

The Canadian Jewish News



EL AL

is flying away from Canada
(but will it come back next year?)

/ page 6

CANDLE LIGHTING TIMES

MONCTON	8:53
MONTREAL	8:26
OTTAWA	8:34
TORONTO	8:43
NIAGARA	8:39
WINNIPEG	9:19
EDMONTON	9:44
VANCOUVER	9:00

Obituaries: Irving Abella and Sheila Goldbloom page 2

McGill University's antisemitism probe findings page 4

Rabbi reflects on kidney donation to a stranger page 5

Faith and grief in a ballet by Avinoam Silverman page 8

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Obituary: Irving Abella, 82, was a Canadian historian who revealed why Canada kept Jews out during the Holocaust

/ Ron Csillag

Irving Abella, who with fellow historian Harold Troper, became a household name in Canada for his withering indictment of this country's war-era animus toward Jewish refugees escaping Nazi Europe, died July 3 after a long illness. He had just turned 82 years old.

The title of Abella and Troper's 1983 bestseller, *None is Too Many*, entered the Canadian Jewish lexicon as bywords for Ottawa's dismal policy of barely admitting any Jews fleeing Nazi Germany and occupied Europe before, during and even after the Second World War.

Contrary to some beliefs, the since-popularized phrase did not come from then Prime Minister Mackenzie King or the director of Ottawa's immigration branch, Frederick Charles Blair, but from an unidentified bureaucrat who was asked by reporters in early 1939 how many Jews would be admitted to Canada, and then gave the infamous reply.

Though considered a compassionate and open country, Canada effectively shut its doors to Jewish immigration at the time, admitting a "paltry" 5,000 Jews between 1933 and 1948, Abella and Troper's seminal book noted. Canada's record was "the worst," it boldly stated.

In 1968, Abella married Rosalie Silberman, who would take her husband's name and go onto a storied, 17-year career as the first Jewish woman and refugee to serve as a justice on Canada's Supreme Court. They were among Canada's best-known Jewish "power couples." She retired from the court last year, when she turned 75.

Irving Abella "was among the first generation of professional scholars to take up Canadian Jewish subjects, and his writings and findings left an indelible print on the now-mature and professionalized field," lauded David Koffman, holder of the J. Richard Shiff Chair for the Study of Canadian Jewry and an associate history professor at York University, in a tribute to Abella, on his 80th birthday.

"Abella is arguably the scholar with the largest imprint on Canadian Jewish studies."

A professor of history at York University from 1968 to 2013, Abella helped pioneer the field of Canadian labour history. His published works included *Nationalism, Communism and Canadian Labour* (1973) and *On Strike: Six Key Labour Struggles in Canada 1919-1949* (1974). He co-edited the volume *The Canadian Worker in the Twentieth Century* (1978).

In 1990, he published *A Coat of Many Colours: Two Centuries of Jewish Life in Canada* to accompany an exhibit of the same name that year at the Canadian Museum of Civilization

in Ottawa.

Abella served as president of the Canadian Jewish Congress from 1992 to 1995.

In 1993, he was inducted into the Order of Canada. "His writings and lectures have helped us to appreciate the rich and diverse roots of our country, and broadened our understanding of the contributions generations of immigrants have made to Canada," the award noted.

He was a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada, and also chair of Vision TV.

Abella will be remembered for both his scholarship and his community activism, said Ira Robinson, Distinguished Professor Emeritus in the department of religions and cultures at Concordia University.

"As a scholar, he will be most remembered for *None is Too Many*, co-authored with Harold Troper. Clearly indicting the Canadian government of the pre-Second World War era with callousness (to say the least) toward Jewish refugees from Nazi domination hoping to come to Canada, *None Is Too Many* is one of the very few academic books that influenced Canadian national discourse and policy-making in the area of refugees.

"Abella was a Jewish community activist as well," Robinson said. "He will perhaps be best remembered for his leadership of Canadian Jewish Congress, but he was equally significant as one of the prime builders of the Centre for Jewish Studies at York University."

Author Franklin Bialystok recalled Abella as a "scholar, teacher and most significantly a mensch."

"Irving took me under his wing, introduced me to scholars and historians, wrote to Oxford on my behalf where I spent a year on sabbatical, and ultimately was my supervisor for my doctorate, *Delayed Impact: The Holocaust and the Canadian Jewish Community*. Irv was patient, and saw the thesis through its publication."

