's past work for politicians involved in the Democratic Socialists of America, though not his short stint at the failed DSA-tied advocacy group Our Time or his 18-month tenure at the far-left Jewish activist group IfNotNow.

Myerson's LinkedIn account describes his new role as handling "press relations, narrative strategy, speech writing, digital communications" for Lander, who defeated Rep. Dan Goldman (D-NY) in a June primary with the backing of New York City Mayor Zohran Mamdani.

Missing in all these accounts, however, is Myerson's history of radical views on Israel, and on the existence of countries in general, as expressed on social media and in left-wing periodicals. These opinions put him at odds with even the most progressive elected Democrats in Congress, and far exceed the stances of Lander, who identifies as a "progressive Zionist" and broke with the DSA in late 2023 over its response to the Hamas attacks on Israel that October.

Myerson's ideas date at least as far back as 2013, when he published a piece in the socialist journal *Jacobin* titled "The Case for Open Borders," in which he attacked "our anachronistic understanding of nations, rights, and immigrants."

"It is for the Left to square the circle the other way, by globalizing labor; that is, eliminating borders," Myerson, a graduate of Bard College, wrote. "When the Right charges the Left with advocating amnesty, we should show them to be correct. No penalties, no electric fences, no drone surveillance, no papers, no fear. Instead, universal human rights, consecrated in struggle, enforced by solidarity. The unification of the world's workers demands this."

The last line is an echo of the famous coda to the Communist Manifesto, an association Myerson has embraced. In multiple articles he wrote in 2014 and 2015 for *Salon*, Myerson referred to himself as "this communist" and "a publicly self-identified communist."

Myerson's views appeared unchanged as of November 2023, when he composed a lengthy Facebook post a month after Hamas' Oct. 7 attacks denouncing the Israeli government and the entire notion of nations.

"There is no such thing as Israel. Not just Israel, but China, Russia, the U.S., and all the rest of them," he wrote, citing the German Jewish communist Rosa Luxemburg. "The nation is just a lie that the ruling class tells us in order to divide the workers of the world into competitive factions so we won't unite as partners in survival."

However, he particularly singled out the case of the Jewish state, a position he emphasized in a screengrab of a portion of the post he shared on Bluesky in 2025.

"People like me are often challenged to say whether we believe 'Israel has a right to exist,'" the excerpt reads. "It's a trick question that employs a linguistic sleight of hand. I'll tell you how I believe Israel has a

right to exist: the venerable Israel, i.e. the congregants of Jacob and their descendants, i.e. all Jews everywhere, have the right — individually and collectively — to exist, i.e. live in safety and freedom. But where Israel means a European-style nation-state (a political form developed by people who despised and oppressed us), for which the 'right' being claimed (as in 'states' rights') is to maintain an ethnocracy, where Jews hold military, legal and economic dominion over all other inhabitants of the Holy Land — no, that Israel does not have that right to exist that way."

The post goes on to assert that liberal American Zionists — a category in which Lander and many of the Jewish constituents of his Brooklyn-Manhattan district place themselves — suffer from not only "cognitive dissonance" but "derangement."

It was not the first time Myerson had made such remarks. In a since-deleted 2014 Twitter thread, he railed against "banal Zionism" and its advocates, and in favor of "humane, universalist, socialist Jewry."

"Wealthy, powerful, well-connected Jews depicting themselves as part of a huddling, vulnerable minority make me sick," he wrote, making no reference to the disproportionate number of hate crimes committed against Jewish Americans of all social backgrounds.

In June 2025 on Bluesky he defended the popular anti-Israel hashtag "globalize the intifada," which many Jews view as a call to violence, as in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict it most recently referred to a five-year wave of shootings, stabbings and suicide bombings against Israeli targets at the start of this century.

Myerson equated the protest chant with "Am Yisrael Chai," a phrase usually understood to refer not only to the nation of Israel but to all Jewish people, including those in the diaspora, and was popularly invoked in the face of Nazi and Soviet persecution.

"Of course I understand why, to many Jewish New Yorkers, 'Globalize the Intifada' is a scary slogan," Myerson wrote. "Imagine how 'Am Yisrael Chai' must sound to Palestinian New Yorkers."

Myerson has also characterized other mainstream Jewish traditions as problematic. In a 2017 for *Jewish Currents* he bemoaned the observation of Hanukkah, casting the holiday as memorializing a battle between two objectionable groups of Jews.

In the piece, he described *halakhic* law as "backward" and criticized the Maccabees for practicing "genital mutilation," though he expressed admiration for their views on social duty. However, he expressed a deeper dislike for traditions invoking a Jewish military triumph.

