

TEKIAH

MAGAZINE



DECEMBER 2025, ISSUE 2





TABLE OF CONTENTS

02
CULTURE

04
HOLIDAYS

06
**INTERNATIONAL
AFFAIRS**

10
NEWS

11
OPINIONS

13
**ARTS AND
LITERATURE**

17
CONTRIBUTORS

A JEWISH UNDERSTANDING OF INTERFAITH WEEK

BY RABBI DAN EPSTEIN

“No religion is an island. We are all involved with one another, and the one is responsible for the other.” — Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel

In the early 1960s, Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel had a dream: to establish an interfaith center in the heart of our nation’s capital. Though that dream went unrealized during his lifetime, it has now come to fruition. This year, George Washington University officially launched the Center for Interfaith and Spiritual Life, located just six blocks from the White House, in the heart of Washington, D.C. Under the inspiring leadership of the incredible Rev. Kristen S. Glass Perez, the center brings together clergy from the National Cathedral, the National Mosque, and other faith traditions to build bridges, engage students, and foster interfaith dialogue across the GW community.

By engaging deeply with other faiths, by truly learning and listening, we paradoxically come to know our own religion more fully. To paraphrase a Jewish teaching, who is the wise one? One who learns from every daughter and son. The Jewish mystics taught that everything we see and hear can be a message from God about how to better serve the Creator.

From the Muslim tradition, I learned that fasting during Ramadan is meant to sensitize believers to the suffering of the hungry. This direct experience of hunger cultivates empathy for those who fast not by choice but by circumstance. While I have not found this idea stated explicitly in Jewish sources, I now reflect on it during our own fast days. It adds a profound, experiential dimension to my Jewish practice. Speaking with Imam Talib and his assistant Fitrah Muhammad throughout the semester enriched my practice of Judaism. One day, I went to Zingers to meet a student and I saw Fitrah and Imam Talib eating lunch together in the Hillel cafe. That was one of the highlights of my semester, the interfaith center brought us together.

When I spoke on Sukkot at Keshet Israel, the local synagogue in Georgetown, I shared what I had learned from the Buddhist tradition about mindfulness and presence. I compared the Sukkah, a temporary dwelling for seven days, to a meditation hut, and drew on a Zen koan to illustrate the art of being fully present. Obviously, my connection to Amitha the Monk this semester influenced my perspectives and my reading material, another relationship I formed through the Interfaith center. While mindfulness is a part of Jewish spirituality, Buddhism offers a beautifully developed model for this state of

CULTURE

awareness and I find the disparate explanation clarifying.

Interfaith learning also requires courage, the willingness to explore our differences. In conversations with Father James, the Catholic priest on campus, I discovered how profoundly the Christian conception of the afterlife differs from the Jewish one. These discussions clarified my own beliefs and deepened my understanding of my faith. We did an interfaith event together about Abrahamic views on the Afterlife. During Interfaith week, we had a priest, an imam, and a rabbi talk about what happens after you die.

This exchange of learning flows both ways. When George Washington University President Ellen Granberg spoke at our Yom Kippur service, she shared that in preparation for her speech, she conducted research on Teshuvah, the practice of repentance and reflection in the Jewish tradition. She said she had long engaged in similar practices of introspection and growth, but had recently found insightful language for them through Judaism's teachings on Yom Kippur.

Earlier this semester, I was invited to speak at the Museum of the Bible to 300 Christian college students who had just returned from Israel through the Passages program. The organizers asked me to explain the Sabbath from a Jewish perspective. I noted that both Christians and Jews say a blessing before a meal, but that Jews also recite a prayer after eating, a custom not typically found in Christian practice. When a student asked why I found that "interesting," what did I mean by that? I explained simply that curiosity, not judgment, guides my learning. I really just found it interesting that these practices are similar and different.



Credit: Lila Kokolas/Jewish on Campus

This is the advice I offer to students. We are all lifelong learners. Those in college may have the advantage of recognizing it, but everyone on earth is a student from the moment we open our eyes for the first time until we return to the dirt. When we encounter a faith or worldview not our own, we should resist judgment and instead engage with openness. Curiosity is the beginning of understanding. We should be open to having an encounter and an experience.

If you have a chance, stop by the interfaith center, and try to expose yourself to a religious tradition that is not your own; you could learn a great deal about your own faith and about yourself.

"Interfaith work is not about watering down your faith. It's about drawing from the deepest well of your own tradition to build relationships with others." —Dr. Eboo Patel★

WHAT AM I?

BY LAINEY GOLDSTEIN

“What are you?” is a question I get far more often than you’d expect. Is it my appearance, identity, culture, or a dichotomy of the three? My features don’t fit neatly into people’s assumptions, and some might even call me racially ambiguous. Whenever I answer, “I’m half Mexican and half Jewish,” it usually requires an explanation, and as I stare back at their confused faces, I find myself having to justify my own identity.

They ask, “Jewish, like the religion?” or “Is your mom Jewish?” Sometimes someone will even say, “You don’t look Mexican.” Initially, I am surprised by how quickly people speak about cultural backgrounds they may not know much about. But I have also learned that most of the time, these questions aren’t meant to offend. They come from curiosity, and from people trying to make sense of a world more diverse and interconnected than ever before. I try to see these moments, not as accusations, but as a chance for people to understand different identities.