Irving Abella was born July 2, 1940. The couple has two adult sons, Jacob and Zachary, both lawyers, and several grandchildren. Funeral services were held on July 5 in Toronto. ■

Ron Csillag is the reporter emeritus for The CJN.

Obituary: Sheila Goldbloom, 96, was a mentor who believed in building understanding between communities

/ Janice Arnold

Sheila Goldbloom was confident that she was destined to make a contribution to society when she graduated from Mount Holyoke, a prestigious women's college in Massachu-

setts, in 1947.

Unlike other elite schools of its kind at the time, Holyoke groomed its students for making the world a better place through real-life work, rather finding a suitable husband.

Goldbloom, who died at age 96 on July 3, fulfilled that promise spectacularly over her long life, as a social work professor at McGill University and as a community volunteer, a term that does not begin to convey her ground-breaking services to a multitude of educational, social, philanthropic and governmental organizations.

She was a mentor to generations of professionals and volunteers, especially women, and is credited with elevating the status and influence of the non-profit sector in Quebec—in both the anglophone and francophone communities.

Like her late husband Victor Goldbloom, she was, in her understated way, a bridge-builder between peoples of different faiths, languages and cultures. One of her causes in recent years was the restoration of the historic Christ Church Cathedral, acting as honorary co-chair of fundraising.

Goldbloom was one of the early champions of the McGill Middle East Program for Civil Society and Peace Building, known today at the International Community Action Network (ICAN), which since 1997 has brought together Israelis, Palestinians and Jordanians to improve the lives of disadvantaged people in the region.

She mentored three Arab women studying social work in that program. One of them was Amal Elsana Ahl'jooj, a Bedouin from a village in Israel, who was among the first cohort. She would stay on at McGill to pursue a PhD and become ICAN's executive director. The two remained friends until Goldbloom's death.

Prof. Jim Torczyner, founder of the McGill program, said, "Sheila contributed so much to civility and civil society through acts of kindness, with wisdom, and a true sense of justice and fair play. She influenced thousands of social work students and was a role model for so many. She served the community so effectively, tirelessly and in so many different spheres. I have lost a dear friend."

Later in life, Goldbloom was an advocate for vulnerable seniors. At age 82, she was appointed by the Quebec government to co-lead a commission that toured the province, listening to the needs of the elderly.

Born Sheila Barshay in New York in 1925, she was the only child of progressive-minded parents, both born in the Pale of Settlement, who she described as well ahead of their time. Her mother volunteered with Planned Parenthood with the support of her husband, a lawyer, who died suddenly when Sheila was 10.

Eleanor Roosevelt was Goldbloom's idol growing up and, as she notes in her memoir *Opening Doors* published three years ago, a favourite quote of hers was "Understanding is a two-way street."

Her first job was with the League of Women Voters in her native city.

When she was 21 she was introduced, through family friends, to Victor Goldbloom, a young doctor from Montreal who was training in New York. After they married the couple settled Montreal in 1949.

A modest, quiet-spoken person, Goldbloom carved out her own identity, yet managed to be a supportive wife to a busy pediatrician turned politician and engaged mother of three.

Moving to a linguistically and religiously divided Quebec, where women were seen as second-class citizens, was a cul-

ture shock for Goldbloom. Her first job in Montreal was at the YWCA, where she helped young women who had moved to the city from the countryside.

As soon as her kids were in school, she resumed her own education, pursuing a master of social work at McGill.

She developed an expertise in the burgeoning field of community organization. Her professors were so impressed that she was invited to teach after graduation, first as a lecturer and later promoted to associate professor. It was a vocation that would last almost 30 years, until her retirement in 1992.

Goldbloom became an active political wife with Victor's election to the National Assembly in 1966, until he left public office in 1979. In 1970 he became the first Jewish cabinet minister. He died in 2016.

Numerous people speak of her ability to encourage people of all kinds that they, as an individual, could make a difference.

"Sheila was, quite simply, one of the finest human beings I have ever known," said Deborah Corber, a lawyer involved in various community endeavours. "Beyond her obvious intellect, organizational and ambassadorial skills, Sheila's unique gift was to make one feel heard, respected and appreciated. Every moment engaging with Sheila left me feeling uplifted."

