Happy Birthday Israel!
Israel’s 74th Birthday

by Phil Alkon

Some 1900 years ago, the all-powerful Roman Empire cleansed the Land of Israel of its Jewish inhabitants by massacre and expulsion, and even sought to destroy its very identity by renaming it “Syria-Palestina.” Today, that mightiest of ancient western realms is a distant memory. Its Jewish victims, by contrast, have reconstituted their ancient covenant with God as the State of Israel. More recently, in the 20th Century, the British Empire sought to encompass the oil-rich Near East as its property. It did manage to create a Jordanian puppet state out of 70 percent of what was supposed to be a Jewish homeland, according to its League of Nations mandate: But who really cared, except for the Jews themselves? Yes, a tiny strip of land is Eretz Yisrael. But now as a vibrant State of Israel, and as Hashem’s covenant with the Jewish people realized, it embodies a unique testament to the human spirit at its noblest. Not only a recognized, legitimate nation, but perhaps the most vibrant state in the world. Certainly “a light unto the nations” in the Middle East, if not far beyond. In fact, Israel’s recent birthday celebration was attended by the highest representatives of Arab nations that were very recently committed to its erasure from a purely Muslim Middle East. Miraculously, the very same nations that waged three major wars to destroy Israel are now formally or functionally at peace with their Jewish neighbor. Moreover, they are openly joining with that neighbor in a wide range of scientific, economic, and cultural initiatives that should benefit all their peoples. Not least, by liberating them from the tribal, religious, and nationalistic hatreds that have crippled them for generations. The overriding threat posed by a nearly nucleared Shia Iran is perhaps a hidden blessing. It is promoting unity among the Sunni Arabs themselves, and with a Jewish state that can claim a superpower United States as a close ally. I believe this birthday entitles us to a hearty – L’Chaim! Celebrate Israel @ 74 with us on Sunday, May 1 from 3:30 – 7pm @ Keystone Heritage Park

How to Do Good

We all want to be helpful, but sometimes unsure where to begin or worry that our efforts may be misplaced and our impact minimal.

On Lag B’Omer, (May 19) we celebrate the legacy of the great Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai. A Talmudic scholar of epic proportions best known for being the author of the Zohar and the father of Kabhualah, Jewish mysticism.

During his lifetime the Roman Empire controlled the Land of Israel and their tyrannical rule often interfered with Jewish religious life. He was overheard criticizing the emperors and as a result the enraged emperor sentenced him to death. Rabbi Shimon fled to the mountains of Northern Israel and hid in a cave for thirteen years.

When the danger passed and the decree was annulled, the two sages emerged from hiding transformed. Thirteen years of non-stop Torah study elevated them to unparalleled spiritual heights.

Despite his superior spiritual status, Rabbi Shimon inquired whether there was any way he could be helpful to the local population. The citizens of Tiberias suggested he visit their town to attend to a matter of significant inconvenience. Kohanim, the descendants of Aharon the High Priest who served in the Holy Temple are required of inordinate purity. This means they are barred to constantly be in a state of ritual purity. This means they are barred from ascending funerals or being near a grave (with few exceptions) among other restrictions.

The main road of Tiberias was off limits for Kohanim because there was evidence that a grave was there, but the marker had vanished, and no one recalled its exact location. Hence, the local Kohanim were forced to make a long and inconvenient detour to circumvent the suspected grave.

In a miraculous manner, Rabbi Shimon located the grave and the decades long problem was finally solved.

What is striking about this episode is that, upon rejoining society, Rabbi Shimon immediately searched for ways to be helpful and did not wait for an opportunity to impact the entire population. He worked hard to correct an issue that was inconveniencing very few people in town.

This is the Jewish ethic of “doing good.” Be alert for the opportunities that abound and don’t wait to solve the global issues that impact many. If your efforts can make life better for even one person - be grateful for the opportunities you have to put a smile on someone’s face.
Israel Unites, Inspires Us to Make an Impact

By Russell F. Robinson, CEO, Jewish National Fund – USA

I can remember celebrating Israel’s Independence Day at our JCC on Mardi Gras Drive 35 years ago. We would have an expo with singers, folk dancing, rides, and even stalls selling jars of glistening sand from the Holy Land. It didn’t matter whether you were religious, secular, or somewhere in between – everyone would come together to celebrate the one thing that united us – Israel, the land and its people.

During my childhood in El Paso, my parents were under no illusion that I would become a rabbi. I would have rather taken multiple algebra exams (which I did poorly in) than attend religious services. And that isn’t a knock on rabbis; it is just a reality for many young people, even today. However, when it came to Israel, I couldn’t get enough. I wanted to learn about the early days of our pioneers, the stories of Theodor Herzl, David Ben-Gurion, and the many larger-than-life icons that enabled our people to realize a 2,000-year-old dream of coming home to Israel.