At the heart of it, my identity comes from my dad being Jewish and my mom being Mexican, and both sides of my family raised me deeply connected to their cultures. Our Mexican family’s meals, music, and even celebrations make up the liveliness of our heritage. For my Jewish side, I wasn’t raised practicing Judaism, and neither was my dad. On his side, being Jewish is about culture and ethnicity rather than religion. We look Jewish. We share the stories and the history. But in religious practice, we attend a Catholic church, were baptized in that religion, and we don’t celebrate Jewish holidays. The absence of these religious practices has never lessened the Jewish part of who we are. My brother and I live at an intersection of our cultures, with one expressed in celebrations and the other expressed through lineage and memory.

My dad’s family story is something I’ve held close since I was little. His parents met during World War II when my grandfather was stationed in England. When they married, traveled to America, and moved in with his family in Philadelphia, my grandmother entered a world that did not welcome her. She was Venezuelan, Catholic, darker-skinned, and not the partner they imagined for their son. Although she was loving, beautiful, and strong, they couldn’t see past what made her different. Their disapproval also wasn’t subtle, and it shaped her early married life in painful ways. After having two children, my grandparents moved to California to escape the discrimination and start fresh. They went on to have two more kids, one of them being my dad.

Growing up, my parents made sure we were immersed in both cultures. From my mom’s side, I celebrated Las Posadas, helped make tamales at Christmas, listened to live mariachis at family brunches, and even had a quinceañera. Ever since I was a kid, they have taught me that being Mexican is something to be proud of. This part of my heritage is bold and vibrant.

From the music that fills the room to our colorful decor that transforms our gatherings, my Mexican side has always been alive around me and is proudly expressed in my everyday life.

From my dad's side, I have embraced Jewish cultural traditions. My brother had a bar mitzvah, and while we didn't participate in the religious aspects, we learned and honored the customs, stories, and celebrations. Whenever we have attended a bar mitzvah, my favorite part has been the Shabbat dinner the night before. The dinners that my family and I have attended were more intimate and smaller. Sitting around the table and hearing stories about ancestry, resilience, and tradition, I was able to feel connected to a culture that shaped my family long before I was born.

Throughout my upbringing, my mixed identity has given me a rare perspective on life that I genuinely cherish. Experiencing these two cultures at once has made me realize just how connected they actually are. Beyond their shared histories of hardship, where both have shown resilience generation after generation, the cultures themselves echo one another in ways that still shape who I am today. Both cultures place a high importance on keeping close-knit families and remaining connected to their roots. The holidays they each celebrate reflect on celebrating their resilience and honoring their ancestors. And both also have a strong sense of identity and pride in their heritages, which has taught me to remain true to who I am.

I have looked up to my grandparents in moments where I have experienced discrimination in my own life. Whenever I feel different or unwelcome, I try to find the same bravery that they once had when they picked up their entire lives to move to a new state. They have taught me that belonging isn't always something you are handed. Sometimes it's something you claim for yourself.

Being mixed has given me a unique lens on identity. I am not "half of this" and "half of that." I am fully both. And while people may question or misunderstand my background, the blend of Mexican and Jewish cultures has given me a rich, layered identity that I wouldn't trade for anything. ★



Credit: Canva



SHABBAT ALWAYS

HOLIDAY CONSUMERISM WHEN JEWISH

BY MARA RIEGEL

As a little kid, maybe it wasn't the most pious thing in the world, but I always wanted to decorate for the holidays the same way people who celebrated Christmas did. I wanted the tree and the fun lights and ornaments. It always felt like there was never anything for me as a Jew to get festive with around the holiday season. As I've gotten older, I've taken a more analytical mindset toward this subject and have started thinking about what Jews do have to choose from come holiday time and what we could have if there were ever a company willing to make it.

First and foremost, I don't think that anything could be done to match quite the same level of festive cheer for us that a Christmas tree does for others. Christmas trees have become the premier symbol of the winter holiday season. They symbolize gifts and holiday joy, which is really lovely, but as Jews, we simply can't partake if we abide by more traditional expectations of how to celebrate the holiday season. These trees are unmistakably for Christians and the Jews just don't have a comparable vessel of festivity, much to my chagrin.

When I was in about sixth grade, to celebrate the miracle of light the Jews received after the successful fight against King Antiochus by the Maccabees, I asked my father if we could get a Hanukkah bush like my Belarusian friends had. Despite us being Eastern European Jews, it was a resounding no. I now understand that this was mostly because a lot of traditional Jews see Hanukkah bushes as a thinly veiled way to indeed just have a Christmas tree without admitting it.

My father, as well as the rest of my family, are all pretty traditional Jews in holiday practice, and I think that partaking in this sort of tradition is deeper than just decorations and festivity. I think in their eyes, it probably represents a desire to be more like another culture and less like my own, a sentiment with which I categorically do not align, even though the idea of those kinds of celebrations seems fun. Because that sentiment is important, for me, I have to scrap the idea of any kind of Hanukkah bush or holiday trees because it isn't worth it, though I hold no judgment for anyone who does partake.

So that leaves us with what? Well, some of Hanukkah's most identifiable symbols include dreidels and menorahs. Some things I've seen a lot of are enlarged menorahs that are lit in public spaces, or specially decorated menorahs and dreidels. A lot of what I've experienced when shopping to celebrate the holidays is that there are either a) limited options that you have to search for in the back corner or weird aisle end cap of a big

store or b) handmade, personal iterations of these items made by the children of any given family or collected over the years from special places.

To address that first part, it is exhausting walking into a T.J. Maxx or a Home Goods and seeing a massive array of Christmas goods only to walk back and see a single shelf of thrown-around pieces of gelt and generic-looking menorahs. Don't get me wrong, I am grateful that big stores like that even have Hanukkah things to begin with, but wouldn't it be nice if the options were actually cute like the Christmas ones?