The lengthy list of organizations in which Goldbloom played a pivotal role includes Centraide, to which she brought greater participation by the English-speaking community; the Fondation de Grand Montréal, which she helped create; Vanier College; Allied Jewish Community Services and Jewish Family Services (forerunners of Federation CJA and Agence Ometz); Meals on Wheels; Batshaw Youth Centres, and the Queen Elizabeth Health Complex.

She was appointed to the Order of Canada in 1999 and the Ordre national du Québec in 2008. Her alma maters Mount Holyoke College and McGill bestowed honorary degrees upon her. The Quebec Community Groups Network named its annual community service award in her and Victor's honour.

Goldbloom is survived by her children Susan, Michael and Jonathan and their families. ■

McGill University's antisemitism and Islamophobia probe cites BDS as a key source of tension

/ Janice Arnold

A McGill University administration investigation cites the "polarizing" debate around the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, in particular the boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) campaign, as causing both Jewish and Muslim students to feel they are targets of discrimination.

In its final report released June 30, the Initiative Against Islamophobia and Antisemitism (IAIAS) states: “Unquestionably, the most fraught question that emerged within the focused consultations was whether expressions in support of BDS amounted to discrimination.

“For many members of the Jewish community, some BDS-related activism – while permissible political expression at the outset—descended into anti-Zionist rhetoric and claims that, for them, were tantamount to antisemitism.”

On the other hand, pro-Palestinian Muslim students felt they were victimized for their views.

The initiative was launched in March by Provost and Vice-Principal (Academic) Christopher Manfredi “in response to a growing number of reports from students and staff of Muslim and Jewish identity of experiences that have led them to feel marginalized, alienated, and/or discriminated within our university context.”

IAIAS report co-authors Angela Campbell, associate provost (equality and academic policy) and Fabrice Labeau, deputy provost (student life and learning) drew on the findings of focus groups with students, faculty and staff conducted by an independent facilitator and through an open call for submissions, as well as input from external groups, including Hillel Montreal and the National Council of Canadian Muslims.

“It is important to underscore what should be an obvious truth and was expressed by many participants: neither the Jewish nor the Muslim communities are monoliths. Additionally, Israeli and Palestinian advocacy does not neatly map on to Jewish and Muslim identity, respectively,” the report states.

They found “unequivocal support” among all participants that every member of the McGill community be “free to critique the policies of any nation” and that the university “must remain true to its commitment to allow political expression even when it singles out and critiques one nation-state. For these stakeholders, denouncing Israel’s policies is not antisemitic and should be understood and treated as permissible speech.”

The administration says that it is coincidental that the IAIAS was struck after the Students’ Society of McGill University (SSMU) adopted a pro-BDS Palestine Solidarity Policy motion. In March the motion was put to a referendum and undergraduates, which the SSMU represents, voted in favour of it by a strong majority, although the turnout was very low.

The administration issued an ultimatum to withdraw the resolution or McGill would terminate its memorandum of agreement with the SSMU choking off funding, because the policy was contrary to the principle of equity.

The SSMU board of directors pulled the resolution in April, to the outrage of Solidarity for Palestinian Human Rights (SPHR) McGill, the club that submitted the policy.

The administration says the IAIAS was created to address antisemitism and Islamophobia going back several years that have become more pronounced of late.

Among the reasons are “BDS activism and contentious campus debate” around the Middle East conflict; increased online “harassment, vitriolic social media posting and doxing”; and Bill 21, the Quebec secularism law.

According to McGill data, 11 per cent of students identify as Muslim and 7.8 per cent as Jewish.

“Muslim and Jewish community members alike feel that there is widespread misunderstanding of their cultures, histories, experiences, and identities—as well as what constitutes discriminatory behaviour against them—throughout the McGill community,” the report states.

Some participants described “repeated micro-aggressions inflicted by peers, colleagues, supervisors and teaching staff,” or feeling “unsafe in their identities” on campus, especially visible Muslims or Jews.

Several students spoke of professors assigning texts, making remarks, or taking public positions that they believed were anti-Jewish or anti-Muslim.

Both religious groups wanted “a respectful and inclusive space” to raise concerns with the administration about antisemitism and Islamophobia.

