endings are invariably happy, with the barren wife ultimately conceiving. **Related Articles** • For the sake of family: When technology and ethics

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In biblical stories about couples who cannot conceive (and there are

many), it's always the woman who's assumed to be infertile. Yet the

Author Elliot Jager knows a different variation on this story. In his experience, it's the man whose reproductive system is malfunctioning. And in his particular case, there's no happy ending.

Jager's upcoming book, "The Pater: My Father, My Judaism, My Childlessness" (Toby Press), brings a unique voice to the increasingly frank public discourse on parenthood – that of the

childless Jewish man. Advertisement –





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childless men.

Yes

"Just because men don't draw attention to the fact they don't have children doesn't mean they don't feel the sting of childlessness," says Jager in a recent interview. Released this fall, Jager's book is part memoir, part sociological study. It tells the story of his relationship with the biological father (aka "the pater") who abandoned him as a child, and with the other

father ("who art in Heaven" – as he likes to refer to the Almighty)

The book also explores Jager's struggles as an Orthodox Jew – and,

ultimately, a not-so-Orthodox Jew – with Jewish attitudes toward

who cut him a raw deal later on in life.

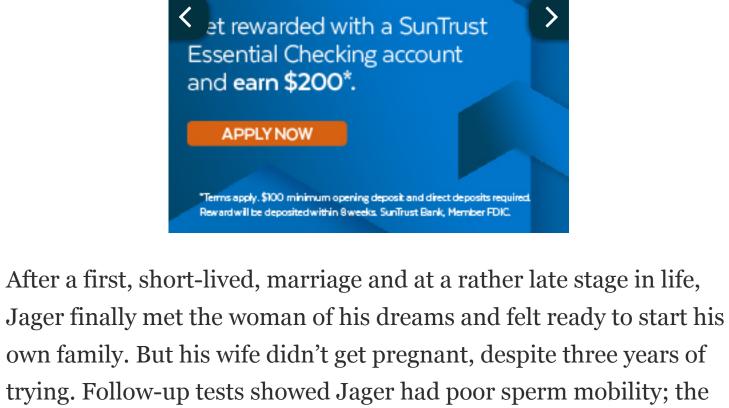
To determine whether his own experiences were unique, Jager sought and found about half a dozen other men - also Jewish and also childless – who agreed to share their own personal stories, albeit using pseudonyms. These, too, are weaved into the narrative.

Keep updated: Sign up to our newsletter Email* Sign up A former editor at The Jerusalem Post, Jager, 60, grew up on Manhattan's Lower East Side and immigrated to Israel as an adult.

His father, a Romanian-born Holocaust survivor, left him and his

mother when he was 8, to realize his lifelong dream of living in the

Holy Land. For 30 years, until their eventual reconciliation, the father and son had no contact. Advertisement – et rewarded with a SunTrust Essential Checking account



couple tried in vitro fertilization, but that also failed. Eventually, they called it quits. That didn't go down well with Jager's father, an ultra-Orthodox Hasid who had by then reemerged as a force in the author's life. The "pater" continued to pester his son to keep trying: Perhaps a blessing from a certain rabbi or a visit to a particular dead sage's

grave might do the trick, he implored. "In the end, it was my father's

obsession with my childlessness that prompted me to write this book," says Jager. It was one thing to contend with his father, but quite another to deal with the hurtful attitude of "Jewish civilization" to men like him, unable to bear children. "In Judaism, having children is seen as a blessing. But someone who doesn't have children isn't seen as being unblessed, but as being

class Jews.

actually punished," he notes. As a case in point, he says many

Orthodox synagogues prohibit childless men from leading services

on the High Holy Days, relegating them to the category of second-

Although he's come to terms with his predicament (thanks, in no small part, to his strong and loving relationship with his wife), it still hurts. As he explains in his book, "To be childless is – forgive the expression – pregnant with consequences. And coming to grips with

Jager describes his book as a "personal and spiritual journey."

Unable to accept such attitudes and treatment, Jager eventually

began distancing himself from Orthodox Judaism – and in a move

that surprised many in his close circle, he stopped wearing a kippa.

it is a life-long process. It's something I feel, for instance, when I attend a Brit Milah (circumcision) ceremony, a Bar or Bat Mitzvah; I feel it in synagogue when the children are dressed in Purim holiday

'Pregnant with consequences'

costumes, and in the living room of a friend's house as we gather to toast the induction of his son into the Israeli army. Sometimes I even feel it at weddings, when the rabbi blesses the bride and groom standing under the canopy with 'May you merit building a home of faith in Israel.' 'Home,' means children, of course." Children are at the epicenter of Jewish life, especially in Israel, which makes life even more challenging for someone like Jager. "A secular Jewish man abroad wouldn't be expected to be a father," he notes, "but here in Israel, he is." As a childless Jewish man willing to speak openly of his pain, Jager may be a rarity. But as a childless Jewish man, he's far from alone. To prove his point, he's compiled a list of famous names who fall