"Even had the Maccabees been an uncomplicated force for good, and even had their vanquished opponents not been Jews themselves, my *kishkes* ache might nevertheless persist," he wrote. "After all, I am also uncomfortable singing too joyfully of how the walls of Jericho came tumbling down, and also when people attribute the shape of the Jewish star to that of King David's shield."

To this view he appended the assertion "the Zionist project is absurd in the first instance," and preferred periods in which Jews lived under the rule of others, such as "Spain and Babylonia."

This is not the first time Lander has hired figures holding extreme views. In February, *Jewish Insider* discovered that the top paid consultant on his campaign had shared conspiracy theories linking Israel to 9/11 and the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, promoted pro-Hamas content and ranted against police officers.

The Lander campaign quickly cut ties with the operative, also the co-founder of the group "Hot Girls for Zohran," and denounced his commentary.

Now on his way to Washington, however, Lander indicated Myerson and his opinions would be welcome in his office. In a quote Myerson himself emailed to JI, the congressman-elect described his communications director as "a proud Jewish New Yorker" and accused JI of having "stripped" context from his past remarks.

"I have confidence in him to communicate my liberal Zionist views, and I'm quite comfortable having a senior staffer with his non-Zionist views," the statement reads. "He won't compromise on anyone's humanity, and that he works hard to listen thoughtfully to people whose views differ from his."

Radicalism appears to run in Myerson's family. His father, Michael Myerson, is a prominent and unrepentant former Communist Party USA leader who co-wrote the memoir of alleged Soviet spy John Abt. The *New York Daily News* reported in 1967 that he had visited Hanoi during the Vietnam War and was named an "honorary nephew" of North Vietnamese communist leader Ho Chi Minh, and that he wore a ring forged from the remains of a crashed American aircraft.

In 2022, the elder Myerson penned an article in which he described his contacts with the Marxist Original Irish Republican Army, as well as the Palestine Liberation Organization, the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine and the Democratic People's Republic of Yemen, a since-dissolved communist regime.

"I became the conduit for invitations to the Party to send a delegation to South Yemen and Lebanon to establish party-to-party relations with the DPRY, DFLP, PLO and Communist Party of Lebanon," Myerson wrote.

Michael Myerson hung up on a JI reporter at the mention of his son's name. Jesse Myerson did not respond to repeated queries about his father.

In his *Jewish Currents* piece, the new Lander staffer complained that after World War II American Jews left "multi-ethnic working class urban neighborhoods" for "white bourgeois suburbs." Newspaper reports indicate Jesse Myerson's leftist father raised him in a Westchester County town that the census estimates is roughly two-thirds non-Hispanic white and has a median income exceeding $140,000. ♦

NOVEMBER 12, 2026

Ron Dermer: Israel has responsibility to expose foreign actors fomenting antisemitism

In an interview with JI, the former Israeli strategic affairs minister also defended his approach in prioritizing outreach to the evangelical community during his time as ambassador to the U.S.

By Haley Cohen

Former Israeli Strategic Affairs Minister Ron Dermer said Israel should deploy its intelligence and cyber capabilities to help combat rising antisemitism around the world, arguing that the Jewish state is not currently doing enough to protect diaspora communities facing growing threats.

In an interview with *Jewish Insider* on Wednesday while he was in New York City to speak at Yeshiva University and the Stephen Wise Free Synagogue, Dermer, a longtime confidant of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and a former member of Israel's war Cabinet, said Israel has a responsibility to go beyond public diplomacy and use its intelligence capabilities to expose foreign actors seeking to foment antisemitism.

The interview comes a year after Dermer stepped away from the front lines of Israeli politics, shortly after he helped secure the hostage-release deal. Rather than navigating the halls of government, he is now on a U.S. speaking tour — hoping to reach 24 cities by Passover — to make the case for Israel to American Jewish audiences. While sitting down with JI, he also weighed in on the future of U.S. military aid, the erosion of bipartisan support for the Jewish state and his hope for a broad national unity government under Netanyahu.

"Israel has capabilities that no Jewish community has. We have intel and cyber capabilities. We have to use those in helping Jews around the world who are facing a wave of antisemitism," Dermer told JI.

"I'm not talking about *hasbara*," he said, using the Hebrew term for Israel's public diplomacy. "No matter how good and effective Jewish communities are, they can't reveal foreign actors trying to poison people around the world against Jews. That's a fight Israel should get involved in to expose and defend them. We haven't had that."

Dermer also offered an endorsement of Netanyahu's continued leadership, saying he hopes the prime minister will head a broad national unity government.