In the last year or so, there has been one singular item I've seen personally of cute Hanukkah merchandise available in one of those sorts of stores. It was a Dachshund menorah from Home Goods and it was probably the only holiday item I really wanted to buy all season. I would love it if we could get more genuinely cute options in a well-presented manner the same way these stores do with Christmas goods. These stores have shown that they are capable, as shown by making something actually cute and palatable like that Dachshund menorah, which makes me wonder if this lack of representation has less to do with a lack of capability and knowledge so much as a lack of desire to make us feel represented and included.

“I think in their eyes, it probably represents a desire to be more like another culture and less like my own, a sentiment with which I categorically do not align, even though the idea of those kinds of celebrations seems fun.”

On that second point of homemade and sentimental holiday pieces, I will never negate the value of those pieces within a home. In my own home, the mezuzah I made in Hebrew school as a toddler hung in my bedroom doorway until we moved, and even now, I think it's still up in our new house. Homemade and personal goods absolutely have a place in holiday celebrations, but to be honest, I am a shopper and I like engaging with the rampant consumerism that comes with the holiday season. So is it too much to ask that stores make genuinely cute stuff for our community when we do indeed have the capacity to spend our money with them in honor of the holidays?

Much to my delight, some stores have indeed heard this message and have taken steps toward making genuinely cute holiday merchandise for Jews. A good example of a store leading by example here is Kendra Scott. I work at a Kendra Scott store, and the second I saw our new holiday line and there was a cute little dreidel necklace right up there next to the candy cane and gingerbread pieces, I actually jumped for joy. Not only did they make a piece that acknowledged our community, they made one that was genuinely desirable and didn't bury it between the shelves. The same has been repeated this season with loungewear company P.J. Salvage, among others.

Other stores can do the same, and some already have.

EU SANCTIONS ON ISRAEL AMIDST THE CEASE FIRE

BY BEN DANIEL

Israel's relations with the European Union are under dynamic tension as the EU is switching its attitude towards its line of connection. For the past few months, the EU as a whole has tightened its restrictions on trade policies with Israel amidst the growing officially internationally recognized backlash.

With the release of the hostages and the partial withdrawal of IDF ground forces from Gaza, the European Commission's continuous development of sanction plans on Israeli imports came to a temporary halt. The new political climate surrounding Israel, with Trump's proposed plan to end two years of war with 20 points of agreement being accepted and phases unfolding at the present moment, has changed the world stance on the future of the region.

The European Union is one of if not the most important economic lines of trade with Israel historically and equivalently in recent years. In 2024, bilateral trade between Israel and the EU was 42 billion between the two areas and Israeli exports totaled over 16 billion. Mechanical equipment, chemicals, and pharmaceuticals are among the top exports included in the typical trade. With exports to Europe growing over the past decade, reflective of the high dollar figure explained previously, the economy of the State of Israel heavily depends on the expenditure of manufacturing, much of which can be categorized as intermediate goods.

Key components of many smartphones and laptops are manufactured and developed, through a staunch investment in R&D in the past decade, in the Galilee region alone. The export market is greatly affected by the policies of acceptance within EU borders. These constantly changing systems of trade interference are crucial to not only European and Middle East growth, but global distribution as well. The consistency of these policies, however, has greatly relied on the current perception of the legality and morality of the Israeli government, which the EC has struggled to take a concrete and official position on.

Estonia's Kaja Kallas, Vice President of the European Commission was among the 27 foreign ministers of the EU that

created and attended a summit in Luxembourg only 10 days after the US led cease fire with the hostage deal put into place. This summit concluded that the situation is too "fragile" at the moment to put into place an official European Commission system of tariffs and sanctions on these exports. However, the current progress towards peace in the conflict started on Oct. 7 has not deterred the European Union from keeping the decision of sanctions on the table for the coming months.



Credit: EVZ Romania

While the staggering tensions between the EU and Israel have grown in the past year since the arrest warrant was issued for Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and international condemnation was bestowed upon his cabinet members Ben Gvir and Bezalel Smotritch, the EU has tried to maintain good standing with Israel by avoiding these kinds of actions against the administration. However, the current European Commission leaders have decided that in order to incentivize continued trade relations, sanctions need to be placed on the entirety of Israel until their actions align with European Union values. This sanction package would include the temporary suspension of bilateral support between Israel and the EU, suspension of some of the provisions of the previous Israel-EC agreement (the Association Agreement), and sanctions against both Hamas and Israeli Settlers.

Kaja Kallas was adamant that the ceasefire has changed the trajectory of peacemaking, however, she was quoted as stating, "unless we see real and sustained change on the ground, including more aid reaching Gaza, the threat of sanctions remains on the table." Kallas's main points, representing the collective state of the European Commission, summarize a list of demands that the EU would like to see put in place to rebuild the Israeli good reputation. Among these measures, Kallas mentions, 'improvement of humanitarian aid reaching Gaza,' 'Palestinian tax revenues to be given to Palestine or released by Israeli authorities,' journalists and aid workers being allowed safe passage in and out of Gaza, and the registration of INGO's to be unrestricted.

Though the European Commission has been persistent among its members with its restrictions on Israel, not all European international relations officials are in agreement with this general disposition. On the opposing side of the European stance on the state of Israeli relations with the EU is Member of European Parliament (MEP) Hildegard Bentele of Germany's Christian Democrat Party. Much of Kallas's operational announcements have been well received in theory, as these

economic restrictions have been put in place as a package of demand for a higher volume of humanitarian action conducted by the current Israeli administration. However, in direct response to Kallas on Oct. 7, Bentele stated to the European parliament, “[with Kallas’s economic punishment plan] If Hamas refuses to lay down arms, what then?”

