



Transcript: Heart to Heart With Rabbi Angela Buchdahl | Hadassah Magazine Presents

[00:00:00] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl:** I just had heaving cries to my mother. I called her and I think this is it. All I wanna do is find belonging in this Jewish community, and I feel like I'm getting rejected at every turn, and I don't really belong. I don't think I even wanna be a Jew anymore. I don't have a Jewish face, I don't have a Jewish name.

[00:00:17] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl:** I, I could just stop being Jewish, right? This is, uh, when my mother very wisely said, is that really possible?

[00:00:32] **Lisa Hostein :** Hello and welcome to Hadassah Magazine Presents a podcast for those who love Hadassah Magazine and want more, and for those who have never heard of the magazine and are looking for stimulating conversations with acclaimed Jewish authors, thinkers, celebrities, and culinary stars, I'm your host. Lisa Hostein, the executive editor of Hadassah Magazine.

[00:00:53] **Lisa Hostein :** I'm thrilled to be in conversation with Rabbi Angela Buchdahl, the trailblazing senior rabbi of New York City's Central [00:01:00] Synagogue, and one of America's most influential Jewish spiritual leaders speaking a few days before Hanukkah, during the Hadassah Magazine Presents virtual program.

[00:01:12] **Lisa Hostein :** With the record, 3,000 in attendance, we discussed her extraordinary journey from South Korea, where she was born, to the rabbinate, finding light and joy in Judaism today amid the many challenges and her new memoir, Heart of a Stranger, an Unlikely Rabbi Story, a Faith Identity and Belonging. Rabbi Buchdahl, who is the first woman to lead the 180 5-year-

old Central Synagogue in New York City, was born in Seoul, Korea, and raised in Tacoma, Washington.

[00:01:37] **Lisa Hostein** : After graduating from Yale University, she went on to become the first Asian American ordained as a cantor, and also the first to be ordained as a rabbi in North America. She has been nationally recognized for her innovations in leading worship at Central, which draws large crowds in the congregation's historic sanctuary, along with tens of thousands of live streamers weekly and up to 1 million on the high holidays in more than 100 countries.

[00:02:03] **Lisa Hostein** : She was invited by President Barack Obama in 2014 and President Joe Biden in 2023 to share blessings and light the menorah for the White House Hanukkah party. Her new memoir, *Heart of a Stranger*, hit the New York Times bestseller list within weeks of its publication in October. Angela and her husband, Jacob, have three children.

[00:02:22] **Lisa Hostein** : She is also the cover girl of the November/December issue of *Hadassah Magazine*, where you'll find a full profile of her on our website, hadassahmagazine.org. And now for the main event. So first Mazel tov on the success of your book.

[00:02:45] **Lisa Hostein** : One of the many special features that moved me personally beyond your extraordinary life story is the way you incorporate Jewish teaching and wisdom throughout with a d'var Torah that accompanies each chapter. So I wanna start by asking you to consider where you are at this very moment at your parents' home in Tacoma, Washington, where you grew up. We are lucky to land you there in your busy book tour, though your life journey didn't begin there, that was in Seoul, Korea. It clearly shaped you in many significant ways. So how did your upbringing in Tacoma and your parents' influence in particular help chart the path that you chose?

[00:03:14] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl**: You're catching me in a very emotional state. I'm near the end of my book tour. I have only one more stop after this one.

[00:03:19] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl**: It's been a long, I mean, wonderful, but very full sort of two months. And last night actually was the event at my hometown synagogue at Temple Beth El. And it was a little bit of like that feeling of like, this is your life. First of all, a few of my first cousins who told me they were not coming surprised me and showed up.

[00:03:37] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl**: One from Portland and um, one from Seattle. I had, both of my religious school directors were there, and there were

three rabbis that were part of my beit din when I had a giyyur reaffirmation ceremony. Rabbi Richard Rosenthal, my hometown rabbi, passed away. But there's this beautiful portrait of him in the main hall.

[00:03:56] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl:** The other two rabbis from Seattle came. And so we posed under the picture of Rabbi Rosenthal. So the three of them were there with me, and I had a kind of reformation of my beit din and, but you know. People who were part of my BBG chapter and grew up with me in town, it just was like face after face of like my life coming back, people whose children I babysat.

[00:04:16] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl:** And it really felt like this was a community that raised me, that made me into a confident, joyful Jew who had a community that embraced us. And it really, I felt very emotional being there. And so I, and I'm still in that state today. Being here in my hometown synagogue and, um, driving past my high school and doing the kind of Tacoma hunts.

[00:04:36] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl:** So, you know, Tacoma is a mid-size city, a quarter of a million people, only one synagogue in all of Tacoma. It was about 300 families. It's still about that size to this day. And there was a really strong feeling when you grow up in a community like this that you are responsible. For carrying Judaism, for educating people about who Jews are and one of very few bar bat mitzvahs that anyone would ever go to.

[00:05:00] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl:** And, and the feeling that, like if you're not talking about Jewish holidays, no one will. And if you're not fighting to get student body elections off of Yom Kippur, that it's not gonna happen. So these were like my experiences growing up in a place like Tacoma, and instead of making me feel burdened or different, which sometimes it felt those ways.

[00:05:16] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl:** It mostly made me feel special and different and proud and responsible. So I think that that is a big part of shaping who I am, is that I am from a smaller Jewish community and a place where everyone had to step in and make things happen or they didn't happen. I saw several of my Sunday school teachers because they were just part of the community.

[00:05:37] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl:** They were parents in the community and, and it was very sweet that we took a picture of. Everyone from my era who showed up last night from my Sunday school era and, and a few of our teachers took pictures with us. So that was really just beautiful. You know, I grew up

also in a community that had, as I said, 300 Jewish families, but there were about 30,000 Koreans in Tacoma.

[00:05:56] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl:** So ironically Tacoma, Seattle has become one of the top five cities in America for the Korean population. And so it was also something that was, I left Korea, but I didn't have to leave behind. The opportunity to eat in Korean restaurants and be able to buy Korean groceries and, and actually be around a pretty thick Korean community.

[00:06:17] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl:** And so, in fact, just today I did an interview for a Korean television channel here. So just the fact that that exists in Tacoma is, is something that's quite unusual. So I really did get to feel a richness of the two kind of cultures that I was a part of as an American with a realization that in some ways all of this coming together in one package could only happen here in America.