"I'd like to see Netanyahu head that national unity government," Dermer said, though he acknowledged that he is not an impartial observer of the prime minister's leadership. "Ultimately, I don't believe the right path for Israel is to go to a new election and I don't believe a minority government is good."

Dermer said a broad coalition incorporating smaller parties would be best positioned to address Israel's domestic challenges, including judicial reform and the debate over ultra-Orthodox military service, alongside its external security threats.

Dermer defended the rationale for eventually phasing out U.S. military aid to Israel, arguing that Israel is in a different position economically and militarily than it was when the aid agreements were first established. He noted that the economic assistance component was phased out decades ago and said nearly all of the military aid Israel currently receives is returned to the U.S. to purchase American military equipment.

He said Netanyahu — if he remains prime minister — and Trump will need to determine the best path forward, with Israeli Ambassador to the U.S. Yechiel Leiter leading the discussions.

Dermer went on to address the challenge of maintaining bipartisan backing for the Jewish state. He said he prioritized dialogue with evangelicals during his tenure as ambassador to the U.S. from 2013-2021 in part because he was concerned about whether younger generations would maintain the community's historically strong support for Israel. "They had been for two decades, at the time, really the backbone of Israel's support in the U.S.," Dermer said. He attributed the decline in support among younger evangelicals in part to weakening religious ties, saying the younger generation has "a more attenuated Christian identity" and attends church less frequently.

"I've been a believer for as long as I've been doing this that Israel had to engage with evangelicals, explain to them what our priorities are, make sure they are aware of the situation on the ground and work with them as an ally," he said.

But Dermer rejected the suggestion that cultivating evangelical support came at the expense of relationships with Democrats or American Jews, arguing that Israel can engage different constituencies simultaneously. "You have to do that to strengthen bipartisan support," he said.

In 2021, Dermer said publicly that Israel's focus on strengthening ties with evangelicals should come instead of American Jews, whom he described as "disproportionately among our critics." The approach and comments sparked backlash from American Jewish leaders who criticized Dermer for appearing to frame Israel's relationship with evangelical Christians as more valuable than its ties to the American Jewish community. He clarified the statement at the time in an interview with JI, saying that "some of Israel's greatest champions are Jewish Americans, but you also have some of our fiercest critics. That's something you tend to not see among evangelicals."

With Democrats set to take control of Congress in January, Dermer said he expects Leiter to continue outreach to the party's leadership and its more moderate, pro-Israel members.

"As the new leadership comes from the Democratic Party, I have no doubt the am-

bassador will engage with them, listen to all of their concerns and to make the case for Israel on both sides," he said.

Dermer reiterated his longstanding view that relations between countries are ultimately driven by national interests, rather than necessarily by shared values. Pointing to then-President Joe Biden's decision to repair relations with Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman after previously calling him a "pariah," Dermer asked rhetorically whether Saudi Arabia's values had changed in the intervening years or whether American interests had driven the shift in policy.

He said that while countries may have different perceptions of one another's values, "the question is what are the interests of the country, and interests tend to drive the relations."

At the same time, Dermer rejected the suggestion that the U.S. and Israel do not share democratic values, calling such criticism "false."

He described Israel as the only country in the Middle East where Americans would feel they are "actually in a free society of a people who share their values." He argued that the alliance goes beyond both shared values and strategic interests, describing it as "a shared sense of destiny" because "America and Israel are not just countries, we're causes."

He said his greatest concern for the future of the relationship is that a generation of Americans could be raised to "not love, or even hate, America," which he warned could have long-term implications for the U.S.-Israel alliance.

Dermer declined to weigh in on potential 2028 presidential candidates in either party, offering instead a hope for the next occupant of the White House — "I just hope the American people will elect a president who loves America," he said. "If that's the case, everything else will take care of itself." ♦

NOVEMBER 13, 2026

El-Sayed significantly underperformed among Jewish Michigan voters, poll finds

The senator-elect underperformed Democratic Gov.-elect Jocelyn Benson by nearly 20 points; Republican Mike Rogers decisively won Jewish voters in Oakland County

By Marc Rod

Just half of Jewish Michiganders voted for Sen.-elect Abdul El-Sayed (D-MI) in the midterm election, according to a new poll conducted by The Jewish Majority, far below typical voting patterns in the state for a Democratic candidate and badly lagging behind Gov.-elect Jocelyn Benson's own performance with Jewish voters.

The poll is the clearest picture yet of the Jewish electorate in Michigan, amid conflicting estimates and analyses of how many Jewish voters in the state supported the controversial Democratic nominee.