Israel to me was about Jews winning.

As Chief Executive Officer of Jewish National Fund-USA, the premier philanthropic movement for the land and people of Israel, I have kept the spark alive that was ignited in me growing up in our beautiful, Zionist El Paso community.

Even though El Paso is 7,500 miles away from Israel, we don’t have to sit on the sidelines when it comes to Israel. Through the power of philanthropy, Jewish National Fund-USA ensures Israel will continue to inspire our children and children’s children to feel proud as Zionists as they connect with their community and feel a part of something bigger. And in this new virtual world, we are bringing thousands of people together to discuss the beauty of Zionism and what it means to them through our Conversations on Zionism series.

In leading Jewish National Fund-USA, it’s important to me that everyone has an opportunity to build Israel’s future. Every day, we support Israelis living in frontier communities in the Negev and Galilee. We built, and continue to build medical centers, fortified schools, resilience facilities, parks, playgrounds, and so much more. Our philanthropic investments also help tens of thousands of people with disabilities feel included and supported through initiatives such as animal therapy and a program that integrate them into the Israel Defense Forces.

Thanks to our generous partners (donors) in El Paso and across the nation, we are ensuring that Israelis living outside the country’s central cities can experience a high quality of life. If you have ever wanted to maximize your impact in Israel, the time is now as Israel celebrates 74 years of independence.

In a world full of conflict, fractures, and division, will you help me make Israel’s light shine brighter than ever before? This Yom Ha’atzmaut, let’s come together and celebrate how blessed we are to have an independent Jewish homeland again to call our own. And what’s more, through Jewish National Fund-USA, every one of us can be authors of the most extraordinary story ever written – the story of the land and people of Israel, the story I first learned of growing up in El Paso, Texas.
By Sarah Heller Pena

Being born and raised in El Paso and actively involved in our Jewish community my entire childhood, I have many happy memories of events and holidays celebrated together with family and friends. Having returned to the Sun City, I find that this connection to my faith has helped me feel welcomed, accepted, and excited to continue the same traditions with my 2 young children.

PJ Library events are something that my entire family looks forward to. It is such a great way to involve younger children in activities and Jewish traditions, all while keeping their attention and providing them a proper environment for growth and engagement.

We were lucky enough to be able to attend PJ Library’s Charoset Around the World. Both my kids, ages 4 and 8, love helping me in the kitchen and preparing dishes for our family dinners. This program was focused on making charoset for Passover, which now both my boys are very excited to make for our seders.

Our youth are the ones that will carry on our Jewish faith and traditions for future generations, and to be able to begin that beautiful transition now was amazing to witness. I often think of my parents, who have both passed, and how happy they would be to see their grandson’s laughing and smiling with their friends while talking about Passover and sneaking bites of the apples from the charoset. As people of the Jewish faith, we all carry the task to continue the generations and remember our past to grow for our future.

So, while the weeks seem to fly by, and our weekends inevitably fill up, our family will always make time for PJ Library events because of the way we feel when we leave. We are always smiling, happy, silly, and so thankful that we had the opportunity to be together participating in laying the foundation for our children’s Jewish future.
Up Close: Noel Hollowell Small

Originally from Los Angeles, California, Noel moved to El Paso after graduating from Occidental College with a degree in Psychology. She married Brian Small and raised Derrick and Evelyn Small. In addition to her children, currently works as a Judaic teacher at The J Center for Early Learning and is the Camp Director for Camp Chai (The Cherry Hill School’s Summer Camp).

What value do we need most in our world today?

We all should value education and cultivate a lifetime of learning in ourselves and those around us. I believe the work to repair the world starts with oneself.

What do you value most in your friends?

I value being able to be open and honest without judgment from my friends. Enjoying the highs of life together and supporting one another through the lows.

Who’s your favorite Jewish hero (Jewish living or not-fictional) and why?

Currently, two Jewish figures stand out to me, Abigail Pogrebin and Ruth Bader Ginsburg. Pogrebin is co-author of “My Jewish Year: 18 Holidays, One Wondering Jew”. I admire how she embraced all the Jewish holiday traditions and the challenges that come with them in a modern world. When speaking with others regarding the book, I recommended her chapter on Purim, Esther, and the challenges of being a leader. Whenever I read about or watch a Ruth Bader Ginsburg interview, I am reinspired to work harder towards my goals.

What’s the best thing about being part of our Jewish community?

I enjoy being able to grow in my Judaism, celebrate Shabbat, and other Jewish holidays as a community. Additionally, I enjoy the programming that fosters connections and works towards repairing the world together through programs like Rise Against Hunger, feeling the challenge brought on by my Temple Mount Sinai Sisterhood Book Review, a fun night out with Jewish El Paso’s ElPasoConnect group for 20s-40s, or learning to Garden with Hadassah. I am grateful that I am able to send my kids to a Jewish school and camps. I am truly grateful for the community I have.