[00:06:38] **Lisa Hostein :** It's so interesting, the confluence, right. Of both your heritages in that not so small town in Washington. Yeah. I also grew up in a very small Jewish community, so I can relate to that experience of being the only one who's in the class and mm-hmm. Candles, although maybe I had five, maybe I was a little different.

[00:06:55] **Lisa Hostein :** You've also talked extensively about how music. Was a big [00:07:00] spark in your connection to Judaism and clearly is now a very big part of who you are. You became a cantor, you became a rabbi. Your music is beautiful. How did that music speak to you when you were young?

[00:07:13] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl:** I grew up in a house that was filled with music.

[00:07:15] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl:** My father would play piano. So even when I was in Korea at age four, I was interested in like sitting next to him and learning how to play piano. So I started my first lessons before I even left Korea, and then started in earnest here in Tacoma, age five, taking piano lessons. And then I added flute in the fourth grade.

[00:07:32] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl:** And my sister was a serious musician, and in fact became a classical viola player. That is what she does professionally. So music was obviously a huge part of our lives. I would also say it was like. I call it my native spiritual language, in that when I sang music and in particular when I started to learn some Jewish music, that it really made me feel like it

was a direct line, both with talking to God, but also that when I sang with other people that we were really.

[00:07:59] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl:** In [00:08:00] community with each other, like I felt like it was a shared language that we had. And I was very lucky that in Tacoma, it's not like we had great resources Jewishly all the time, but this woman named Ruthie kind of flew into Tacoma when I was eight and she stayed for several years and started a children's choir.

[00:08:15] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl:** And that to me was when I found my voice in the Jewish world. And uh, she recorded an eight track children's choir album. And then we also sang on the bima at services. And I felt like, oh, this is. How I'm gonna find my place in the Jewish world. And you know, the interesting thing is Ruthie then left when I was about 11 or 12 years old, and I didn't even know her last name.

[00:08:37] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl:** I didn't know who she, where she was. I tried to track her down while I was writing this book. Didn't know how to find her. Well, I will say that on this book tour, someone recognized who she was and connected us. And so I've actually spoken to Ruthie, which has been such a thrill, and we're gonna figure out a way that I can meet her because she moved back to Chicago.

[00:08:56] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl:** So that's where she is now. I feel like the gift of [00:09:00] Jewish music was something that Ruthie first gave to me. But then Camp Swig kind of reaffirmed for me in becoming a song leader and then of course Cantorial school. And I do feel that it is still the quickest distance for me to communicate kind of spiritual energy and emotion and community building.

[00:09:17] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl:** The kind of the quickest pathway for all of that for me is still through music.

[00:09:21] **Lisa Hostein :** So I think we need to let everyone know that if it weren't for Hadassah Magazine, you may not be who you are. That's true. That's true. So do you wanna tell the

[00:09:29] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl:** story? I'd be very happy to. You know, I was the kind of kid that, you know, I was very happy to be Jewish, but you know, the idea of traveling to Israel was not on my radar, in part because first of all, I, I just, I don't think my family had the money to just like send me on a trip to Israel.

[00:09:45] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl:** It was not the kind of thing that kids did from Tacoma. But my Aunt Lily, she clipped an ad from the Hadassah Magazine back in 1989 and said, look, there's an ad for the Bronfman Youth Fellowship, which at that point was only [00:10:00] in its third summer. And she said, if you can get on this trip, it's a free trip to Israel.

[00:10:05] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl:** And that sounded pretty great to me, and I really didn't know what I was getting into. And it was a pluralistic trip for Jewish leaders. They would pick 25 of us from all of North America. They wanted geographic as well as religious diversity. So I guess I checked the box of like, you know, Korean Jew of a Jewish outpost called Tacoma, and they selected me for the fellowship.

[00:10:27] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl:** It was a transformative summer, uh, really, truly transformative. It was my, not only my first trip to Israel, but it was really where I fell in love with Israel and Israelis and the kind of the riot of colors and smells and people from so many different Jewish places. And listening to Jewish music that came from so many different places, I just fell in love with.

[00:10:49] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl:** Israel, but I also fell in love with Jewish learning, which was the first time that I really engaged on a deep level with what Jewish learning could feel like. You know, beyond, of course, decoding Hebrew, which is [00:11:00] too much of what Hebrew school has to be before age 13. And then even though I stayed on through confirmation.

[00:11:05] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl:** This was a different kind of Jewish learning altogether. The kind that made me ask the biggest questions about life and it felt like I was working so hard, like my brain hurt in that good kind of way that like I was thinking and I felt a sense of awe just being able to be part of the vastness of this conversation across geography and time and space.

[00:11:23] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl:** So this was like so thrilling to me that I thought to myself, I can't believe that there's a job. In which that's a primary task of your job, is to be able to engage in these questions and with these texts and with these people. And that was a rabbi. I found that while this was a beautiful, powerful, meaningful summer where I felt the most alive I had ever, probably ever felt, it was also a very deeply painful and destabilizing summer.

[00:11:48] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl:** 'cause it was the first time I was outside the, the bubble of my Tacoma Jewish community. And meeting Jews from many, many different places who just had very different systems for how they

approached and saw [00:12:00] what Jewish life looked like and what Jewish identity looked like. And so you might know that the reform movement had decided that patrilineal descent was sufficient for Jewish identity in the 1970s, right when I was coming to America.

[00:12:12] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl:** But the conservative and orthodox movements. To this day have not changed their policies on this. And so it was the first time that I was meeting Jews who made it clear to me that I was not actually halachically legally Jewish as a person who thought of myself as the carrier of Judaism from Tacoma, Washington.

[00:12:32] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl:** This was more than painful. It was, it really shook the foundations of my deeply understood identity of who I was. I'd like to say that I didn't have to rely on what other people thought of me, but it was very hard to feel that I could be a Jew recognizing that there were just large swaths of the Jewish community that said, no, you actually don't even understand what, what it means to have Jewish status.

[00:12:57] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl:** And it was also not just about the legal [00:13:00] definition, although that was obviously pretty unequivocal. It was also very, very challenging to meet people who had such. Incredibly thick, deep Jewish lives where every part of their life was Jewish, including being in a Jewish day school, which put them on a Jewish calendar, and where even the music they listened to was Jewish rock music.

[00:13:18] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl:** And I remember thinking to myself, now that is a really Jewish life and. That did not resemble the life I was living in Tacoma. And so it wasn't just the external challenge, it was the internal challenge of my saying, well, if I have all these other pieces of my life that aren't just Jewish, that must make me a lesser than Jew.