The poll found that Republican Mike Rogers won 43% of the Jewish vote, while 4% of Jewish voters left their ballots blank in the Senate race and 3% voted for a third-party candidate.

The Nonnegotiable campaign, representing Jewish Democrats torn over their choices in the state's Senate race, had urged a write-in vote for deceased poet Emma Lazarus for voters uncomfortable supporting either major-party candidate.

In Oakland County, the largest Jewish community in the state, Rogers won a majority of the Jewish vote, comfortably outpacing El-Sayed 52-39%. Much of Oakland County lies in the district of Rep. Haley Stevens (D-MI), who withdrew her endorsement of El-Sayed and switched it to Rogers in the closing days of the race.

El-Sayed performed strongest with Jewish voters in the progressive college towns of Ann Arbor and East Lansing.

Data analyses since the election have also found that El-Sayed significantly underperformed Democratic Gov.-elect Jocelyn Benson and Democrats in the Statehouse in heavily Jewish precincts in Oakland County.

Rogers also comfortably won Jewish voters affiliated with a synagogue by a double-digit margin, 54%-42%.

Benson won 69% of the Jewish vote, according to the poll, running 19 points ahead of El-Sayed, and more in line with typical Jewish voting patterns in the state, which have traditionally split approximately 70% Democratic and 30% Republican. In the overall electorate, El-Sayed ran just two percentage points behind Benson.

According to the poll, Benson won 98% of self-identified Jewish Democrats, compared to 70% who supported El-Sayed. Over one-third (37%) of Jewish voters who supported Sen. Elissa Slotkin (D-MI) in 2024 did not vote for El-Sayed.

Fifty-nine percent of Rogers voters said their vote was "mainly a vote against El-Sayed."

Nearly all Jewish Democrats who opposed El-Sayed said they would likely have voted for a different Democrat, with 87% citing antisemitism as a concern about El-Sayed, 84% pointing to his comments following a terror attack targeting a Michigan synagogue earlier this year, 83% expressing concerns about his positions on Israel, 82% citing his treatment of Michigan's Jewish community and 71% pointing to concerns about people with whom he campaigned or from whom he accepted support.

Statewide, 81% of all Jewish voters said that antisemitism, concerns related to

Michigan's Jewish community and Israel policy impacted their vote to some degree.

Most voters surveyed (67%) identified as Democrats or said they leaned towards Democrats, while 26% said they identified as or leaned Republican.

A poll of Jewish early voters by The Jewish Majority found that El-Sayed won 59% of the early vote, meaning El-Sayed did worse among Election Day voters statewide. The new poll combines that survey with a postelection round of interviews, for a combined sample of 883 Michigan Jewish voters.

"A Democratic Senate candidate earning just half of the Jewish vote should be a blaring alarm for every Democratic leader in the country, especially when that candidate underperformed the Democratic nominee for governor by nearly 19 points," The Jewish Majority's executive director, Jonathan Schulman, said in a statement. "Democrats cannot assume Jewish voters will stay with them when their concerns are dismissed. Republicans should not assume a vote against one Democrat is a lasting endorsement of their party."

"This year's Democratic wave defied recent cycles that have been decided by razor-thin margins. Officials must understand that even a modest shift in the Jewish vote can be decisive. Both parties have to earn it," Schulman continued. ♦

NOVEMBER 13, 2026

Overlake Fund gives University of Haifa $8.8 million grant for suicide-prevention training hub

The donation comes as Israel faces rising levels of post-traumatic stress disorder and other mental health illnesses in the wake of the Oct. 7 attacks and 3 years of war

By Justin Hayet

The article first appeared in eJewishPhilanthropy.

In response to rising levels of mental health disorders in Israel in the wake of the Oct. 7 attacks and resulting three years of war, the University of Haifa is launching what it calls Israel's first national hub for teaching suicide care, backed by $8.8 million from the Overlake Fund over five years, the school exclusively told *eJewishPhilanthropy*.

The National Training Center for Suicide Care expects to train about 4,500 clinicians and front-line workers within five years. It will also reach 12,000 more people in local communities, teaching them to spot red flags and refer those in danger for treatment. Over the same period, it plans to launch some 80 courses and forge ties with 15 large organizations.

"This will be a national center that will change the way communities and even the whole society think about suicide, treat suicide and do suicide care," Yossi Levi-Belz, the center's founding academic director and a professor in the University of Haifa's School of Therapy, Counseling and Human Development, told eJP.

The Vermont-based Overlake Fund is led by William L. Gottesman and his wife, Debra L. Gottesman, according to IRS filings. William Gottesman is the son of the late billionaire investor David Gottesman and philanthropist Ruth L. Gottesman. The fund declined to comment on the donation.