Over the course of the past two weeks, Bentele has urged the leaders of the EU to take the halt of military operations in Gaza as an opportunity to release tensions on Israel. She claimed in a tone of relief that, “we have reached a different stage: there’s a ceasefire, humanitarian aid is flowing, and Israel is giving the peace plan a chance.” While this is not the current popular opinion among the EC and the EU, the general argument that is being spearheaded by those alongside Bentele is that punishing Israel amidst the transition period of the ceasefire would only promote an unnecessary wave of aggression towards Israel.

Along with International oversight over Gaza and the continuous adoption of a multi-stage peace plan, Israel is complying with international demands and is open to international cooperation. Sanctions, as argued in view of the sentiments of those in general opposition, would not be helpful for any growth between the EU or Israel and the sooner these sanctions are off the EC’s table, the more likely Israel is to follow international pressure as they are under no threats. With potential cooperation with the demands for humanitarian, journalistic, and economic action, Israel could have the ability to continue previous trade patterns and return to the global economy in greater capacity than the pre-war era. ★



ANTISEMITISM AROUND THE WORLD POST- OCT. 7

BY BRADY WILSON

Antisemitic incidents have erupted worldwide since the attack on Oct. 7, 2023, signaling an unprecedented mix of security enhancements and education crackdowns. In the United States, the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) reported a record 9,354 antisemitic incidents in 2024, a 5% jump from 2023 and a roughly 344% increase over five years.



FIGHTING HATE FOR GOOD

Credit: the Anti-Defamation League

Campus life has been particularly affected, where Hillel International recorded 2,334 antisemitic incidents on U.S. campuses in the 2024-25 school year, a tenfold jump from 289 incidents in 2022-23, the last year before Oct. 7. “This is the most hostile environment Jewish students have faced in modern campus history,” Rabbi Noam Marans, a senior director at Hillel, said in an interview with The New York Times, warning that antisemitism is “no longer at the margins of student life.”

In the U.S., and specifically in New York City, it has become a test case for action. In July 2025, Mayor Eric Adams signed an executive order requiring all city agencies to use the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition of antisemitism, an attempt to bring consistency to how complaints are logged and investigated. City officials paired the move with a new Mayor’s Office to Combat Antisemitism and tighter coordination with the NYPD, including stepped-up synagogue perimeters, targeted patrols, and rapid-response deployments during Jewish holidays.

Nationally, the federal government has leaned on universities and law enforcement to ensure accountability and protect Jewish students and campus communities from antisemitic violence. Rising campus incidents, up 84% in an

ADL analysis between 2023 and 2024, have prompted more hate-crime investigations into schools accused of failing to protect Jewish students. One senior Justice Department official, speaking at a 2025 conference on hate crimes, called the campus trend “a civil rights emergency” and pledged that “no university will be allowed to look the other way when Jewish students are targeted.”

In Europe, governments are trying to blend long-term education with immediate protection. Sweden has appointed national antisemitism coordinators to align ministries and police, a step officials say is meant to avoid the “siloes” responses that failed in the past. Sweden’s efforts are framed in a ten-year plan, “Sweden’s first national strategy to strengthen Jewish life and combat antisemitism 2025–2034,” which emphasizes Holocaust education, Jewish culture and heritage, and public awareness. The strategy also includes increased security funding for Jewish institutions, coordinated policing by the Swedish Police Authority, and support for community organizations to respond quickly to antisemitic incidents.

In the United Kingdom, on Oct. 2, 2025, a vehicle attack near a Manchester synagogue on Yom Kippur became a breaking point. The attack spurred new funding for Jewish community security and pushed curriculum changes meant to strengthen Holocaust and antisemitism education in schools, according to British government statements and Jewish security briefings. Rabbi Rachel Levinsky of Manchester Jewish Representative Council described the attack as “a brutal reminder that rhetoric has consequences on our streets.”

Germany, still deeply marked by the Holocaust, has seen a sharp rise in antisemitic incidents since Oct. 7. In response, the Federal Interior Ministry raised the security alert and coordinated with all 16 Länder (main states) to step up protection for synagogues, schools, and Israeli institutions. Federal Interior Minister Nancy Faeser, who emphasized in her 2025 press briefings the government’s firm stance, a policy of “zero tolerance for antisemitism,” with police increasing patrols and surveillance around Jewish sites.

In addition to actions being taken, groups are urging the government to take further steps. A new initiative, “DACH Against Hate,” launched in 2025 to confront growing antisemitism in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland, combining protests, petitions, and a five-point policy plan. Organizers are seeking at least 100,000 signatures to press parliaments in Berlin, Vienna, and Bern to strengthen laws, expand education, and increase protection for Jewish institutions.

Holocaust survivor Charlotte Knobloch told The Guardian in 2025 that the recent escalation feels like “a breaking of taboos” in public discourse. “We are seeing things shouted openly that were once unthinkable in Germany,” she said, backing the new initiative.