[00:13:36] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl:** I felt I didn't know enough, I wasn't observant enough, I wasn't inside enough to feel like I could hold my own, especially up against that legal definition, ed set off a Jewish identity crisis that I would say actually lasted for the next five years at least. And there were times when. I wasn't sure that I could ever, ever really belong, but I really still wanted to be a rabbi, so I stuck with it and I found my way [00:14:00] and I found angels along the path who helped me understand that I could find my place in the Jewish community.

[00:14:07] **Lisa Hostein** : At what point did that kind of epiphany happen, or was there a particular point when, after all these hurdles, that you really did feel that this was the right way for you to go?

[00:14:18] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl**: You know, oftentimes people will come to some kind of epiphany after they hit like a rock bottom moment. I, I would say that I would characterize that.

[00:14:25] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl**: For myself as well. I mean, it was a series of, a lot of, um, I would've never used this word back then, but microaggressions and aggressions, like everything from just constantly being challenged about how, how could I be Jewish or, that's funny, you don't look Jewish. Those kinds of smaller kinds of hurts.

[00:14:42] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl**: But then the much bigger ones as well. And then I would say that my summer, I managed to get myself back to Israel for two summers of my college life because I just longed to get back to Israel after I went. And on my second summer, which was before my senior year, I had a series of really painful episodes with people who [00:15:00] I both knew well and I didn't know well in terms of sort of rejecting my form of Judaism or outright thinking I'm not Jewish.

[00:15:06] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl**: And I had, I would say, my rock bottom moment, which I describe in the book, and I won't go into too many details, but it included being with the Women of the Wall in 1993 when that was not a particularly well-known organization. Nowadays, most people have heard of it, but it, they were a group that wanted to be able to pray at the Western Wall as a group of women.

[00:15:23] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl**: I was with Rabbi Jackie Ellenson and with a few other friends who all were very knowledgeable, super Jews as I'd call them, and I was not. So while we were at that prayer service, I remember that I could barely follow along with the fast davening prayer service that was happening. And then when we went to go read Torah.

[00: Ellenson 15:40] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl**: They invited Rabbi Ellenson, Jackie Linson to have an aliyah, and they invited one of my friends to have another one. And I felt like everyone was looking at me like I was just their guest. I was an outsider, not a real Jew. When they asked if anyone wanted to have an Allah, I raised my hand and I felt like this was my test.

[00:15:58] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl:** I was going to show everyone that [00:16:00] I belonged. They graciously let me have an aliyah, and when I started the words, I messed up the words of an aliyah, which I have said a hundred times correctly before that. But somehow the nerves got me and all the women corrected me simultaneously. And I remember feeling.

[00:16:17] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl:** So devastated. Like I just failed the test and I actually really wanted to disappear in that moment. 'cause like my eyes were just burning with the tears I was holding back. And when I got home, I just had heaving cries to my mother. I called her and I think this is it. All I wanna do is find. Belonging in this Jewish community, and I feel like I'm getting rejected at every turn and I don't really belong.

[00:16:40] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl:** I don't think I even wanna be a Jew anymore. I don't have a Jewish face, I don't have a Jewish name, and I could just stop being Jewish right now. This is, uh, when my mother very wisely said, is that really possible? That question, and actually imagining, literally just walking away from Judaism and [00:17:00] being pushed to ask if that was actually something I could do was, I think a rock bottom moment.

[00:17:04] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl:** But in a way that was a form of landing. Like, once I kind of picked myself up with my mother's question and I dust myself off, I was like, well, look, I guess I'm still Jewish. And I, you know, I, I couldn't, I couldn't stop. And I found that deeply comforting. I, I think it was also then reaffirmed later that summer with the CAGE conference, in which I had a conversation with Rabbi Elliot Dorff.

[00:17:24] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl:** Who didn't really know me at all, but we talked about giyyur and conversion and he helped me understand that I was thinking of conversion as a turning into something that I wasn't before, which I rejected. 'cause I was like, how can I convert to what I've always been my whole life? But when he said, well, we think of conversion or giyyor as an affirmation of the Jewish soul that's always been in you.

[00:17:46] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl:** Well then I was like, oh, that resonates. I can embrace that. And so I. I think the combination of that summer in Israel and then Rabbi Dorff's explanation of giyyur made me feel like I'm ready for a [00:18:00] ritual to mark this like five years of Jewish identity crisis because I'm in a different place. And so I don't think that I would call that giyyur.

[00:18:08] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl:** Reaffirmation something I did to just make me Jewish in the eyes of other people, because frankly it didn't really

change my status for Orthodox Jews at all. And for conservative, I think it's 50/50. Who would've accepted that or not because it was a Reform beit din of rabbis, but for me internally, it was marking.

[00:18:26] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl:** Something that I had come to that felt really profound and important, and it was a very emotional ritual and like all good ritual felt transformative. And on the other side of that ritual and the other side of that mikvah and that beit din. I just didn't struggle with the questions in the same way after that anymore.

[00:18:42] **Lisa Hostein :** Hmm. So that leads nicely into a central theme in your book that comes from its title, Heart of a Stranger, and you talk about what that means in several different ways. And I was particularly struck by the chapter about you leading services at the Reform Biennial in 2013, in front of [00:19:00] thousands of movement leaders and colleagues, and your mom was there and you say it was one of the most important moments of your life, and you write.

[00:19:07] **Lisa Hostein :** You stood as a Jewish, Korean American woman without having to choose one identity, one box, one story. For so long I had carried the heart of a stranger, but I now saw that every moment of outsidership had been a teaching. My welcome there before 6,000, reformed Jews was like a voice From above. I had taken the path.

[00:19:25] **Lisa Hostein :** I was meant to. There's a lot there. It's really a continuation of what you were just saying, but suddenly you were on the other side, that you were able to accept who you were and other people were able to accept who you were. Although that hasn't always continued, but unpack that a little bit for us.

[00:19:41] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl:** That's actually one of the, um, powerful things about writing a memoir is you get to go back to chapters of your life, and especially to ones that in, in the moment just feel painful or uncomfortable or exclusionary and. With the power of retrospective, you [00:20:00] know, looking and perspective. And, um, now I could see how those moments were the moments of like my greatest kind of growth and character building and meaning in some way.