The initiative comes in the wake of the national trauma of the Oct. 7 terror attacks and the ensuing three years of war, which have seen a marked rise in PTSD diagnoses, along with a slew of other mental health disorders.

Research by Levi-Belz and colleagues, including Columbia University's Yuval Neria, found that nearly 30% of Israeli adults showed probable PTSD a month after the attacks, up from roughly 16%. Probable depression reached almost 45%, up from approximately 31%, and probable anxiety hit nearly 43%, up from almost 25%.

"This gift reflects a shared commitment to one of the most urgent challenges facing Israeli society," University of Haifa President Gur Alroey said in a statement.

The war has also helped remove the taboo around seeking help, Levi-Belz said. "Stigma about trauma and PTSD is much lower than before the war and people with acute stress or acute depression are more likely to go into therapy than before."

The country's overall suicide rate hasn't climbed, according to the university, but follow-up studies have detected more suicidal thinking among vulnerable groups, notably combat reservists. Some studies have also found that suicide rates significantly increase in the years following a disaster, and not necessarily during the traumatic period.

Many Israeli clinicians know some aspects of suicide prevention, Levi-Belz said, but the field has never been made a national priority. "Today many clinicians say, 'I don't know how to treat it, so I will not accept it for therapy,'" he told eJP. The goal: fewer patients falling through the cracks.

The center will spend its first year laying groundwork, including developing a clinical model meant to explain why one person slides into a suicidal crisis after trauma while another doesn't. Clinicians could then match proven treatments to each patient. Levi-Belz said the center also aims to bring new mental health professionals into the suicide prevention field. "It cannot be only me and several of my friends. We need other leaders."

Trainees will rehearse conversations with AI-generated patients in crisis and get real-time critiques, using simulators Haifa researchers designed. The lab will add virtual reality scenarios and professional act-

ors, and an online platform will open the courses to clinicians nationwide.

The rollout begins in Israel's North and South. Social workers, nurses, physicians, psychologists and psychiatrists make up the core audience, alongside educators, youth workers and others who routinely meet people in crisis. The center plans to work with government ministries, the Israel Defense Forces and Israel's healthcare organizations.

Levi-Belz hopes a later grant will fund "stabilization homes," residential units for people at suicide risk that offer more support than home but less than a hospital. Existing facilities of that kind often refuse at-risk patients, he said.

"It's a very, very emotional decision to trust us with such a huge amount of money," he said of the donors. "I take on an enormous amount of responsibility."

Levi-Belz stopped short of promising quick results. "I cannot say to you that next year there will be a decline in the suicide rate," he said. "But eventually, I think it will happen." ♦

NOVEMBER 12, 2026

Jensen Huang's resignation raises questions about Nvidia's Israel presence

Huang, who called Israel the company's 'second home,' was reportedly the driving force behind a planned multibillion-dollar campus near Haifa

By Matthew Shea

Nvidia CEO Jensen Huang's abrupt resignation on Thursday — amid revelations of affairs including with a woman suspected by U.S. intelligence officials of spying for China — has raised questions about the potential impact on the technology giant's extensive footprint in Israel, where it employs roughly 6,000 people and operates its largest research and development hub outside the United States.

Huang, who co-founded Nvidia in 1993 and led the company for 33 years, stepped down as president, CEO and board member effective immediately, the company announced.

He apologized for the relationship that has raised potential national security concerns in a Sunday email to staff, while Beijing has denied the espionage allegations. Media outlets reported this week that Huang also had extramarital affairs with at least two more female employees.

Nvidia announced that Executive Vice President and Chief Financial Officer Colette Kress will serve as interim CEO while the board searches for a permanent successor. Kress, who joined Nvidia in 2013, has previously emphasized her close working relationship with the company's Israeli teams, telling Israeli media outlet *Globes* in 2023 that her workday "starts with Israel meetings."

The leadership shakeup comes as Nvidia has been preparing a major expansion of its Israeli operations, which grew significantly following its $6.9 billion acquisition of Israeli chipmaker Mellanox, announced in 2019 and completed in 2020. Huang, who has frequently referred to Israel as Nvidia's "second home," was reportedly the driving force behind a planned multibillion-dollar research and development campus in Kiryat Tivon, near Haifa. The roughly 22-acre facility is designed to accommodate up to 10,000 employees, with construction scheduled to begin in 2027 and initial occupancy targeted for 2031.

His departure raises questions about whether Nvidia will maintain its ambitious expansion plans and current footprint in Israel, though there has been no indication that the company intends to scale back its Israeli operations.