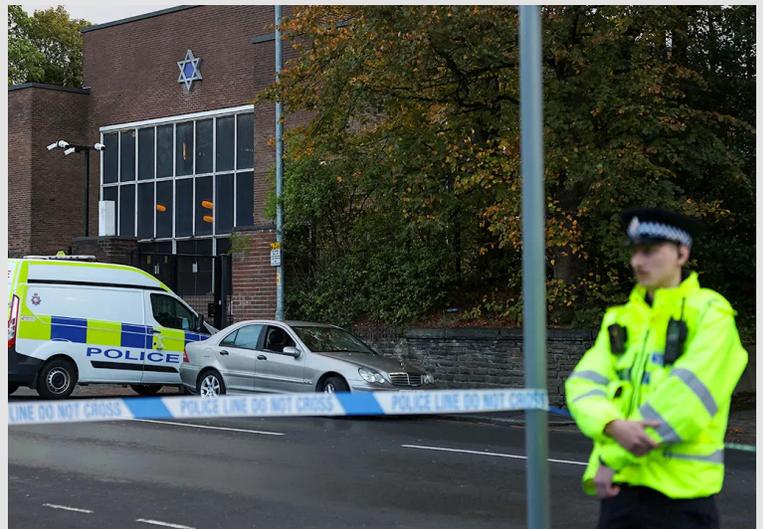
Australia has experienced one of the steepest increases in antisemitic incidents globally, rising an estimated 316% since October 2023, according to the Executive Council of Australian Jewry. The surge includes attacks on synagogues, Jewish schools, and Israeli-owned businesses, including a known arson at a Melbourne synagogue.

In response, the federal government appointed Jillian Segal

as Australia’s first Special Envoy on Antisemitism in 2024. In July 2025, she released a multi-step plan tying government funding to performance on antisemitism, recommending penalties for universities that fail to address campus hate, and urging monitoring of extremist ideologies and media coverage. The plan pushes for mandatory Holocaust education and funding restrictions on arts and cultural institutions promoting antisemitic narratives, framed by Segal during a briefing with ABC News as an effort to “push antisemitism back to the fringes of Australian society.”

In Canada, the federal government recently announced the Canada Community Security Program (CCSP), an expanded successor to the Security Infrastructure Program, with an extra 65 million Canadian dollars earmarked to help vulnerable communities harden their facilities. The Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs (CIJA) welcomed the move, warning that Jewish schools have been shot at, synagogues vandalized, and community centers terrorized at levels, as stated in the Anti-Defamation League’s Audit of Anti-Semitic Incidents 2024, “not seen since the Holocaust.” But advocates fear the momentum they have now might not continue. In coverage of the 2025 “Canada Strong” federal budget, some Jewish community figures criticized the government for failing to increase long-term security funding despite the continuing wave of incidents.

For many Jewish communities around the world, the post-Oct. 7 surge in antisemitism is both a security emergency and a moral stress test for democracies that vowed “never again,” but the continuity is uncertain. As Charlotte Knobloch put it in an interview with Deutsche Welle, “the time for speeches is over,” a sentiment to those who say the real measure will be whether Jewish children can attend school, walk to synagogue, and live openly as Jews without needing a security plan. ★



Credit: Fox News





MAMDANI ELECTED MAYOR, AMERICAN JEWS WORRY

BY SOPHIE STARR

Zohran Mamdani is now the new Mayor-elect for the most Jewish populated city in America. Mamdani was born in Uganda and became a US citizen in 2018. The impact of Zohran Mamdani’s win of New York City is a multifaceted situation, especially impacting the Jewish people of the city. Mamdani’s election highlights a major rift within the Jewish community.



Credit: Madison Swart

According to polling and analysis, younger, more progressive Jews were more likely to support him, while many older or more traditional Jewish voters were wary. This explains the divide in the community which members were already worried about. “New data shows just how starkly New York City’s Jewish voters split in last week’s mayoral election — with Andrew Cuomo dominating in Hasidic and other Orthodox strongholds, while Zohran Mamdani swept progressive Jewish neighborhoods in Brooklyn and Manhattan on his way to a citywide win,” said Forward, a Jewish paper based on independence and transparency. This quote came directly from the writer, Jacob Kornbluh.

He was first elected to the New York State Assembly in 2020, representing the 36th District in Queens (Astoria, Ditmars-Steinway). Mamdani “focused” on affordability, housing, social justice, and public transit. When Mamdani ran for mayor elect he stood his ground. He ran for NYC Mayor in 2025, launching a campaign around making the city more affordable, for instance, freezing rent on rent-stabilized units, free buses, universal childcare, and higher taxes on the wealthy, which is already controversial because many would like to avoid spending money from taxes on public services that are not relevant to them.

NEWS

Mamdani has publicly stated how he feels about the state of Israel and Jewish community, but claims he isn't antisemitic. He rejects the idea of Israel as a "Jewish state" in the sense of privileging a religious hierarchy. He has said he "isn't comfortable supporting any state that has a hierarchy of citizenship on the basis of religion."

When people are given a big platform like being the Mayor of NYC, they have a lot of eyes on them. Especially now post Oct. 7, 2023 and the subsequent ceasefire deals, all of these comments and actions are watched. Putting the wrong information out and posting it creates a divide and is dangerous. That is why more than half of the Jewish community all over the nation, not just in NYC, are scared.

Looking back at interviews with family and friends, this writer has gotten the same response from all of them. They are worried about the rise of antisemitism. Post Oct. 7 antisemitism has been on the rise and fueled by other propaganda within the media. "The Jewish people have been worried about antisemitism for a while now but now since the Mamdani election and having this power, I'm not sure what he will let slide." said Jodi Tawil when I interviewed her about the Mamdani election.

What does this type of "ruler" mean for the Jews? Not only is the Jewish community worried about politics and policies, but they are more concerned for their safety and what comes next for them. Jewish students and community members expressed fear that Mamdani's past rhetoric could embolden antisemitic behavior.

He has strongly criticized Israel's military actions, particularly in Gaza. For example, after the Oct. 7, 2023 attacks, he referred to Israel's response as part of a deeply unjust system. "The path to peace... can only begin by ending the occupation" and "dismantling apartheid." These statements can be interpreted as antisemitic and anti-Zionist.

During his time in the NY State Assembly, Mamdani has proposed legislation called the Not On Our Dime! Act, which would prohibit non-profits in New York from supporting Israeli settlements.

