

# A fork in the road: Fear or fight

Have you ever felt like you were at a fork in the road? We all know we won't see an actual "fork" — there's a deeper meaning. Life's twists and turns put us in situations where we come face to face with this metaphorical crossroads. I believe that, as a people, we have faced this fork before — and now more than ever, we must ensure we stay on the right path.

This past week, the world has shown its true colors. The heartbreaking loss of a vibrant couple has shaken Jewish communities worldwide. They were shot while



**OP-ED**  
By Brenna Vivier

attending an event meant to bring people together. Fear has crept into our lives, reaching levels only our grandparents and great-grandparents once knew.

I had a conversation with someone about people taking down their mezuzahs. I read an article about Jewish individuals choosing not to wear anything that symbolizes their faith. I spoke to my dad about how people are resorting to whispering in public so others won't hear if they're discussing Israel. I look for armed guards before deciding to attend services.

And — let's be honest — how many times have you said to yourself, "Oh my God, I go to Jewish events too"?

This fear is valid. We all feel it. Society has brought us to this fork in the road: fear or fight. My fear is that we stop fighting. My fear is that fear overtakes you at the fork, leading you down the path of hiding. We've taken this road before. It has led us to a life underground — a life where our identities were hidden so thoroughly that some people discovered years later that they were Jewish. It's a life that restricts all our possibilities. This road isn't a way to live, and living is at the very core of who we are.

I would never tell you what to do — we're surrounded by enough of that. But I will tell you what I am doing.

I am choosing the road that allows my mezuzah to stay exactly where it is. It's a long road, but it needs us. It needs us to fight. It needs us to turn fear into fight. It needs our strong stance — a stance that will show the world nothing can knock us down. Without us, this road would dry out and turn to dust.

This road needs us to bring humanity back into the world.

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## An open letter of thanks from the Texas Holocaust, Genocide and Antisemitism Advisory Commission



**Joy Nathan,**  
Executive Director



**Ken Goldberg,**  
Chairman

As Jewish American Heritage Month (JAHM) draws to a close, we write with appreciation for your contributions and support — and with resolve to continue raising awareness as we fight antisemitism in our nation and around the world.

Over the past month — for the first time ever — communities,

individuals and institutions across Texas collaborated to honor the generations of Jewish Americans who have helped shape our state's culture, economy and civic life. Our partner organizations brought JAHM to life with branded events, exhibits and educational programs that inspired pride and reflection.

Highlights included a powerful online conversation with renowned legal scholar Alan Dershowitz and social media influencer Lizzy Savetsky, organized with help from a steering committee of students across the state. The event drew young Texans into a conversation about heritage, responsibility and the fight against antisemitism.

We also saw meaningful coverage in the Texas Jewish Post and other Jewish and mainstream media outlets, lifting up stories of Jewish resilience and contribution — and sharing little-known facts about the Texas Jewish experience.

These stories matter. Especially now.

In recent weeks, we've seen

disturbing reminders of rising antisemitism in this country, including the shooting of two Israeli Embassy employees outside the Capital Jewish Museum in Washington, D.C., by an anti-Israel terrorist. In the face of such violence and hatred, education remains our most powerful tool. By sharing the stories of Jewish Americans — who have helped build, protect and lead this state — we strengthen our communities and our democracy.

We thank Governor Abbott for his ongoing leadership and for charging our commission with leading these JAHM efforts. We appreciate the Texas Legislature's support of new legislation to help combat antisemitism. And

we are especially grateful to the volunteer steering committee of Texans who helped us organize this year's JAHM observance. Their actions remind us that this work is not just timely — it is essential.

To everyone who participated, organized or simply paused to read, learn and listen: thank you. Jewish American Heritage Month may be ending, but the stories we've shared must continue to be told — and we are well-positioned to have an even greater impact in the years ahead.

With appreciation,  
**Joy Nathan**, Executive Director  
**Ken Goldberg**, Chairman  
*Texas Holocaust, Genocide and Antisemitism Advisory Commission*

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others emotional or psychological. It may be simply to keep track and maintain order, or to experience satisfaction or gratitude.

But here, it's a census — and a divine command. So, there must be something more significant than the surface purpose of organizing the nation for its journey or preparing it as a military force. Furthermore, when G-d counts the Jewish people, so to speak, it's not because He doesn't know the number.

Rashi, whose job is to fill in the gaps of the verses with meaningful explanations, immediately comments that this command to count is a sign of love and affection. Just as a person counts what they cherish most, the Jewish people are being counted to show

that each individual is precious and not just part of a crowd.

### 3 counts, 3 stages

The Torah relates that the Jewish people were counted three times in the first year and one month after leaving Egypt; then only once more, 38 years later, during their wanderings in the wilderness; and only at rare intervals afterward. According to tradition, there have been nine such censuses in total — and the 10th will occur in the future era. Why, then, were there three censuses in such close proximity at the beginning of the nation's journey, and what distinguished them?

The first, upon leaving Egypt, is not attributed to any specific individual. The second was conducted by Moses. The third, however, was commanded to both Moses and Aaron. Why

was Aaron involved in this third count but not the others?

To understand this, we need to explore the spiritual nature of the census. When people are counted, they are placed on equal footing: the greatest and the simplest are each counted once — no more, no less. The focus is not intellect or moral standing but essence — the soul, which we do not usually perceive. The spiritual nature of this census was to elevate this inner truth, to bring the soul of each Jew to the surface of awareness.

The three censuses represent stages in this process. The first, taken at the Exodus, awakened the soul through G-d's love. It stirred the Israelites' willingness to follow Him into the barren wilderness, but it left their emotions untouched. The second census, taken before the building of the Tabernacle, engaged their minds and emotions as they prepared for the work that would

draw G-d's presence into their midst. Yet even here, the drive came from above — G-d's command, rather than their inner initiative.

But the third census marked a higher turning point. Now the Tabernacle was complete, and the people were actively bringing G-d's presence into their midst through their own actions. Their efforts now came from within. This shift explains Aaron's involvement in the last counting: in Torah symbolism and mystical framework, Moses is the communicator and channel of divine revelation from above, while Aaron, the priest, elevated the people from below. At this stage, both forces were needed. It was no longer just about receiving but about becoming active participants in the relationship.

### Relevance to Shavuot

With this in mind, the

connection of our current portion to Shavuot is even clearer. When the Torah was given, there was a double movement: G-d revealed Himself from above, and the people were elevated from below. In the same spirit, the portion of Bamidbar speaks of a census that brought both aspects together — Moses and Aaron, revelation and elevation. Through this counting, each individual was affirmed in their worth, the soul was activated, and the nation was readied for a higher union.

As we near the celebration of the Torah, we are reminded of the worth of each Jewish life, the personal connection to the Torah as an inheritance, and the revelation of a code of divine laws by which we live.

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