Among the names being discussed as potential permanent successors are two Israeli-born, Technion-educated executives: Nvidia Chief Technology Officer and Mellanox co-founder Michael Kagan and Apple's Chief Hardware Officer Johny Srouji, according to *Haaretz*.

In an interview with *Israel Hayom* conducted in early September, Kagan expressed confidence in Nvidia's continued expansion in Israel. Asked whether the company would need the thousands of employees expected to work at its planned Kiryat Tivon campus, Kagan replied: "Of course we'll need them." He had also expressed hope that Nvidia would eventually build another campus in Israel.

Neither has been named as an official candidate by Nvidia, which said it will consider both internal and external replacements.

The company's Israeli teams have long played a central role in developing the networking and artificial intelligence technologies that allow data center chips to operate together. According to *Calcalist*, the operations have become so deeply integrated into Nvidia's business that any changes could disrupt the development of key products.

Engineers in Israel lead the development of Nvidia's flagship networking hardware, which links tens of thousands of AI processors into unified supercomputing clusters. Those high-speed systems have aided Nvidia's dominance in artificial intelligence infrastructure and generate billions of dollars in annual revenue. ♦

NOVEMBER 11, 2026

Gal Gadot to bring Golodryga and Levi's *'Don't Feed the Lion'* to the big screen

The book by the two journalists explores antisemitism from the eyes of a middle schooler

By Haley Cohen

Gal Gadot and her husband, Jaron Varsano, are teaming up with FOX Entertainment Studios and the media arm of the Simon Wiesenthal Center to bring *Don't Feed the Lion*, a book about antisemitism and Jewish identity for middle schoolers by journalists Bianna Golodryga and Yonit Levi, to the big screen.

The film, announced on Wednesday by *Deadline*, will follow the story of a fictional 13-year-old Jewish soccer player whose world is crushed when his sports hero shares an antisemitic message that goes viral, leading to antisemitic incidents at his Chicago middle school. It is based on the novel published last November by co-authors Golodryga, an Emmy Award-winning journalist who announced last month that she is leaving CNN after nine years, and Levi, the longtime anchor of Israel's Channel 12 nightly newscast.

The project comes as the Simon Wiesenthal Center prepares to honor Golodryga with its Jewish Heritage Award at its annual Humanitarian Award Dinner in Los Angeles on Wednesday evening. The Wiesenthal Center is helping to produce the film through its storytelling division, Moriah Media.

Gadot and Varsano will serve as executive producers on the adaptation. The Hollywood couple said in a joint statement that the book appealed to them because "we want our children to grow up in a world where differences are respected, where hatred is challenged and where no one feels alone in standing up for what is right." Gadot may also star in the movie, according to *Deadline*.

Golodryga and Levi, who were raising their own children in New York and Israel, respectively, when the Oct. 7, 2023, Hamas attacks and subsequent rise in antisemitism prompted difficult conversations at home, said they struggled to find resources to help young people understand and confront hatred.

Golodryga told *Jewish Insider* last November amid the book's launch that when she asked her son's school in New York what it was doing to address antisemitism, she received a lengthy response that made clear "there were no resources" and that the school "wasn't really doing anything." Levi similarly recalled being caught off guard when her preteen son began asking questions about antisemitism.

The two journalists decided to write the book they wished had existed for their children, drawing on their own experiences and those of their families to create a story that addresses antisemitism through the eyes of middle schoolers. Levi told JI that the book is ultimately about helping children recognize right from wrong, even when the adults around them are reluctant to stand up to hate. ♦

NOVEMBER 12, 2026

Why do so many leaders study in Pardes' Beit Midrash?

As the institute rebrands, graduates share their experiences with Jerusalem's pluralistic yeshiva

By Jay Deitcher

The article first appeared in eJewishPhilanthropy.

One former student of the Pardes Institute of Jewish Studies in Jerusalem helped put the issue of environmentalism on the Jewish communal agenda. Another now leads the largest Reform temple in Canada. And a third, Rachel Goldberg-Polin, whose tireless work on behalf of the hostages held captive in Gaza earned her great praise throughout the Jewish world, credits her five years of study at the institute's beit midrash as influencing everything in her life since.

Today, more than 50 years after Pardes opened its doors in 1972, under the direction of Rabbi Michael Swirsky, it's hard to imagine an area of Jewish life that its students haven't touched. The pluralistic yeshiva continues to serve as an incubator for leaders, and its impact ripples across denominational lines and around the Jewish world. And this week, the school launched a new website as part of a rebranding of its visual identity, including an updated version of its pomegranate logo and a new tagline, "The Art of Jewish Learning," reflecting its emphasis on building skills, exploring diverse perspectives and engaging deeply with Jewish texts. (The old tagline was "Your Torah. Your Journey.")