Right after Mamdani's election, there were hundreds of reported antisemitic incidents reported by the ADL. On the night of Mamdani's win, Nov. 5, there were two large swastikas drawn on a Brooklyn Yeshiva. One of the biggest concerns from Jewish leaders is that Mamdani's administration could further normalize anti-Zionist or "anti-Israel" political discourse in City Hall. His past support for the BDS (Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions) Movement and criticisms of Israel are particularly alarming for some.

In response, Mamdani has publicly condemned antisemitism: he called the graffiti "disgusting" and vowed to "root the scourge of antisemitism out of our city." Major Jewish institutions are taking a watchful stance. The ADL, for instance, plans to "monitor" his administration through a "Mamdani Monitor" to track policies and appointments relevant to Jewish security. Some see his mark as a potential risk to public safety, especially given his critical stances on Israel and law enforcement.

The ADL created the "Mamdani Monitor" for this reason and a reinigorated antisemitism hotline that has been around for more than a decade, but now it is more relevant than ever. Both of these tools will be a great start to watching antisemitism in NYC. "In light of Mayor-elect Mamdani's long, disturbing record on issues of deep concern to the Jewish community, the ADL is watching and responding to the policies and appointments of the new administration." To hear more about these tools, the ADL offers extensive information regarding these tools and antisemitism. Mamdani is set to be sworn in Jan. 1, after the new year has begun. From this point on, this situation should develop further. ★



ANTISEMITISM

SJP, JVP ARE WHAT THEY SEEK FREEDOM FROM

BY MARA RIEGEL

For years, I've prided myself on being able to discuss hard things with people and find some area for common ground. Growing up in an area where I always felt like an outsider, even with people who wouldn't like me if I paid them, we could at least agree on our disappointment over our mutual favorite baseball team. I've accomplished this with Republicans, Muslims, Christians, Democratic Socialists, and a host of other people with whom I'd never be lumped in.

However, among members of groups like Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP), Jewish Voices for Peace (JVP) and other similar organizations, it has become increasingly apparent that no matter what I, or really any other proud Jew, could do would make much of a difference and build a common ground.

These groups advertise themselves as being pro-Palestinian liberation and advocates of a peaceful society in the Middle East. These statements on their face advocate for respect, autonomy, self-determination, and group dignity. These messages are not harmful inherently, in fact they sound ideal if you are someone who values dignity and consideration. However, the groups we see on college campuses advocating for them today have now become antithetical to the core of those messages.

In my work with Jewish on Campus (JOC) here at GW, we hear the stories of and advocate for those who have come into contact with antisemitism and other forms of anti-Jewish discrimination, of which there are unfortunately many. In fact, many Jews I know at this school have dealt with it in some form. In many of those cases, the hate has not come from those who these organizations would label bigots or Islamophobes. This is not to say this hatred doesn't also come from those people, it does, but particularly recently, it comes from those within these organizations themselves.

Last year, I faced my own instance of antisemitism. I viewed an SJP teach-in in front of Kogan Plaza wherein I was intimidated, my rights to record a public protest were infringed upon, and I was told that I don't belong there, among other things. In the instance of this teach-in, much

like the one conducted on Monday, Nov. 17, SJP enjoyed the free expression, autonomy, group dignity, and freedom from persecution and violence that they so ardently advocate for.

It is when Jewish students such as myself choose to observe this behavior that SJP chooses to take issue. In attending these events, I know not to call out or disrupt what is happening, mostly because I am well aware that it would only invite more hostility that myself and other Jews like me already endure.

Moreover, that first instance of disrespect and hypocrisy was not an isolated incident. At this most recent teach-in, a protester I identified as the leader and speaker of the previous interaction identified me by name, pulled me aside and made sure to seek me out to insult me. She said, "Mara, whenever I talk to my friends about you, I refer to you as the [ugly] Zionist, and they always know who I'm talking about."

Personally, I do not care about whether or not these protesters find me physically desirable or any other positive adjective, particularly because I don't attend these events looking for a partner, but the principle of the comment is what I think is worth noting. These protestors are starting to abandon even the illusion of respectability and stoop lower and lower.

Maybe they are peeved that the ceasefire they protested and screamed for is now in place. Maybe they're upset that the Jews endured yet again. They should be angry that Hamas is still in charge, but that part isn't convenient for the narrative of Israel and the Jews as the sole oppressor. Regardless, they have forgotten the principle of their own movement.

"...These statements on their face advocate for respect, autonomy, self-determination, and group dignity. ... However, the groups we see on college campuses advocating for them today have now become antithetical to the core of those messages."

See, a point I hear often in speaking to members of these groups is that they simply want respect, freedom, and independence for Palestinians. What they neglect to acknowledge is that very many Jews are also proponents of treating everyone, including Palestinians, in a way that wouldn't make us atone on Yom Kippur.

But what confuses me is the logic behind behaving the way that they do. If they want that outcome for their people, why is it acceptable to torment and alienate the people that, in their opinion, are able to deliver that result?

Something else I've often asked protesters is what they wanted 19 and 20-year-old college students to do exactly. They never have an answer, but considering the fact that they keep targeting us rather than government organizations, they clearly think we have power to give them what they want.