Moses Montefiore; British prime minister Benjamin Disraeli; Jewish Theological Seminary Talmud professor Saul Lieberman; the spiritual mentor of the settlement movement, Rav Tzvi Yehuda Kook; former British Chief Rabbi Israel Brodie, the first chief rabbi to be knighted; the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, considered the Messiah by some of his followers; New York City Mayor Ed Koch; and the famed authors Jerzy Kosinski, Arthur Koestler and Philip Roth.

into the same category, among them the 19th-century philanthropist

a voyeuristic element. I'm in the same shoes as the prophet Jeremiah, for instance." Jager says his message is not to condemn the Jewish community, but rather, to encourage some soul-searching among its members. "In the year 2015, when synagogues are showing more openness to gays and singles in their midst, it behooves the Jewish community to take cognizance of men and women who are without children. A little sensitivity – that's all I ask."

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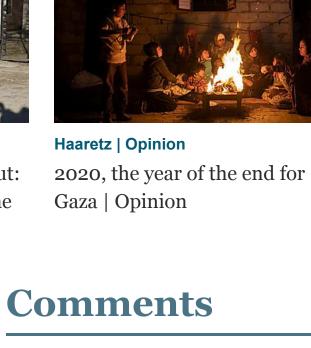
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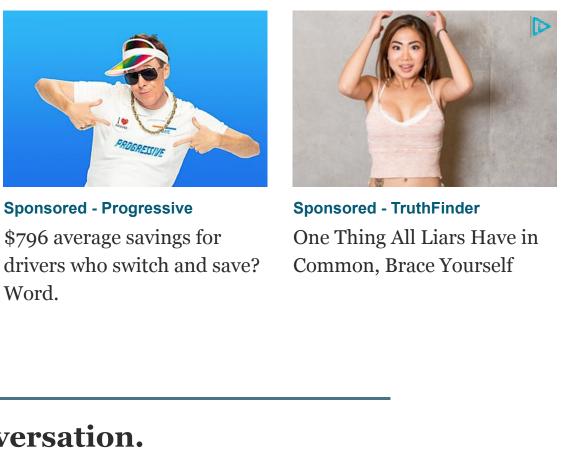
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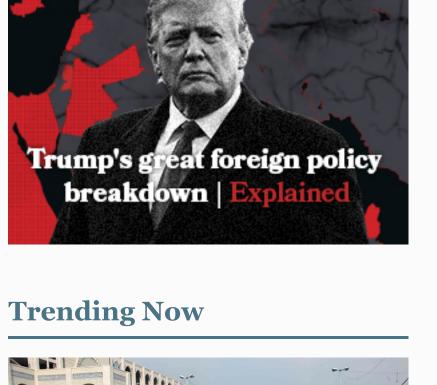
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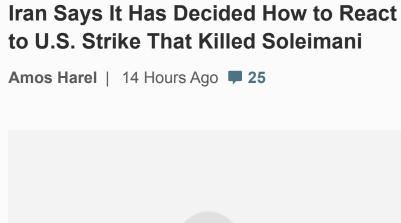
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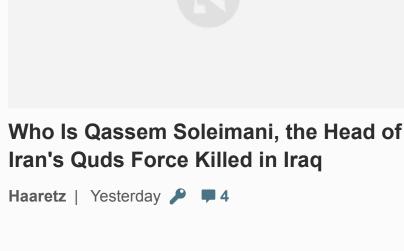
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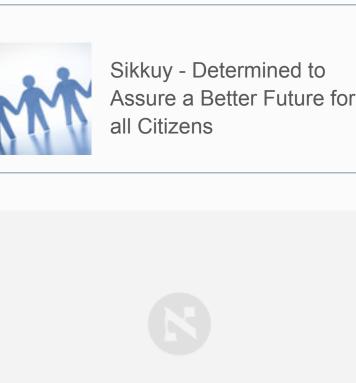


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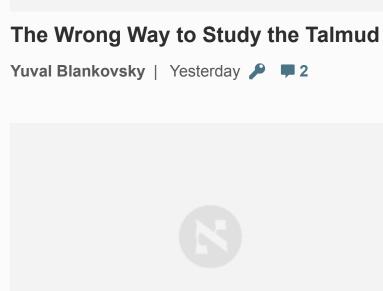
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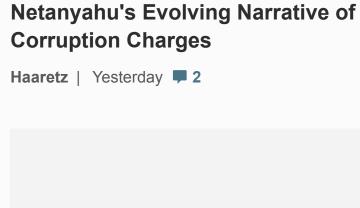
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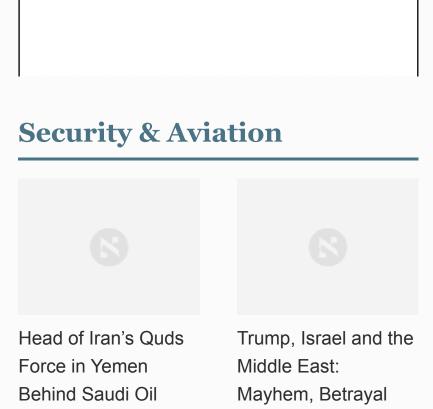