[00:20:11] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl:** And I guess, you know, there's something very therapeutic about taking the most painful moments of your life and being able to actually write them as. Sort of maybe your most important, so maybe, I think there's probably a form of therapy that is this as well. That you get to, you

get to write the narrative and that doesn't mean that you're changing what happened, you're just changing what the meaning of those moments were with the benefit of hindsight.

[00:20:31] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl:** And so, you know, that moment, it wasn't just powerful because I felt acceptance. It was this moment that had literally that week been named as the nomination to be the rabbi of Central Synagogue. And so this was a, a giant moment of my life, but it was. Kind of crazies to just days later go to this convention of 6,000 Jews and to feel like people were congratulating me and people were saying, as a cantor, this is meaningful to me.

[00:20:54] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl:** Or as a Jew of color, this is meaningful to me. Or as a woman, this is meaningful to me. Or [00:21:00] just fill in the blank of whatever it was. I realized that it also had a symbolism that was important. It was crazy to be at this biennial with my synagogue president who came to his first biennial and people coming up to him and saying.

[00:21:13] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl:** Not only congratulations, but also, oh, it was so brave of you to choose Angela, and he thought to himself, I didn't think it was necessarily so brave, but you realize that it was. Obviously not the traditional path, and there was, you know, I had not been a full-time rabbi before. They hired me in one of the biggest rabbi jobs, so there was a certain amount of risk in that for sure.

[00:21:34] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl:** Not to mention the, the female part and the fact that I was switching from cantor to rabbi and all the, all the pieces, that made it a little bit more, more complicated. It wasn't just an acceptance of me, it was also an acceptance of my mother. And that is not something that has always been in my control.

[00:21:48] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl:** In fact, it's generally not been in my control. And for me to be able to honor my mother who was there sitting in the front row at that biennial, and for me to thank her for the sacrifices she made to [00:22:00] raise two children as Jews and not in her religious tradition. And I didn't just thank my mother, I said I know that there are many others that are part of our communities and our families.

[00:22:10] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl:** Who have done the same thing as my mother, who come from a different tradition and have raised Jewish families, and I wanna honor my mother and all of you. And then there was a giant standing ovation, you know, and this was so powerful for my mother, who kind of felt in many ways, always a little bit. Like a welcome guest, um, to really feel

celebrated for what she had brought to the Jewish community a very different way.

[00:22:34] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl:** It was, it was extremely powerful. This book tour has been fun 'cause my mom start and my dad started with me in New York and went to dc My mom joined me on the San Francisco LA Legs and the Tacoma, Seattle, of course, she's with me as well. She literally, as we go along, she gets asked to sign books. Um, and, and that has been, you know, that alone is like a.

[00:22:55] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl:** The price of admission, like I feel like it was a reason to write the book, but to celebrate the [00:23:00] contributions that my parents have made, you know, and by extension all those who came before me. And I wanna say that it's so much about shining the light back on all the people that I owe gratitude for. My Tacoma Temple Beth El family, I talked about just the beginning of this talk, but the other women rabbis who shattered the glass ceiling, stained glass ceiling for me so that I could be in the.

[00:23:21] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl:** Able to even think about having a job like I have today. There were so many people who really fought very hard so that we could each be in these positions. And I really hope that I'm pulling up the next generation as well. And the fact that within this book tour, I got to do an installation for two female co-senior rabbis of this large congregation in Denver, I think the largest reform synagogue west of the Mississippi, and two women leading this congregation now.

[00:23:45] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl:** Kind of a new model of leadership and one of them was, uh. My first cantor I hired at Central Synagogue and, and she's now also cantor and rabbi and just, I just thought to myself, now, maybe that's the greatest thing I've done. Definitely, you know, more than this book, that if I [00:24:00] can feel like I have people that I've worked with who I help end up in these positions, that to me is maybe the greatest gift of all.

--AD STARTS--

[00:24:09] **Lisa Hostein :** Are you looking for what's new to read? NuReads is more than a bi-monthly book subscription. It's a community of readers committed to Jewish stories curated by the Jewish Book Council. Every other month. A carefully chosen work of Jewish literature arrives at your door assigned novel memoir or short story collection selected to spark meaningful conversation.

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[00:24:50] **Lisa Hostein** : And invitations to virtual or in-person and community gatherings. It's not just reading, it's conversation, connection and community. By subscribing to NuReads, you're also joining the long legacy of the Jewish Book Council, the organization that for decades has championed Jewish writers, promoted Jewish literature and woven Jewish books into lives and communities across North America.

[00:25:11] **Lisa Hostein** : So here's our question to you, 'Nu, what should you read next? Let New reads and the Jewish Book Council bring stories into your home, your conversations, and your heart. Visit newreads.org. That's new reads, N-U-R-E-A-D s.org and subscribe today to become part of our community of readers

--AD BREAK ENDS--

[00:25:35] **Lisa Hostein** : . So you broke that ceiling, that stained glass ceiling with many cracks. Right. But you do talk about in your book how in 2013 when you were mulling over whether to actually pursue the job and even some of your most trusted mentors questioned your ability to balance that life work balance as how could you ae to the demands of a full-time senior rabbi as a mother, what were the factors that enabled you to overcome.

[00:25:59] **Lisa Hostein** : [00:26:00] Those naysayers or questioners and really take the plunge.

[00:26:04] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl**: You know, I would say that I think the feeling was less like. Feeling like I couldn't do it and more a protective like, are you sure you wanna do this kind of thing? And you know, because I really did feel the championing as well that they had kind of given me.

[00:26:18] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl**: But I think that when it really came, pushed, come, came to shove, I think there was a feeling of like, are you sure you wanna do this? And you know, I think that there are many factors that pushed me or pulled me to it. I mean, first and foremost, I have a, a tremendous

partner in my husband who really shared in parenting, but also was my biggest cheerleader and champion, and I couldn't have done it without him really full throated, believing that this was something that not only that I could do, but that would be meaningful.

[00:26:45] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl:** I think there's also a part of me that, you know, for better or for worse, I'm kind of hardwired that if I get a little too comfortable, I start to get restless and a little bit almost bored, and I. Almost always need a job. That puts me on the edge of my comfort zone, because if [00:27:00] I'm not there, then I feel like I'm not growing in the same way.

[00:27:02] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl:** And I had been in the job of cantor, which I really thought was the best job in the world, which when I started, I thought was a very scary job and that I was not. I'm gonna be able to handle it at Central Synagogue. When I became the Cantor at Central in 2006, I had never had a full-time job in my life at that point.