If they truly believe that American Jews are the key to Palestinian freedom, why do they think that hurting us and tormenting us is the way to get us to act in their favor? I think many of them just want a pretext to perpetuate their hatred of

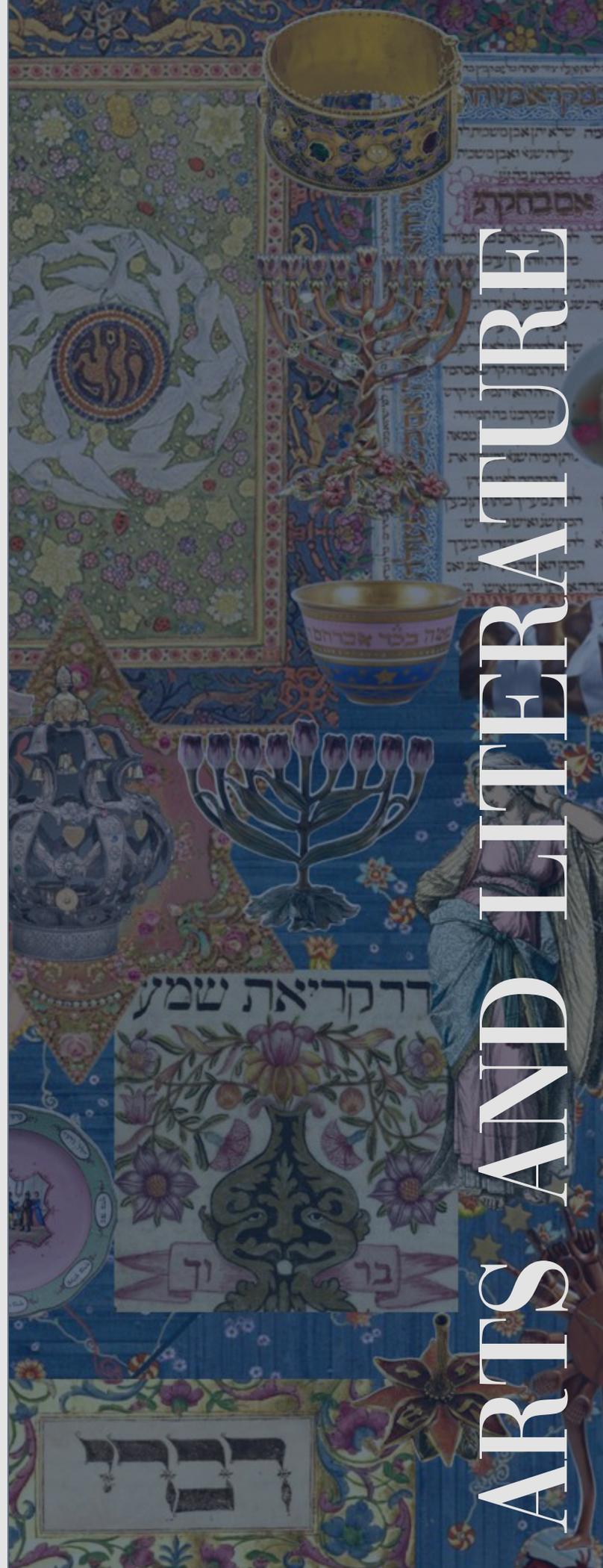
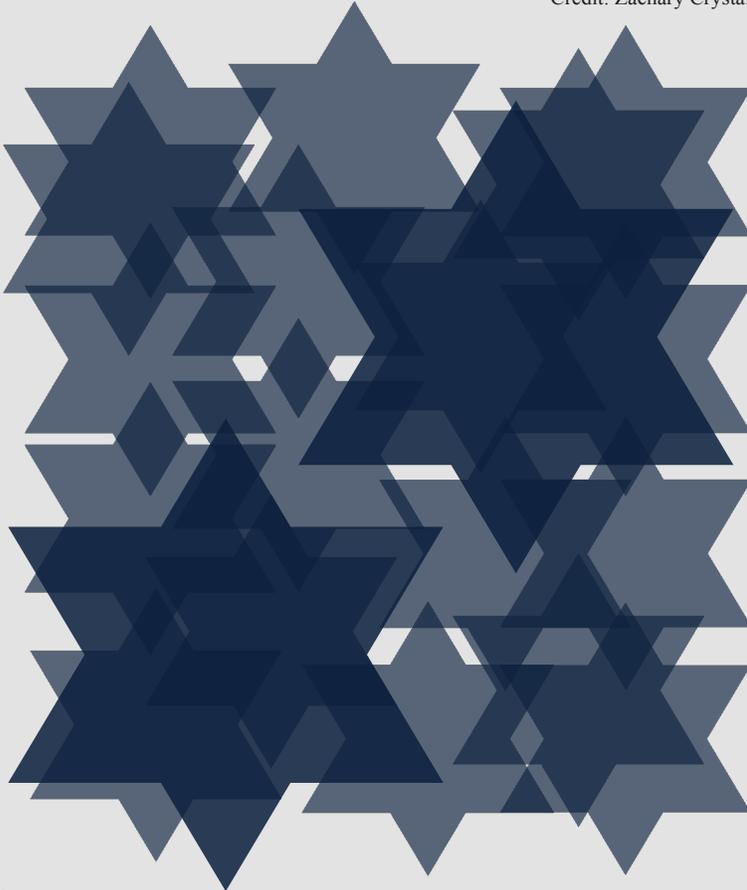
Jews. How that hatred came about, we'll never really know, but they seem intent on maintaining it so much so that they forgot the people they used as their reasoning to begin with.

After all, if it was independence, non-violence, and respect these advocates wanted, why are there no teach-ins, protests, or fundraisers for the humanitarian effort in Sudan? Why have they stopped speaking about the war in Ukraine? Why don't they speak publicly nearly as often about the crises happening to immigrants and people of color here in the US?