Why do you think it is important for American Jews to be connected to Israel?

Israel provides a beacon of hope, and democracy in a tough place to be. When I was in Israel, I looked through bullet hole walls in Tzfat and thought about the spirit to thrive in a difficult place to live. It is inspiring to see the art created, beauty, delicious food, and life among the wreckage. I think that work needs to be done on how certain historical sites are publicly used, for example the Kotel, the Western Wall, and how we connect beyond the Jewish community there. Israel is an important part of who we are as a people, an extension of our tribe and spirit.

Welcome to the Jewish El Paso Board (not listed Scott Kobren)

Donna Leffman

was born and resided in Illinois until I moved to El Paso in 1998 where I completed my accounting studies at The University of Texas at El Paso. I am an accountant and have been in the tax field for 21 years. I am a member of Temple Mount Sinai and am the treasurer for Temple’s Sisterhood group. I would like to serve on the Jewish El Paso Board to become more involved in helping our Jewish community.

Occupation: Accountant
Birthplace: Quincy, Illinois
Child(ren) Name(s): Daniel, Douglas, Dara

Robin Krasne

I have volunteered through the years on the boards of various Jewish organizations including the Jewish Community Center, The Jewish Federation of El Paso, The JCC, Preschool, The El Paso Jewish Academy, National Council of Jewish Women as well as Congregation B’nai Zion. I want to help create a community where myself and others can connect with their Jewish identity.

Occupation: Human Resources at Alamo Auto Supply
Birthplace: New York
Spouse: Dick Krasne
Child(ren) Name(s): Seth and Zach

Ross Marks

I am a filmmaker and professor at New Mexico State University. I am known for directing Walking with Herb, The twilight of the Golds, and Homage. I am a member of Chabad of Las Cruces. I choose to serve on the board to support and serve our wonderful Jewish communities in the desert of the Southwest.

Occupation: Professor
Hometown: Highland Park, Illinois
Spouse: Debra
Children: Kagan, Mason & Grace

JEWISH EL PASO CONNECTING EL PASO-LAS CRUCES

Graduating in 2022?

Preschool, Grammar School, High School, College

We want to feature you.

Send us a 5x7 picture and a two-line biography by May 10 to be featured in June/July’s issue of The Jewish Voice.

https://jewishelpaso.digitalphoenix.com

or email thevoice@jewishelpaso.org

It was the wish of Ms. Weiss that proceeds from the Beatrice L. Weiss Memorial Scholarship Fund would be given to Jewish college students in El Paso and Las Cruces to enable them to pursue their studies.

Scholarship Submission Deadline - Sunday, May 15
By Arvin and Beverly Robinson

We chose to establish a fund with The Jewish Community Foundation of El Paso in honor of our late daughter, Elisa. We would like to see the endowment grow so that the income it generates will ensure the survival and success of the many organizations and causes the Foundation supports.

Some of the worthy organizations and causes are those that provide services once provided by Jewish Family and Children’s Service. Help for grief support for families who have lost loved ones and counseling support for caregivers of chronically ill patients, among other social services. We would also like to see continued support of programs with expansion to include those components that require more specialized resources.
Looking for ROMEOs!

We are Retired Old Men Eating Out

We meet for lunch at 12:30pm, every Wednesday at the Great American on Cromo. If you’re over 65+ looking to share lunch, laughs, kibbutz and telling lies to each other, come join us.

Call the Jewish Batman, Ira Batt: 915-472-2288

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85th Annual Meeting - Monday, May 23 | 6 – 7:30 pm

At the home of Allison and Jordan Furman

Thank Monika Kimball for her 2 years of service as President

Presentation of the Bernard and Florence Schoichet Leadership Award to Dana Frank

Electors of Officers and Board Members

Executive Committee – to be elected to a 2-year term
Debra Kanof – President
Lee Chayes – Vice-President
Carlos Kaplan – Treasurer
Shane Wagman Romero – JCRC Chair, ElPasoConnect Chair
Monika Kimball, Immediate Past President

Continuing Board members – to be elected to a 2- year term
Marc Ellman
Robin Furman
Noel Hollowell Small

New Board members – to be elected to a 2- year term
Scott Kobren
Robin Krasne
Donna Leffman
Ross Marks

Continuing Executive Committee member(s)
Martha Eisenberg – Secretary

Continuing Board member(s)
Michael Blau
Cesar Carrasco
Eddie Trevizo
Joanne Turnbull

Outgoing Officers and Board Members(s)
Tatiana Judith Avila, Dana Frank, Wendy Lanski, Dan Sonnen

Annual Meeting Chair
Wendy Lanski