When Meesh Hammer-Kossoy first strolled through the institute's doors in 1987, the Jerusalem *beit midrash* looked markedly different than it does today,

where LGBTQ+ advocates study across from Jews of color, and women in tank tops partner with those with their hair wrapped in *tichels*. Today, Hammer-Kossoy, who began teaching at the institute in 1999, is herself the director of Pardes' year program and is *rosh beit midrash* — yet another student who has made good.

"The core mission, which is letting Jews define their own Jewish journey and really hav[ing] access to the Torah, is still 100% the core mission of the institution," she said. "And in some ways the learning is very similar to how it was" when she first enrolled, Hammer-Kossoy told *eJewishPhilanthropy*.

Ordained at the Jewish Theological Seminary and a leader in the Havurah movement, Swirsky envisioned a Jerusalem-based *yeshiva* with deep respect for Torah intertwined with the intellectual openness and progressive thinking of an American university. When the school opened in the fall of 1972, it catered to post-college young adults primarily from North America — today, students of all ages trek from around the globe to study together.

In her recent book, *When We See You Again*, Rachel Goldberg-Polin describes the institute as "where inquisitive young post-graduates could go to hydrate their thirst for learning." She enrolled in a six-week summer program in 1995, but didn't leave for five years. In this regard, hers is a story that mirrors many others who came for one program and stayed for more. In September 2023, she was hired as the Student Support Coordinator, a position she would hold for a month before tragedy struck and her son, Hersh, was kidnapped by terrorists during the Oct. 7 terror attacks in southern Israel and executed nearly a year later.

A summer 2026 alumni impact study found that 53% of Pardes alumni serve as Jewish professionals — they are rabbis, educators and leaders. Twenty-three percent have founded or co-founded Jewish institutions, initiatives or communities such as Jewish-environmental nonprofit Adamah, Jewish meditation and spirituality organization Or HaLev and the Hadar Institute, which modeled its learning on Pardes.

Born in Chicago, Swirsky made *aliyah* in 1971, at 26, entering a country still buzzing with excitement after its definitive Six-Day War victory and before the national shock of the 1973 Yom Kippur War surprise attack.

At the time, the country's existence felt miraculous, and that heady sense of euphoria encouraged the settler and *baal teshuva* movements, with spirituality-seeking hippies turning towards Torah. It also led Swirsky to partner with the World Zionist Organization to offer American Jews a pluralistic setting to debate Torah.

A lot has changed since Pardes' inception. The school split from the WZO in 1987. It launched programs to train Jewish educators and started offering summer programs, immersive seminars, a second-year fellow program, community education programming and an expanded curriculum to North America.

"Many of the people at Pardes are not getting a degree from being there," Nigel Savage, who founded Adamah, previously known as Hazon, in 2000, told eJP. "Most of the time, we're on professional tracks and getting undergrad degrees and graduate degrees, and Pardes, almost since its beginnings, but up through 'till today, has attracted bright, talented, questioning, idealistic students."

Pardes is in an infinity loop, Savage said; students and faculty bring out the best in one another. "The caliber of those students influences each other and inspires the faculty, and having great faculty inspires the students. So that's a potent mix in a really lovely way."

In 1994, Savage served as a lay leader in London's Jewish community while working on the English version of Wall Street when he packed his bags to study at Pardes. After wrapping up his year of studies, Savage thought to himself, "Why would I want to commute to the city of London in a pinstripe suit?" so he stayed in Israel without a plan. Then a friend from Pardes invited him on a hike from the Mediterranean Sea to the Sea of Galilee. "I'd never basically set foot outdoors," he recalled, "and I was incredibly scared."

Clad in ill-suited shoes and lugging a gargantuan backpack, Savage journeyed into the unknown, slogging through rainstorms and sweltering heat, but he fell in love with nature. The wilderness "was a great way to bring people together across difference," he said. Soon, he founded Hazon and today Savage serves as the founding CEO of the Jewish Climate Trust.

None of this would have happened without Pardes, Savage said. His time at the school gave him the footing to move forward in the world steeped in Jewish tradition, and the school taught him something that later would become the tagline for Hazon: "The Torah is a commentary on the world, and the world is a commentary on the Torah."