[00:27:19] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl:** I had been a student for forever, you know, um, six years after college. And then I had three children within five years and was, um, not working full-time for those five or six years. And so this was my first full-time job. So it felt super scary to take that job. And it took many years before I settled into it, but I felt like I was finally.

[00:27:40] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl:** Not nervous to do high holidays anymore, um, which is probably, you would imagine that would make somebody happy to not be nervous anymore. But for me, I think I felt a little like, like restless. I had a mentor and past president take me out to lunch and say, would you think about being the senior rabbi when Peter finally decides to retire?

[00:28:01] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl:** And I thought about it and I had three relatively young kids. I looked at the way that Peter was rabbi of this congregation. I could not picture how I could do that job with my three kids at home and with a working husband. And he had a very different family situation. And I said, my first response was, I just don't think this is the right timing.

[00:28:22] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl:** And he said, Angela, it's never perfect timing. And he said, you should know that if you don't apply for this job on this round, someone else will take it. It will likely be a man and he will likely take it for the next 25 years. Because that's what people do and that's what the congregation would want is someone who's gonna take this job for 25 years and he said, and then you'll have missed your, your opportunity.

[00:28:45] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl:** He said, how do you feel about that? So there was a little bit of that push, you know, which I didn't expect, but I was grateful for. And then there was just the pull of understanding that as much as I. Adored, adored the role as senior cantor and sometimes missed doing more of the music. There is certainly still the way that the setup in a congregation is and is certainly in a place like Central, which is a large staff with a lot of systems in place, that the person who gets to sort of.

[00:29:16] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl:** Set the strategic vision is still the senior rabbi with the team. But, but that was certainly the model. And you know, I hope that I have shared and been collaborative in this leadership and that I think that my senior team we share in this together. But that was certainly the model and there was a part of me that really understood that I wanted to be able to be a part of that decision making and that strategizing and that visioning.

[00:29:39] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl:** That I had to do that from the number one position, I guess, and it was different. And the good news is I haven't gotten restless in this job. This job continues to challenge me. It is immensely rewarding. It's always different. It has not stayed the same. I mean my 13th year, I guess, as rabbi and my [00:30:00] 20th year at Central, and the fact is that it is.

[00:30:03] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl:** The job has never been exactly the same each year. And, and that is part of why it just continues to energize me and push me. And I think that Central has evolved and changed over the years with us.

[00:30:16] **Lisa Hostein :** Hmm. Well, I could think of probably a couple experiences that may have pushed you to the edge of your comfort zone even in the last several years.

[00:30:24] **Lisa Hostein :** And one of them, I'm sure was in January, 2022 when you settled, became central to the hostage crisis taking place at. Ville Synagogue where a man entered the synagogue took four hostages, including the rabbi demanded that the rabbi call you because you would be able to influence the release of a terrorist being held in a prison nearby.

[00:30:46] **Lisa Hostein :** So what was the thought processes going through you as you navigated? That could only be, I'm sure, a horrific experience.

[00:30:55] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl:** You know, it took a few moments to even believe that this could be real. It sort of almost felt like I was in a movie where you feel like this isn't really happening, that someone is calling me.

[00:31:07] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl:** I also didn't know Rabbi Charlie Cytron-Walker at the time, so I had to Google just to see that he was really a rabbi in Colleyville, which he was. My thought processes was like. Immediately. I pretty quickly figured out that this looked like this was not a joke. As Charlie Cytron-Walker said, this is not a joke.

[00:31:23] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl:** And I realized that I needed to take this seriously and I responded in the way that I have unfortunately had to in sort of pastoral care crisis moments where someone, there's been a tragic loss or whatever else, which is to first to kind of maintain your own sense of. Calm and then to do what you can to keep the situation as calm as possible.

[00:31:45] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl:** And you know, they say in a hostage situation that the first minutes, the first hour are the most critical moments because people are emotionally very hopped up, I guess. And so I recognize that in some ways my only job if I were to call, [00:32:00] were to try to buy time and to stay as calm as possible. And so the gunman got on the phone relatively quickly after I got on the phone with Charlie Cytron-Walker, and I wanna.

[00:32:08] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl:** Say that from the very beginning, the Rabbi Charlie Cytron-Walker was truly the hero of this SI situation, and he stayed calm. Like even when he was calling me, he was staying calm and I know that they survived because he kept his wits about him and he kept talking to the gunman for 10 hours at the standoff and continued to sort of humanize themselves and him, which I think is part of the reason that this man did not kill them.

[00:32:33] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl:** These are things that they do not. Train you for in rabbinical school, but he certainly was using all of his pastoral skills in that moment. I was. Trying to think with my head of security, I had my security director on the line. I had 911 listening to the call while I was on speaker phone. I was trying to make sure that I was covering as many bases as I possibly could.

[00:32:56] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl:** I wasn't sure if this man not only had them with under [00:33:00] gunpoint, but he also claimed he had bombs on his back and also bombs in New York and Brooklyn. So I was thinking about how I was responsible, perhaps for much bigger things, and basically my main job was

to buy time. Um, he said, I had an hour to bring this notorious female terrorist from the local federal prison to the synagogue, and an hour into this standoff, he called me back to see if I was doing it.

[00:33:26] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl:** I remember thinking to myself, I just have to make sure he does not kill them, and so I. Made a story about how I was, I had made a bunch of phone calls and how we were getting closer to bringing her and for him to be patient because it was gonna happen, and of course, none of this was true, but I was just desperate to make sure that he didn't actually hurt them.

[00:33:47] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl:** After my hour was up and he ended that phone call, which he had said many times, I love death more than you love life. He ended that phone call by saying, I'm running out of patience, and you're running out of time. [00:34:00] My state of mind at that point was despair and some panic, and it was a terrible feeling to feel that I was ultimately responsible for these lives and that I felt pretty genuinely powerless to do, certainly to do what he wanted.

[00:34:17] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl:** I think that, you know, thank God the four hostages got out alive, traumatized, but alive. The gunman was killed at the end of this standoff, as you probably know if you followed this situation. But in some ways it was a foreshadowing of some of the things that we've continued to see years later of people's misunderstanding of antisemitism.

