



Shira and Jay Ruderman, with their dog Teddy, and Sharon Shapiro.

Ruderman Foundation gives \$1.5 million in emergency grants to Israel

BY STEVE MARANTZ([HTTPS://JEWISHJOURNAL.ORG/AUTHOR/STEVE-MARANTZ/](https://JewishJournal.org/author/Steve-Marantz/))

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Jay Ruderman knew garden variety antisemitism growing up in Lynnfield. But the president of the \$200 million Ruderman Family Foundation sees a more pernicious strain taking root since Oct. 7.

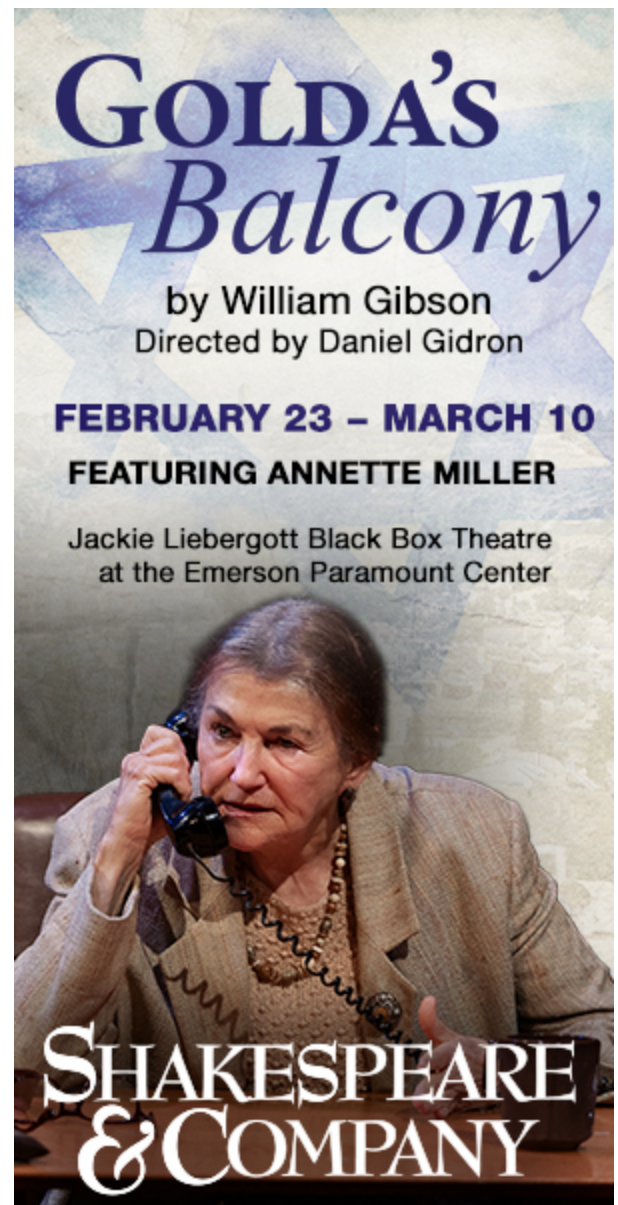
“The antisemitism we’re seeing now hits you from both ends,” says Ruderman. “Classic right-wing antisemitism, Jews are subhuman and polluting the race. But we also see it in the progressive community, the critics of Israel, who say it’s a colonial power that took land from indigenous Palestinians.”

His warning to American Jewry is unequivocal.

“Those Jews who feel like they can have a safe, secure Jewish life without the state of Israel are grossly mistaken. Because we’ve seen what it’s like to be a Jew without a Jewish state in the past and it hasn’t been pretty.”

Ruderman’s philanthropic foundation, based in Newton, enables him to support Israel at one of the country’s most vulnerable times in its history.

Israeli organizations received more than \$1.5 million in Ruderman emergency grants from October to December. Among the recipients, Natal received \$120,000 for educators and professionals to support teenage mental health; Lev 1 was awarded \$100,000 for 25



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civilian emergency centers; and HaShomer HaChadash received \$100,000 to establish and train a people's guard of ultra-Orthodox.

Another major effort went to a partnership with Keshet Media Group to launch a campaign on primetime television and online "to call for unity across society." The campaign is needed, according to the foundation, because "in the last years leading up to [Oct. 7], Israeli society was crumbling and torn from the inside, and its weakness on the outside was visible to all."

Also, a \$1 million grant to Shamir Medical Center was repurposed into an emergency grant, for missile-proofing and lowering operating rooms and beds underground.

These emergency grants supplement nearly \$10 million that Ruderman gives annually in America and Israel.