To that end, the IAIAS recommends appointing one Muslim and one Jewish student liaison within the McGill Office of Religious and Spiritual Life and starting regular meetings between Muslim and Jewish student associations and the administration.

The report also speaks of the need for a peer mentoring program in collaboration with the Muslim Students’ Association and Hillel McGill.

It also recommends funding for Muslim Awareness Week and public lectures and scholarly symposia by the Department of Jewish Studies and the Institute of Islamic Studies; annually observing International Holocaust Remembrance Day and the deadly 2017 shooting at the Quebec City mosque; more interfaith activities, and inclusion training for faculty and staff.

“Fair and consistent accommodation” of Jewish and Muslim holidays and better access to kosher and halal food is also recommended.

The university says it will “act on each of these recommendations immediately to enhance inclusion and belonging for Muslim and Jewish members of our university community.”

Jewish advocacy groups were pleased that the university had listened to student concerns and was beginning to address antisemitism on campus.

“We thank McGill University administration for the process they engaged in, listening to students, hearing our suggestions, and proposing steps to address the situation on campus,” Hillel Montreal said in a statement. “We hope this is the start to a better campus life for all McGill students.”

On preliminary reading, the Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs (CIJA) reacted positively to the report.

“The IAIAS consultations undertaken by the McGill administration mark one more step in McGill’s commitment to addressing the very real problems facing our students on campus,” CIJA Quebec vice-president Eta Yudin said in a statement.

Federation CJA chief executive Yair Szlak said, “Jewish students at McGill have shared their concerns with Federation CJA about issues such as the exclusion and targeting of Jewish students by certain campus societies, abuse of podium where professors would use their position of authority in order to push their personal opinions, and the antisemitic BDS movement’s presence on campus.

“We’re glad to see McGill is serious about tackling antisemitism and hate, and ensuring that all students can feel safe on campus.” ■

This rabbi from Montreal is preparing to donate a kidney to a stranger

/ Janice Arnold

Life and death converged on Jan. 13, 2020, in a way that Rabbi Yechezkel Rabbi Freundlich could never have imagined. Tragedy and hope came together that day.

The spiritual leader of Congregation Tifereth Beth David Jerusalem (TBDJ), Rabbi Freundlich had just returned home after hours at the hospital where the two-year-old child of congregants had died suddenly and without explanation.

Emotionally and physically spent, he collapsed. Minutes later his phone rang. "It was an unrecognizable number, which I usually don't pick up, but I thought it was related to what was going on at the hospital."

The exuberant caller said, "Mazel tov, you've been found to be a life-saving match!"

Rabbi Freundlich was stunned. The woman at the other end reminded him that, 13 months earlier, in December 2018 he had taken a swab test and registered with Renewal, a New York-based organization that identifies potential matches for Jewish people needing a kidney transplant, at an information event hosted by TBDJ.

"I would like to think I would have said yes anyway, but at that moment there was no doubt in my mind when she asked if I was still interested. I became very tearful. The woman said usually it's the recipient who sobs when a match is found, not the donor."

The match had been found in New York, a total stranger. That February, Rabbi Freundlich went to that city for a full day of tests. Before the second tier of tests could take place, the pandemic hit in March and hospitals shut down.

By June when New York hospitals were functioning again, the patient's health had worsened and they were no longer a candidate for transplantation.

Within a week another potential recipient had been found—in Toronto. It was surprising that it was so quick this time because Rabbi Freundlich would learn that he has a specific sequence of antibodies that is hard to match.

So began the long journey to the transplantation scheduled for July 8 at Toronto General Hospital (TGH), after having been delayed repeatedly due to the backlog of surgeries caused by the pandemic.

Rabbi Freundlich spoke to The CJN from the hospital on June 30 during a break in his final pre-operative testing. Since being matched with a Canadian, he had to repeat the testing done in New York.

Rabbi Freundlich is an altruistic or non-directed donor, one of those rare people who give a kidney to save the life of a per-

son in renal failure that they don't know. Outcomes are better from a living donor than a deceased person.

Known as a modest and exceptionally kind person, Rabbi Freundlich is telling his story in the hope that perhaps someone else might do the same as the waiting list for kidneys is long.

It's not a decision to be taken lightly. Rabbi Freundlich, the father of seven, has been fully apprised of the risks of an operation under general anesthesia, the pain and fatigue during the weeks to full recovery, and the potential—though slight—of long-term effects.