[00:34:40] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl:** You know, the kind of antisemitism we're seeing today is not. We hate Jews, but it's a form of this idea that Jews have too much influence, too much power, that we're conspiratorial in our ways that we're using that power. Whether or not that's language that people are using around Israel or around the way that we are controlling things with our own [00:35:00] government here, or the media or fill in the blanks.

[00:35:03] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl:** This is an age old ancient trope said about Jews that have, is kind of like shape shifted into this moment, but people don't recognize it. You know the FBI director when he reported this hostage situation. His initial response was, this is not an antisemitic incident. And I just think to myself like, antisemitism doesn't show up the same way that anti-Asian hate shows up or the way that anti-Black racism looks in this country.

[00:35:29] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl:** People, they don't always recognize how dangerous the trope of Jewish outsized influence and power can be. But we saw that with Colleyville and we're seeing it still. In different forms today.

[00:35:40] **Lisa Hostein :** Mm. Things of course have only gotten worse after October 7th massacre. Yeah. And the ensuing war. So I wanna ask you, were you surprised by the controversy that erupted in the run up to the New York City mayoral election a few months ago over your decision not to join the letter signed by more than a thousand rabbis nationwide.

[00:35:59] **Lisa Hostein :** [00:36:00] Calling out political figures like then candidates Zohran Mamdani for refusing to condemn violent slogans, deny Israel's legitimacy, and accuse the Jewish state of genocide. Were you surprised by that reaction?

[00:36:11] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl:** Yeah, I mean I, I definitely was, I mean, I knew that this was an emotional and scary election for a lot of Jews in New York, and I shared much of that worry and concern.

[00:36:23] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl:** And there was also quite an organized campaign to pressure rabbis to endorse or condemn candidates in this election, which only got ramped up. It happened even before the IRS made its announcement that they would no longer go after. Or prosecute, you know, pastors and rabbis running congregations if they were to do that now.

[00:36:44] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl:** So, but once they said that, our leadership at Central said this is a very dangerous precedent. Now the law in New York didn't change, but they said if we start to have rabbis endorsed candidates, this is, besides the fact that this is a very [00:37:00] slippery slope around the separation of church and state, it also is not hard to imagine that synagogues could become repositories for.

[00:37:07] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl:** Political donations as long as a rabbi would endorse a particular candidate. Imagine someone saying, I'll give a million dollars to your synagogue if you endorse this candidate. Or imagine that someone could say, I'm gonna withhold my donation if you don't make the endorsement I want. Which by the way, was actually something that was said to me as we approach this election.

[00:37:27] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl:** So that's not hard to imagine. The dangerousness to our own democracy. If we start to make it a policy that rabbis can endorse political candidates in elections, it's also not good for Judaism because I think that it really actually weakens the sort of moral standing of religious leaders. If this becomes something that that doesn't mean that religious leaders can't talk about political issues that are connected deeply.

[00:37:52] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl:** To Jewish values and Jewish safety and security, and I felt that I was quite clear about where I stood on my [00:38:00] Zionism and on my fight against antisemitism and on my condemnation of anti-Zionist rhetoric, right? So I've spoken about those things many, many times from my pulpit. I made a policy decision several years ago that I was no longer signing any letters.

[00:38:15] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl:** Even letters that I agreed with, um, because I saw the ways that those letters get manipulated and used in ways that are beyond my control, and in particular because of Central's platform and name recognition that I have in the community. I saw the way that my name particularly would get pulled out of letters when I was one of a thousand signatures, but somehow my name would get pulled out and be the picture when they talked about the letter.

[00:38:41] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl:** That's a kind of loss of control of, of my messaging that I did not feel comfortable with. And so I said I am no longer signing any letters, even letters that I agree with. I ended up writing my own letter to my congregation and I thought made very clear where I was, but I think that there was so much agitation around this, and [00:39:00] because some of my rabbinic colleagues made different choices, not only just to sign the letter or not sign the letter, but some of them to explicitly endorse or not from the bima.

[00:39:08] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl:** I think that that ratcheted up the pressure and made it feel like, okay, well this is something that you can do. And I still felt really strongly that that was not something that I wanted to do on principle. And I, I think there were people who disagreed with me. They let me know about it. I appreciated the people who let me know about it in respectful and in ways that were.

[00:39:28] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl:** To me personally, rather than just trumpeting it on social media. And I think though that it was clear that I needed to speak really directly to my community. So I ended up breaking my sabbatical and giving a sermon. On the Friday before elections to just make it really clear the kind of moral issues where I stood on them and then I still stuck to my principle that I wasn't going to say, this is then therefore you have to vote for this person or this person.

[00:39:54] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl:** I actually tried to lower the temperature a little in our community, which had really started to pit Jew against Jew, [00:40:00] which I think is very dangerous. And to talk about a framework of understanding Jewish memory that Yossi Klein Halevi, my teacher offers. That

helped people understand why there might be people who would vote differently from them and to not just demonize that.

[00:40:15] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl:** Difference. So that was important to me. I mean, so yes, I wasn't surprised. I was surprised by the level of upset, but I also understood that this was highly emotional election and people really wanted to feel like they knew exactly where I stood on it.

[00:40:31] **Lisa Hostein :** So in the aftermath of so much acrimony that did surround that election and given Mamdani's avowed, anti-Israel views and words, even after his election.

[00:40:42] **Lisa Hostein :** What is your message to your fellow New York Jews and to Mayor-Elect Mamdani himself.

[00:40:50] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl:** I think it need, we need to be helping to educate him on the fact that what it means to be a Zionist, because I think he makes a big distinction between keeping the Jews [00:41:00] of New York safe and secure, which he has said many times and that has included keeping Jessica Tisch is the police commissioner, which I think is a very positive step forward in, in that.

[00:41:11] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl:** But somehow there seems to be distinction between keeping Jews safe and what is allowable. Against Zionists, right? Or those who are supporting Israel. And I think that we have to do some educating around the fact that. The vast majority of American Jews and New York Jews consider themselves Zionists and the toning down of the sort of demonizing rhetoric around those who support Israel must be a part of what keeps Jews secure and safe in in New York.

[00:41:37] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl:** And I think he really needs to understand that in a way that he doesn't quite yet. I do think that it's important that we stay at the table, that we don't just walk away. I know that. Many, many Jewish leaders have met with him. I know that he has been willing to meet with pretty much anyone. I think the New York Board of Rabbis is going to be meeting with him, and that's really important.