Rabbi Samuel Kaye, too, was searching when he strolled through Pardes' doors in 2012. He was a 26-year-old bartender living in Chicago who discovered the institute after returning home from a Birthright Israel trip. "When everyone else was hooking up with each other, I fell in love with Israel," he told eJP. Browsing through a Masa Israel Journey catalog, a Pardes promotion "just spoke to me," he said. "I didn't know anyone who had gone, I didn't know anyone who was there, but it was listed as this egalitarian study-based program. I didn't think it was gonna try to turn me into a black hat."

Before Pardes, "I would not have identified myself as a religious person," Kaye said. "I would have identified as a Jewish person, and when I finished at Pardes, I was both Jewish and religious."

During his time in the year program, Kaye participated in the school's student-led egalitarian minyan, but grew frustrated that staff wouldn't intervene in intragroup conflicts, especially over who was counted for prayers. "Now I appreciate that they wouldn't get involved in that," he said, "and that they let people discuss it and resolve it for themselves every single year... because it shows you how Jewish community has to function to answer questions inside of itself as opposed to having authority come and tell you what to do."

Today, Kaye serves as lead rabbi at Canada's largest Reform congregation, Holy Blossom Temple in Toronto. "I credit Pardes with a lot of my success," he said. "My love of text, my ability to work with more traditional conservative Orthodox colleagues, the fact that I find a lot of joy in be-

ing in intra-Jewish spaces, and my continued study habits."

Rabbi Maya Zinkow was studying creative writing at Barnard College when her Hillel rabbi told her about Pardes. Zinkow grew up in a Reform household with rabbis as parents. After two weeks studying *Gemara* at Pardes, she had an epiphany: "I can't believe I've been Jewish my whole life, and I've been *really* Jewish my whole life, and I've never, like, done this, and this is new, and this is different," she thought to herself.

She loved that Pardes allowed students to find their own path. "No matter who you are — queer, straight, woman, man, trans, cis, Zionist, anti-Zionist, whoever you are as a Jew — Pardes is a place that really embraces the idea of coming to the text as you are," Zinkow told eJP. "For thousands of years, only a certain kind of person, at least on the surface or as we understood them, was coming to the text as who they were. All of the laws of *niddah*, all of sacred sexuality as relates to menstruation, were developed by a certain kind of person who didn't actually have that experience. What happens when you open up the doors to the *beit midrash* and actually have different people with different bodies and different identities coming to the text?"

The *beit midrash* at Pardes "is like a little bit more rad, a little bit more queer every day, every year," Zinkow said. "There's no other place where you can go and learn Torah in a very traditional yeshivish kind of way, but be a Jew of any and all kind."

At Pardes, Zinkow experienced educators who were "brilliant minds who know the entire Torah and are also incredibly emotionally intelligent, care about you as a human. I was like, 'Whoa! If that's what a rabbi is, can I be a rabbi?'"

The school allowed her to find herself "as Rav Maya, the feminist, Rav Maya, the queer person, Rav Maya, wanting to heal the world of its brokenness in whatever ways, that allows me to authentically learn and teach Torah in the same way that it's been happening for centuries, but in my voice, which has not been happening for centuries."

In October, Zinkow — formerly campus rabbi at Berkeley Hillel from 2021 to 2026 — joined the Pardes North America faculty, teaching a monthly class with varying topics in Berkeley, Calif., with the first session titled, "Why Pray for Rain? (Or Anything at All)."

There will be a time in every Pardes student's life when they will be looked up to as if they were the most educated Jew in the world, David Bernstein, the dean emeritus of Pardes, tells students at the beginning and closing of every year. They need to be prepared, he says. According to Pardes' recent report, they are; 96% of alumni report serving as a trusted source of Jewish wisdom in their communities.

The study surveyed 760 alumni and found that the participants reached 513,000 people through teaching, mentorship, leadership, institutions and community life. Magnified across the more than 10,000 alumni who have studied at the institution over its 54 years, alumni are estimated to have impacted 6.7 million people.

Having taught at Pardes since 1999, Hammer-Kossoy has watched alumni establish their own Jewish schools and organizations across the globe, but often the school's impact is more intimate. She's watched students fall in love. Watched them smooch under a *chuppah*, surrounded by Pardes peers who shower the couple with Sunkist Fruit Gems. She's watched Pardes' graduates start families together, and she *kvelled* at their children's bar and bat mitzvahs.

"At the core" of the Pardes student body "is a group of Jews with a really strong, robust and vibrant Jewish identity," Hammer-Kossoy said. Today's students often identify as postdenominational, she said. "In a lot of ways Pardes has always kind of transcended those labels." They are individuals, coming from all backgrounds, finding themselves. "We give them confidence to back up that identity, and from that identity they want to be leaders; they naturally become leaders." ♦