He is practising what he preaches: "Our sages say saving a life is as if you save an entire world. God gave us two kidneys, even though we can live very well with one. Each of us has the ability to literally save a life."

Knowing the recipient would be Jewish did make it easier; the shidduch felt like it was not really with a stranger, but an extended family member.

He admits his own family was not as sanguine initially as he was, "but they saw early on that I was not going to change my mind."

Rabbi Freundlich and his kidney's recipient have been guided by Renewal Canada, a not-for-profit organization founded in 2009 that, besides matchmaking and liaising with the hospital, provides emotional and financial support.

Accepting any kind of compensation for an organ donation is illegal, but donors' ancillary expenses, such as travel and accommodation, can be covered, which Renewal has done for Rabbi Freundlich.

Renewal told The CJN that the recipient is a woman in her 70s. Rabbi Freundlich was told her name, which meant nothing to him. He has no idea how much she knows about him. Whether they ever have any contact is up to the recipient.

Rabbi Freundlich will be on the same hospital floor, and he would be happy to meet her. He'll be spending three days in hospital post-operatively, his wife Rifki accompanying him.

The rabbi has not only been busy preparing for this procedure: he has simultaneously been getting ready to start a new job in a new city.

After six years, Rabbi Freundlich, who came to Montreal from Atlanta, is leaving TBDJ to become spiritual leader of Congregation Beth Shalom in Lawrence, N.Y. His last Shabbat at TBDJ is Aug. 6.

"They say you leave your heart in San Francisco; I won't say this is a parting gift, but I am leaving my kidney in Toronto," said Rabbi Freundlich, who has not lost his sense of humour.

If someone cannot be a donor—and he personally knows four people in his Côte St. Luc community who need a new kidney—Rabbi Freundlich asks that a monetary donation for his and the recipient's success be made to Renewal or to research into Sudden Unexplained Death in Childhood through the Ronnie's Joy Foundation, created in memory of the little girl who lost her life the day his changed forever. ■

Janice Arnold has been reporting for The CJN from Montreal since 1976.

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Did El Al make a good business decision to cut its Toronto route? Yes and no: business experts

/ Ellin Bessner and Lila Sarick

Fred Lazar has never flown on El Al, but the Toronto aviation expert thinks the flagship Israeli airline may just have squandered much of the goodwill it established among generations of Canadian passengers.

According to Lazar, who teaches economics at the Schulich School of Business at York University, the Toronto market was probably one of the most important ones in El Al's schedule after New York, Miami, and London, England. At least, before COVID grounded international travel.

When flying resumed, the new owners of the airline looked at current fuel costs and widespread shortages of pilots and crews, made a pledge to downsize the fleet, and pulled the plug on the non-stop route from Tel Aviv to Toronto—after nearly 40 years.

"They may realize in three or six months afterwards, that maybe, in retrospect, it was not the right decision," Lazar told The CJN. "Even if they decide to return, probably in the late spring, or next summer, they will have lost the loyalty of a significant amount of this market, and that's why they may learn to regret it."

Although 100,00 Canadians travelled to Israel in 2019, many on El Al, pandemic lockdowns in both countries interrupted regular travel for two years.

He does think another airline will jump in to provide service to Tel Aviv and compete with Air Canada.

Cancellations likely for bar mitzvah

But that won't happen soon enough for Toronto's Reena Ostro and her family.

Ostro's oldest son Adriel, 12, was set to put on his tefillin for the first time in Jerusalem during a pre-bar mitzvah ceremony at the end of December. Not only had Ostro already booked the time spot at the Western Wall for the event, but she also reserved the shofar blowers and the restaurant.

Ten members of her family already have tickets with El Al.

Last week, El Al emailed customers who have already booked tickets for trips after the last Toronto to Tel Aviv flight which ends on Oct. 27.

In the email, El Al also said it wants to fly to new "exciting" destinations.

Passengers who hold tickets are being offered several options, including rebooking to other destinations, flying to Ben Gurion airport via connecting flights in the United States or Europe, or even cancelling and receiving a voucher for future travel.

When she learned the airline would no longer be flying directly from Toronto, Ostro reluctantly decided to cancel.