[00:41:57] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl:** I think that he is not our mayor yet. I [00:42:00] think we are gonna have to hold him accountable to the things he has said about keeping Jews safe. But I think that we wanna stay at the table so we can build some relationship and recognize that this is our mayor and we wanna

do what we can to work with him. We also recognize that there are Jews in the city.

[00:42:14] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl:** Who were excited by his campaign, and I think that for the vast majority of them, and I know many of them, I don't think that they were voting because they hate Israel or they are themselves anti-Zionists or self-hating Jews, or any of the things that I've sometimes heard people say about people who must have voted for him.

[00:42:31] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl:** I think that they had different priorities of what they thought were the most important things in the election. And we also know that we have many Jews in New York who were critical of how the war was handled, and that might have been something that actually spoke to them. So I think we have some work to do internally in our own community so that we understand each other so that we're not just pitting ourselves against each other and fighting each other as well.

[00:42:53] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl:** And I think that that comes from more a deeper understanding, and I really hope that we can help our mayor elect [00:43:00] understand the Jewish community and what it is to be a Zionist better.

[00:43:03] **Lisa Hostein :** So that's a good segue actually into my next question, which focuses on your Rosh Hashanah sermon this year, in which you said that October 7th and the war in Gaza has been, quote, the most painful experience of my rabbinic life.

[00:43:16] **Lisa Hostein :** And you said you'd never been so afraid to talk about Israel, and I'm sure that that speaks to something that you've already just described about the divisions within the Jewish community. So what I really want to ask you is, what do you say to members of your congregation, young people in particular, who may be struggling with or outright rejecting Israel as central to, or even any part of their identity?

[00:43:41] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl:** I think that our tradition has had a very, very long engagement with Israel. It's very hard to separate Israel out from Judaism. I mean, you look at our liturgy and the longing for Zion or the relationship with Israel is like woven into all of our liturgy. It is a part of [00:44:00] so many of our holidays. It is, of course, deeply a part of our historic and biblical.

[00:44:06] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl:** History. And so to wash your hands of, um, Israel altogether as not being a part of your Jewish identity, I think is, is missing out on a very important part of what Judaism is and what it is to be a Jew today. I do think though, that we can make the distinction between saying, I must engage with Israel and Israeli.

[00:44:25] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl:** Because that's part of the peoplehood that we're a part of, and being able to be critical of the government, of the state of Israel in the same way that I think any one of us, depending on who is the president of our own United States at any time, I think that we can engage with a country. Love the people, care about its foundational principles and still be, we can be very deeply upset with our government and maybe even think that some of the things they're doing are immoral.

[00:44:53] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl:** And yet that doesn't mean that we think that the, the country doesn't have a right to exist. It doesn't mean that we just wash our hands [00:45:00] completely and say, we'll have nothing to do with it, and we should boycott anyone who comes from this country. That's just not the way we handle pretty much any other country except for Israel.

[00:45:10] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl:** And I think that that double standard to me is part of what feels so painful is that I think that you're looking at a country, Israel that has had almost three full years of protests of its own government. That is a thriving democracy. That means there are a lot, lot of Israelis who are also not happy with what is happening in.

[00:45:30] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl:** Um, with their own government. And that doesn't mean that you just wash your hands of it. You know, Israel is the most..., it, is the where half of the world's Jews live. It is the most important sort of sovereign project of modern Jewish history. The idea that we would completely wash our hands of it, I think is somehow feels irresponsible now.

[00:45:49] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl:** I understand that. We don't have quite the same say as American Jews, as I think Israelis who are working there and paying taxes and most of all serving in the army and sacrificing [00:46:00] their own lives or their children's lives for the country. But that doesn't mean we have no say, that we are not in some ways connected.

[00:46:07] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl:** When you love someone, that doesn't mean that it has to only be positive you. It also, when you love someone, you are willing to give them constructive criticism and critique when needed. Out of love, but I think it comes first from that place that you actually care. That's the

way I like to think about my relationship, and that's what I'd like to encourage for younger generations to recognize that they've got a stake.

[00:46:29] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl:** So if they wanna see a different Israel, then, then maybe engage with the many, many Israelis and many, many NGOs and many, many causes they're helping support that Israel, that so many Israelis also want to see. That is reflective of the Declaration of Independence and the aspirations that the founders of the State of Israel also set forth.

--AD BREAK--

[00:46:51] **Lisa Hostein :** I may be biased, but I love hosting Hadassah programs like the one you're listening to Now. We know we're bringing you the best speakers on the [00:47:00] best topics. And I can tell you we love creating these programs for you. But while these programs are free to our listeners, they do cost money to produce, and Hadassa could not continue offering such programming or carrying out our life-saving work in Israel, the United States and around the world.

[00:47:18] **Lisa Hostein :** Without the support of generous donors. Please consider making a donation right now. donate at go.hadassah.org/podcastsupport. That's go dot hadassah.org/podcast support, and you'll feel good knowing you're helping us produce programming like this and healing the world together. Thank you.

--AD BREAK--

Lisa Hostein: What have you learned about yourself in this process of going out to different communities and really exposing yourself your entire life story in a very public way that you hadn't before?

[00:47:54] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl:** There is a part of me that will be very happy when I finish my last couple cities to just [00:48:00] disappear in. I'm going to South America for a little vacation and to just disappear and not be recognized at all and just sort of like, um. Uh, hibernate for a little while and be with the turtles. And so I think that there is a part of me that, that finds the spotlight hard, honestly.

[00:48:16] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl:** And in, and that was, I think, you know, magnified with the, uh, mayoral election that happened at the same time that the book was being published. And it was, it was a lot, a lot of pressure and a lot of eyes. And that can be very exhausting, honestly. And so there is a piece of that that's been hard. I mean, I think the joyful part of this has been that I can go to.

[00:48:37] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl:** Big cities and college campuses and large cities, and I've done all of the, all of the above, um, on this book tour. And there is this feeling of familiarity and extended Jewish family everywhere I go. And that has been this beautiful feeling for me. Um, it is quite literally because people come up to me and [00:49:00] say, oh, I watched Central Synagogue's live stream wherever I am.

[00:49:03] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl:** It is also that people come up and say, you know. So and so who's my cousin or my sister is in your congregation or, um, you know, some literal connection with people I know, or you went to camp with so and so or it, and so everywhere I go that, that sense of like the six degrees of separation in the Jewish community, it's like two degrees of separation in, in the Jewish community and that feeling of interconnectedness across a giant, like just thousands and thousands of people that I've been meeting along the way.