"My wife (Shira) has been in Israel since the beginning of the war and with our office in Israel we chose the organizations which we thought would be the most impactful in aiding Israeli society in its time of need," Ruderman told the Jewish Journal. He had just returned from Israel, where a Hamas rocket had fallen in his yard.

North American Jewry raised about \$1 billion for Israel in the first month of its war with Hamas, according to a report by Haifa University's Ruderman Program for American Jewish Studies. Jewish Federations of North

America accounted for more than \$700 million, while \$400 million came from communal and private organizations with Jewish affiliation, the Times of Israel reported. As of Dec. 15, Combined Jewish Philanthropies in Boston had raised \$55 million for the Israel Emergency Fund from nearly 6,000 individual donors.

A part of a Hamas rocket that fell in Jay Ruderman's yard in Israel.

The Ruderman foundation was funded by Ruderman's late father, Morton, who cofounded the health care technology firm Meditech and invested in real estate. Morton, along with Ruderman's mother Marcia, started the foundation in 2001.

Ruderman's wife, Shira, a native Israeli, is executive director of Ruderman Family Foundation, and maintains an office in Rehovot. Jay's bio on the foundation website

says he “has focused his life’s work on seeking social justice by advocating for people with disabilities worldwide and educating Israeli leaders on the American Jewish Community.”

The Rudermans have four children, three of whom attend or soon will attend college.

“I have one at Northeastern, a daughter on a gap year who will be going to Columbia, and a son applying to schools now,” Ruderman said. “What’s happening on college campuses is concerning. Where colleges get it wrong is they don’t understand the difference between free speech and hate speech.”

An alumnus of and trustee for Brandeis University, Ruderman credits Brandeis for clamping down on hate speech and banning Students for Justice in Palestine. Other universities have followed Brandeis’ lead.

“When my kids apply to colleges, I’m calling other students asking if they feel safe where they are and the answer often is ‘no, we don’t feel safe, we feel targeted’,” Ruderman said.

“Kids are dealing with things that I didn’t have to deal with growing up. It’s an uneasy time.

“In my community in Brookline I’m involved in the Orthodox community. Many if not most members of the community are now trying to obtain permits to carry.

“We used to lament the Jewish situation in France, where people walk to synagogue with baseball caps (to hide their yarmulkes). But now that’s our situation here. My synagogue – and probably most synagogues – have people, professionally and on a volunteer basis, standing guard. People are carrying weapons to synagogue. This reality came on us very quickly, which I don’t think we expected.”

Ruderman is especially concerned about younger Jews who identify as liberal/progressive, and who are alienated by Israel’s military tactics in Gaza. At a recent conference of Reform Jews, Rabbi Rick Jacobs, president of the Union for Reform Judaism, said that “a significant number of younger Jews are struggling with the war in Gaza and the American Jewish community’s strong support of Israel’s prosecution of the war ... ”

Liberal Jews are conflicted about how to address Israel’s military campaign, about what the word Zionism means, and if a connection to Israel is necessary to being Jewish, the Washington Post reported.

A conference attendee, Noah Shapiro, a student at George Washington University, told the Post, “A lot of people feel isolated and pushed away because they don’t consider themselves Zionists.”

The Pew Research Center, in a 2020 study, found that 58 percent of U.S. Jews feel attached to Israel, but of Jews age 18-29, the number drops to 48 percent. Forty-five percent

of U.S. Jews say caring about Israel is essential to being Jewish; but is 35 percent among Jews age 18-29.

“I do think there’s a generational thing going on, which I’m concerned about,” Ruderman said. “As long as there is a state of Israel, Jews anywhere in the world will be connected to it. That’s just a fact whether they like it or don’t, and a lot of what they don’t like is who’s been in power in Israel. But we as Jews are connected to Israel, our futures are connected to Israel, and I think we should wake up and realize that.”

Ruderman, who served in the IDF in 2005, defends Israel’s military tactics exacting a toll on Palestinian civilians as necessary to confront the “existential threat” of terrorism posed by Hamas and Hezbollah.

“The only viable long-term plan is eradication of terrorism,” Ruderman said. “The continuation of terrorism, dedicated to the destruction of Israel, I don’t think Israel puts up with it any longer. I don’t think it’s sustainable.

“I think this huge intelligence failure inside Israel will be investigated for the coming decades, and I’m sure many people now on the scene in Israel will leave once this is over.

“What’s not being said aloud by many Arab countries is that they don’t want these terrorist organizations either, they don’t want a destabilized region.

“I see a much better day coming for Israel, much more peaceful. But it won’t be easy to get there.” ☹

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