"Talking about snow storms, bad weather, flying [with four



kids] through New York, or anywhere, is just really just not possible, right?" she said, adding that the family would also lose so much time out of their week-long overseas trip.

Ostro said aside from the logistics nightmare, if she switches to fly directly on Air Canada during the last week of December, it would have pumped up the cost of the airfare by close to \$3,000. Both Hanukkah and Christmas fall during the week of their trip, when demand is strong from Christians and Jews alike who want to visit the Holy Land.

While her son's actual bar mitzvah won't be until February, it will now likely take place in Toronto without the long-awaited rite of passage at Judaism's holiest site.

"He's always dreamed of having his bar mitzvah in Israel. We promised him," Ostro said. "So as of now, it does not look hopeful."

Ticket prices on Air Canada will rise

Artzi Korostelev, executive vice-president of Peerless Travel in Toronto, says the issue is not re-booking travellers on now cancelled El Al flights, but the fact that prices have jumped significantly.

"We're finding alternatives for them. They understand they have to be more flexible. What is difficult is that the prices are extremely high, so there's a lot of frustration to fend off."

Peerless is the largest El Al re-seller in Canada and had been in partnership with the airline for more than 30 years, he said. The agency sends over 10,000 travellers a year from North America to Israel.

Fares have risen recently, not because of El Al's decision to leave the Canadian market, but due to high demand for flights.

But in the long run, having just one airline, Air Canada, providing non-stop flights to Israel from Canada is worrisome, he said.

“When an airline is not competing with anyone on a specific route there’s no incentive to keep rates in check, there’s no incentive to keep perks and sales.”

Jewish travellers patronized El Al because they appreciated that the meals on board were kosher, the airline didn’t fly on Shabbat and offered extra levels of security.

People who still want to fly El Al, usually for religious reasons, will likely travel through New York, which is problematic because of cancellations and congestion in New York airports, he said.

Those looking for a cheaper flight will have to forego the convenience of a direct trip and look at connecting through Europe.

Religious travel impacted

El Al’s decision has also disrupted plans for Christian travellers who liked to fly on the Israeli airline, Korostelev said.

“Especially for pilgrims that have been in Israel and support Israel and travel to Israel quite often..., they had grown accustomed to El Al service and they were extremely satisfied with the service out of Toronto. We’ve heard from many of them that they are extremely surprised and disappointed this is happening,” he said.

While travel has not bounced back fully since COVID, the travel agency has seen strong demand for winter and spring travel to Israel, Korostelev said.

“We do expect Air Canada to step in and fill in the gaps, meaning increasing their weekly frequency of flights. We recommend for them to do it sooner rather than later.”

With Air Canada now cornering the market as the only airline offering direct service, experts expect the Canadian carrier will be free to raise ticket prices on flights to Israel by as much as 10 to 20 percent, according to Lazar.

Like all airlines, Air Canada uses an algorithm that monitors demand, and adjusts ticket prices accordingly, he said.

“What you’re going to find is the cheapest economy fares disappear, the other economy fares will increase and, with jet fuel prices, there is an even stronger incentive to increase those fares,” Lazar predicted.

He doesn’t see Air Canada adding any additional flights to Israel, because of staffing problems. Indeed, the Canadian airline announced June 29 that it was cutting some routes in North America this summer to rebalance the available pilots and crews.

Harder to visit elderly parents in Canada

Flying on an airline that adheres to Jewish religious rules is one of the main reasons why Jessica Myers loves El Al. The resident of Ramat Beit Shemesh Alef immigrated to Israel 20 years ago from Toronto, but her parents still live in Toronto, as does one of her sons. She takes the red-eye after the Sabbath ends, to arrive in Canada early Sunday mornings.

As the owner of a ceramics business called Keramkli in Beit Shemesh, Myers had to pivot during the COVID pandemic, so she is upset that El Al decided not to wait any longer for volume to pick up on its route to Toronto.

“I’m a business owner. I’m still trying to recover from COVID,” she said. “If the travel industry is just getting up to speed and it’s going to take a few months, obviously, then why make such a drastic decision right now?”

Serious financial trouble

The El Al move isn’t out of the blue. The new owner, American health care entrepreneur Ken Rozenberg, told an Israeli news outlet in September 2021 that he would shed 1,500 more employees, and reduce the size of El Al’s fleet. The El Al website is currently showing over 50 planes operating.

