



Jonathan Perlman of the Chutzpah Coffee Co.: "I see our brand as a bridge within the Jewish community to strengthen connection and pride." (Provided photo)

Stirring Things Up

Do you take Chutzpah with your Coffee?

By Caryn R. Sagal



While many of us rely on a cup of Joe to boost our daily energy levels, Jonathan Perlman sees coffee as a vehicle for spreading Jewish pride and unity.

A 27-year-old resident of Arlington, Virginia, Perlman is a co-founder of the Chutzpah Coffee Co., an online enterprise that is Jewish-owned, specialty-grade and certified by the Vancouver-based Kosher Check supervisory agency.

Along with its signature house light roast and "Bubbie's Blend" medium dark roast, the company sells coffee merch with slogans such as "Hot & Jewish," "Full of Chutzpah" and "Bubbie Knows Best."

Jmore recently spoke with Perlman, the grandson of a Holocaust survivor, about building a brand "that supports Jewish charities, organizations, and people that strengthen the Jewish community."

What prompted you and your friends to launch an 'unapologetically Jewish' coffee company? In the wake of Oct. 7 and the surge in antisemitism that followed, I felt a strong urge to support

Jewish-owned businesses. As a proud Jew and 'coffee snob,' I looked for a brand that celebrated Jewish identity and had specialty-grade coffee.

But nothing existed. So I did some research and partnered with two friends to build a Jewish brand that could rise to the forefront of the niche coffee market.

Were you active in the Jewish community? Growing up on Long Island, I regularly met with Holocaust survivors to hear their stories and preserve their memory. While attending the University of Pittsburgh, I was deeply involved with Hillel and Chabad, and after the tragic shooting at the Tree of Life Congregation [in Pittsburgh in 2018] I organized a custom T-shirt fundraiser with my fraternity to support the synagogue.

Since graduating, I've been active with Chabad Young Jewish Professionals and GatherDC [a nonprofit group to connect Jewish young adults in the nation's capital area].

What went into creating the Chutzpah Coffee Co.? In Yiddish, *chutzpah* means audacity, courage and boldness, so we made sure our coffee reflects that same energy. With my full-time job as a product manager in the fin-tech [financial technology] space, I don't have the time to roast my own coffee at scale. So we found a great partner roaster with kosher facilities and the ability to produce specialty-grade coffee.

As CEO, I oversee product development, product naming and flavor profiles, the full supply chains, packaging, charity partnerships, marketing, social media, event planning and coffee relations. Co-founder Matt Gutkin operates behind the scenes. He built our website, manages the technical side of the business, keeps our systems running smoothly and grounds some of my wilder ideas as the voice of reason.

Co-founder Jack Gare, who I met at a GatherDC Chanukah event, joined as an investor. He provided early capital and has worked closely with some of our larger clients.

Where are your customers based? Most of our sales are in the DMV [D.C., Maryland and Virginia area], New York and Los Angeles. Currently, we can't sell

outside of the U.S. but hope to eventually expand to Israel.

While we are mostly online, our coffees are sold at Chelsea Market & Deli in Arlington and Think Sweet, a kosher candy shop in Farmington Hills, Michigan. We hope to grow our retail footprint and ideally be in every kosher supermarket.

What's the inspiration for your products? A lot stems from Jewish family values imparted from my maternal grandparents. My grandpa survived the Holocaust directly, and my grandma survived the Holocaust indirectly as her life was upended. They were two of the strongest people I ever met and guided me to get educated and be a proud Jew.

Their legacy lives on at Chutzpah Coffee Co. The 'Bubbie's Blend' roast pays tribute to my grandma's favorite plum dumpling dessert, with notes of plum hazelnut and brown sugar.

We also have a competition where customers submit pictures of their grandmothers drinking our coffee or

wearing our merch, and the winning grandmother receives a 'Bubbie of the Month' mug.

We want our products to focus on Jewish pride and capture that fun Jewish deli/Yiddish culture. The 'Hot & Jewish' mug is a bestseller, and our newer 'Morning Routine Mug' has become a hit, with proceeds going to our local Chabad to fund *tefillin* sets.

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— Jonathan Perlman

Which other causes are supported by Chutzpah Coffee? To date, we've raised almost \$2,000 for charities. Our first recipient was the Jewish-founded nonprofit Kids Kicking Cancer. We just released 'Caffeinated for a Cause' mugs

and shirts to support imadi, a Maryland organization that provides support services to families facing complex pediatric health diagnoses.

We've also donated our coffee at many events at [Rockville's] Bender JCC of Greater Washington, and hope to give back to congregations in the area.

Future plans? In August, we'll partner with four Jewish artists to create a line of custom mugs to showcase members of our community.

Long term, I see our brand as a bridge within the Jewish community to strengthen connection and pride. And that means embracing all kinds of Jewish identity, without being political or divisive. As we evolve with new products, we'll always be proudly Jewish and full of chutzpah! 🇮🇱

For information, visit chutzpahcoffee.com or follow @chutzpahcoffee on Instagram and X.

Caryn R. Sagal is a Baltimore-based public relations consultant and freelance writer.



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