[00:49:32] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl:** It's this weird way that when I see people, I feel like I know them even though I haven't met them and it's, I can't explain it. It's like, it's like a kind of Jewish humor, Jewish feeling. I can't explain it. And it's like I've been saying, oh yeah, we were all at Sinai together. So I recognize them from Sinai.

[00:49:50] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl:** I idea that we all were there together. That's been so beautiful. I feel very deeply comfortable in every community, even though it's a brand new community. I'm coming into each time. I [00:50:00] do feel a deep sense of Jewish peoplehood on this tour, which has been beautiful.

[00:50:05] **Lisa Hostein :** Now I think that's such an important piece of what you represent, uh, joy, a voice of hope.

[00:50:10] **Lisa Hostein :** And so as we get ready to celebrate Hanukkah, the Festival of Lights next Sunday evening, can you share a short d'var, a word of Torah about how we as a people during this extremely difficult time can seek the light and hold onto that hope.

[00:50:24] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl:** Hmm. I think we sometimes forget that very, very small acts, even where you can see a little change.

[00:50:32] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl:** It's not only that it transforms the person who's the recipient of your little act of kindness or generosity or a smile or a hand or whatever it is, a little just assistance or whatever. It actually. Renews our sense of agency and hope. I have found that like in moments when I feel like I'm despairing or the world feels really dark or really hard, like even just like the exchange that I can have with the cashier, um, at the grocery store [00:51:00] or the, where you just exchange some kindness.

[00:51:02] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl:** We had this situation where my mother and I were traveling together and my mother left her purse. Back at the house that we had stayed in and we could not get on the airplane. I mean, the bag would not get back to the airport in time. And I was panicking because I had a book talk that day in Los Angeles and the agent, the Delta agent, we like, literally her last name was Santos, and we decided she literally was a saint, but she wasn't just that she.

[00:51:27] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl:** Somehow managed to help my mom get onto the airplane without her ID because there's a whole process you can do. But it was the way she handled everything and her kindness and her smile, and I swear it changed the entire week for us that we were like people like that exist in the world. She was a Delta agent, like in a hotel.

[00:51:46] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl:** I mean, I'm sorry, in our San Francisco Airport and it changed the way we felt about humanity. You'd be surprised by what it can do. It sometimes can be that you just read horrible things about people and you just start [00:52:00] to despair. But even one small act of extraordinary kind of beauty and generosity and kindness can change the whole way you feel about about humanity.

[00:52:09] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl:** So I think that when, when we do that, or when we experience that, we forget. That, that those are the little pieces of light that actually have a massive ripple effect.

[00:52:19] **Lisa Hostein :** Mm. So I'm gonna thank you for being with us and for sharing your extraordinary story and your wisdom. So I wanna thank Leah Finkelshteyn, our senior and book editor, who helped plan and implement this program along with the magazine's digital editor, Arielle Kaplan, who both promoted and produced it.

[00:52:34] **Lisa Hostein** : And a shout out to our partners as always in Hadassah engagement and marketing and communications divisions who always play an important role in making these events happen. And now a special surprise from Angela who will close with this beautiful song. Angela, take it away.

[00:52:49] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl**: Thank you. And I just, I wanna say thank you to Lisa for and Hadassah and everyone that you just named for this beautiful opportunity to greet the Hadassah [00:53:00] extended community, which you all have done so much good for the world, for many, many.

[00:53:05] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl**: Decades and, and for the beautiful feature on the magazine cover. I feel like very grateful for all of that and just for the work you do. So thank you and thank you to everyone who joined. I share in the beginning, in some ways, the essence of the book is about what it feels like to have the heart of a stranger, which is very much at the core of being a Jew.

[00:53:23] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl**: And we know that the origin story of our people begins when God calls Abraham and Sarah and says, you have to leave your birthplace in your home and everything you know behind to a place you do not know, but that you will be a blessing. And it is that call that sets off the journey of the Jewish people and in Hebrew, the word ivri literally is where we get that word crossing over from when Abraham and Sarah Cross over the river, the boundary of their homeland. .

[00:53:43] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl**: And so to be a Hebrew is literally to be a boundary crosser and for every one of us, whether it's been a geographic leaving of your original [00:54:00] home, um, as I did when I left South Korea, but I think many of us have boundary crossings that can sometimes be about crossing.

[00:54:08] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl**: Family expectations or gender norms or anything else that sort of feels comfortable and familiar, and having to leave that behind to fulfill some kind of blessing, um, so that we can be our truest selves and find our truest home. So that's the blessing I wanna leave you all with as we go into this season of light as we.

[00:54:29] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl**: Embrace what it might feel like to have the heart of a stranger and recognize that when we live in that place, we will eventually come to home and to finding blessing.

[00:54:43] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl:** I will show you to a place you do not know.

[00:54:57] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl:** On your journey. I will [00:55:00] bless you and you shall be a blessing. You shall be a blessing, and you shall be a blessing.

[00:55:21] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl:** And I shall make your name great and all shall praise your name.

[00:55:36] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl:** To the place that I will show you

[00:55:49] **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl:** and you shall be blessing.

[00:55:57] **Lisa Hostein :** Ah. Thank you so much, [00:56:00] Angela, for sharing that beautiful song and for being with us and sharing your special journey and for all the work that you do For now, I wish you all a joyous and light-filled Hanukkah. Goodbye.

Angela Buchdahl: Happy Hanukkah. Happy New Year everyone.

[00:56:16] **Lisa Hostein :** Thanks for joining us today. If you like this episode, if Hadassah Magazine presents, please follow the podcast to listen to podcasts and please, please follow us. Rate and review us and tell your friends to help bolster our audience. Earlier episodes include discussions with Israeli writers, Yossi Klein Halevi, and Lee Yaron on the post-October 7th Jewish reality.

[00:56:38] **Lisa Hostein :** With Israeli fiction authors like Maya Arad and Ayelet Tsabari, and with other important Jewish figures such as Mayim Bialik and Dara Horn. You can find this and other Hadassah podcasts at hadassah.org on the podcast page where you can also sign up for new episode alerts. Check out the show notes for further resources, and if you'd like to watch a video recording of this and any of our [00:57:00] previous episodes, go to YouTube and search Hadassah Magazine.

[00:57:03] **Lisa Hostein :** We'll be back soon with another episode. Thanks again for joining us.