“They are a relatively small airline, and so getting the right usage of every plane is extremely important in this competitive environment,” said management expert Opher Baron, of the University of Toronto’s Rotman School of Business.

According to Baron, El Al just did what it needed to do to get out of serious financial trouble in the short term. He points to the Toronto route having several challenges, not the least of which involves winter weather causing delays. But also, Baron explained, El Al doesn’t fly anywhere else in North America, after the plane and its crew lands in Toronto.

“When you don’t have much work to do with them, when they are idling, say in Toronto, because you don’t have any other flights from Toronto that you can use them for... you may find yourself paying too much to maintain one specific leg,” Baron said.

Still, he also predicts El Al will be back eventually because Toronto is a loyal and solid market.

“We’re a little bit of a captive audience in that if they come back, we will start using them again,” Baron said, although he cautioned El Al not to bank on smooth sailing if a third airline offers flights for the Canadian market first. ■

**Ellin Bessner is chief correspondent of *The CJA Daily*.
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Avinoam Silverman's new ballet wrestles with his questions about faith and grief

/ Alex Rose

A man dances through the middle of the stage. He carries one woman as another clutches at his heels, dragging along behind him.

The woman in his arms represents the wings of freedom and ambition, the woman at his feet represents the roots of home and family.

The piece, called *In Between*, is an autobiographical ballet for dancer and choreographer Avinoam Silverman. Born in Jerusalem, he moved to Canada at 16 to attend the National Ballet School, and has lived here ever since. He made *In Between* in 2018 when the Canada-Israel Cultural Foundation (CICF) commissioned him to create it for their Spotlight on Israeli Culture Festival.

On July 10, Silverman will put on another show commissioned by CICF in Toronto, featuring *In Between* and the debut of his new ballet *Waiting for the Fall*.

Waiting for the Fall is autobiographical as well. It has five dancers—four male and one female—representing Silverman, his two brothers, and his parents. Just like *In Between*, *Waiting for the Fall* also deals with Silverman's questions about his Jewish heritage.

In fact, in *Waiting for the Fall*, there is even a moment where Jewish prayers are recited on stage.

"There's a section where the dancers are sitting around the table and you hear the prayer for the blessing of the child, which my dad would do... So I incorporate that, and then also the blessing of the bread," Silverman said, adding that he remixed the recordings so that the name of God would not be spoken.

However, the piece takes a turn around that point. *Waiting for the Fall* is about how we deal with loss and grief, said Sil-

verman, as well as how intergenerational trauma affects families, so he uses the choreography to explore the full meaning of heritage.

"The boy that gets the blessing, he gets his head slammed into the table quite a few times. But it's a metaphor. My dad never did that," Silverman said. "But it's (about how), in some ways, what he went through, how it affected me. Because what happens to our parents, it just trickles down into us as kids. So it's a bit of a metaphor, but it's just done in an artistic way."

The name of the ballet, however, comes not from Silverman's Jewish or Israeli upbringing, but from an inspiration that is even further east.

"I read something in a Buddhist book about a leaf. It explains when a leaf falls from the tree, it's just being a leaf. And it made me think how we strive to just be, as people," Silverman said. "But then, in some ways, as people, life can get a lot more complicated and a lot more complex. So I wanted to show that struggle, but also how we're striving for that simplicity, just being like the leaf."

In Between and *Waiting for the Fall* were not the first interactions CICF had with Silverman; they've been following his career for a long time. CICF supports the Mia Arbatova Dance Competition in Israel (named for the Riga-born ballerina who arrived in Israel in 1938 determined to establish classical ballet there)—a contest that Silverman won at 15.

It was the prize money from CICF that allowed Silverman to come to the National Ballet School in Toronto for the summer, which set the stage for him to move to Toronto and attend the school full-time.

"For CICF, it's really our privilege to support so many talented young artists, but in this case, it really gives us a sense of pride in that we were able to help him when he was 15 in order to come to Toronto," said Janet Klugsberg, executive director of the CICF.

"Now we're able to help him through his career as a choreographer, and helping to produce his works and present those works to the city of Toronto, to the community, really is full circle." ■

Alex Rose is a Toronto-based news reporter for The C.J.N.

Do Jewish comedians have anything new to say?

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