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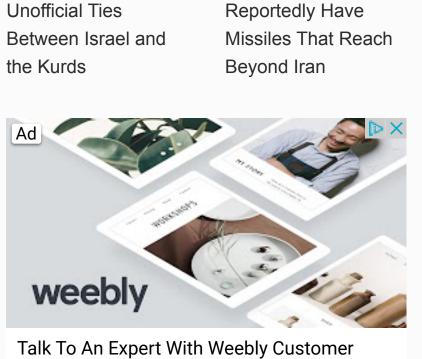
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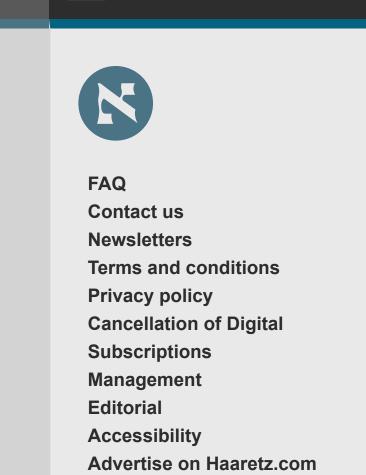
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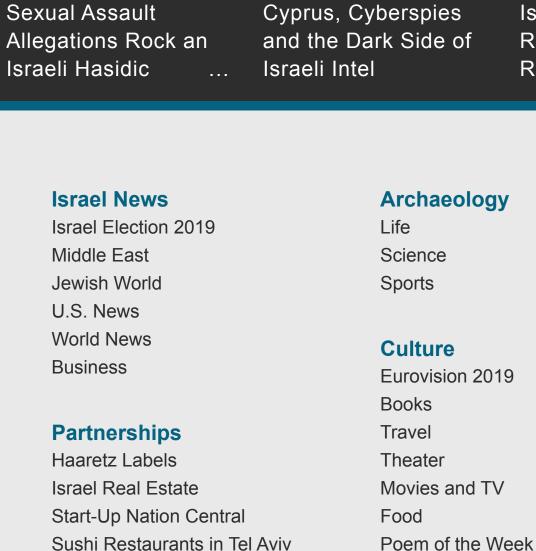
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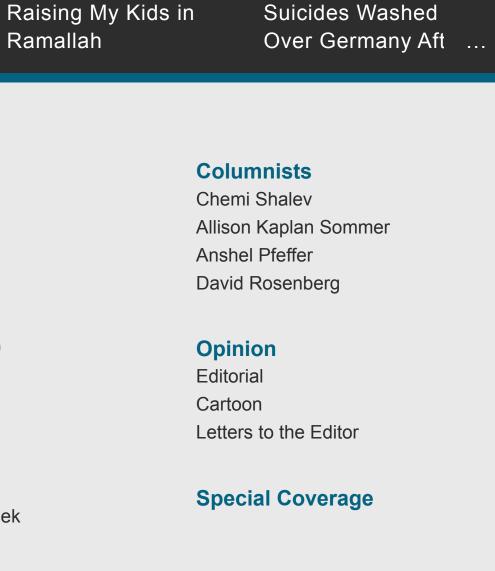
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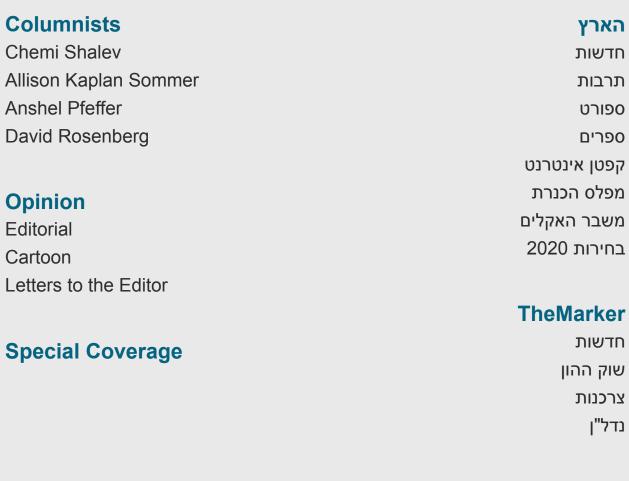






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