It is patterns, habits, and behaviors like this that convince me that nothing the Jews could say or do would ever make any of these protesters treat us in the manner they wish the Israeli government treated Palestinians, because it isn't about Palestine at all anymore. Jewish-American young adults have no say in international politics, but in choosing to harass and target them, SJP, JVP and others show us exactly why the need for a Jewish state exists in the first place. ★



Credit: Zachary Crystal



ARTS AND LITERATURE

SWALLOWED WORDS

BY ELISABETH LEVY



“תורוצנ מילימ” (Swallowed Words), a 30in. x 40in. oil painting, uses surrealism to explore the fear and silence Jewish people have endured throughout history. Each figure in the piece has a unique purpose: the figure on the left pulls at the skin, attempting to escape, while the figure on the top hangs onto the skin, attempting to close the wound. The final figure sits in the water, existing peacefully and comfortably in the environment. Covered in leaves, the figures evoke biblical artworks’ representations of Eve, existing in a setting similar to that of Eilat, Israel, symbolizing the deeply rooted connection between Jews and their homeland. The figures also represent different levels of comfort in speaking as Jews about the Israel-Palestine conflict. The closed mouth of the main figure represents silence, and the world within the jaw reflects

everything that could be said, but is instead kept inside. The hole, strategically located near the jaw, places further emphasis on the hesitancy and struggle surrounding dialogue about the conflict. The peeling skin folds and rolls up, almost resembling a Torah scroll. The complete piece functions as a commentary on the multifaceted and crucial relationship between Judaism and the Holy Land.

In recent years, I’ve struggled to find the courage to speak up and allow myself to be vulnerable as a Jew. As my first piece exploring my Judaism, I hold this work extremely close to my heart. I have found that this piece is my way of speaking freely, and I hope that it creates a space wherein others can engage in meaningful, productive dialogue as well.★



THE GOAT THAT LIVES

BY ARCHER BERENSON

In ancient Israel, during Yom Kippur (the day of atonement), two goats were chosen at the behest of G-d: one to be sacrificed and one, the scapegoat, to have the sins of the community symbolically placed upon it and then be released into the forest. Once released, the hope was that the scapegoat would never return, and thus the sins placed upon it would be forever excised from the community. I imagine these ancient Israelites watching on as this affair occurs. What kind of feeling does witnessing the first goat, no doubt trembling with terror, being brutally slain evoke? What kind of relationship does that imply between the Israelites and G-d? Between G-d and His creations? Why would G-d demand of His chosen people such a graphic display of fealty? The questions beget yet more questions. But it is the second goat, the one that lives, that invites the darkest revelations.

This goat too trembles with fear, unable to make sense of what is happening to it. Saddled with the burden of the collective sin of ancient Man, this creature becomes a vessel for, even a physical manifestation of, evil itself. It will die out there in those woods. In all that dark and all that cold. When it leaves, the Israelites know that it will not, and cannot, return. I imagine them in their beds at night, as the desert wind gently passes through their camp, and I can feel the void where catharsis should be. Why have the heavy chains of sin not been supplanted by the lightness of virtue? Why is the evil within still so clearly alive after the scapegoat has been banished?

Perhaps the answer lies not in the ritual itself, but the illusion

it sustains. The goat carries the sins with it into the woods, but the woods are not a cosmic incinerator. They are silence. They are refusal. They are abdication. The goat still wanders aimlessly beneath the stars and the canopied trees waiting to face obliteration. It does not take with it anything the people do not give it freely. It is not a cure. It merely reveals the depth of Man's need to believe in a cure. It is obvious that this ritual is not about sin at all. It is about comfort. It is about the relief that comes when someone else, something else, is made to walk out into the darkness in your place. The Israelites did not watch the goat and see their sins upon it; they watched it and felt the loosening of the noose around their own necks. They watched it disappear into the trees and convinced themselves that something fundamental had shifted. The tragic irony that we know, and they knew too, on some level, is that nothing but the focus of blame had really changed.

We tell ourselves we've evolved beyond such primitive spectacles; that this kind of thinking belongs to the dustbin of antiquity and the superstition of ancient peoples. Yet the mechanism, stripped of its idols and altars, persists in the modern mind. Two Israeli embassy employees were murdered this year on American soil. They were not architects of war, but were chosen merely by association, by proxy. They, like the second goat, were selected because they were there. Because they were accessible. In doing so, their killer engaged in the perennial scapegoat tradition: he mistook the visible for the responsible. He confused the proximate for the guilty. He conflated cruelty for purification. It is the same ancient story revived in modern dress, and it reveals a disturbing truth: we no longer believe in sacrifices, but we still believe in sacrificial logic. As thousands online rally to support the murderer, and condemn the murdered, we owe it to Yaron Lichinsky and Sarah Milgram to ask the questions which hang heavy in the air: whose sins did the young, murdered Israelis carry with them into the grave? And who sleeps better now that they are gone?

This is not Ancient Israel. And the forest is not empty. The truth, revealed to the point of redundancy, is this: the scapegoat ritual works not because it cleanses, but because it displaces. Once we are persuaded that our sins will be lifted from us if the vehicle arbitrarily selected to bear those sins is destroyed, the most unspeakable horror does not become merely possible; it becomes imperative. It becomes rite and ritual. It becomes a mandate from G-d Himself.

And what of the goat that lives? What if the sins do not burn in the wilderness, but fester? What if one day, long after the ritual is forgotten, it returns; emaciated, revenant, bearing not only their ancient sins, but the memory of a people too eager to forget them? ★



And the Goat shall bear upon him all their iniquities unto a land not inhabited

Credit: Jemima Blackburn

L. FRANK BAUM AND ELPHABA: WICKED AND JEWISH STRUGGLE

BY ARIELLA MANDELL

First premiering in the Robert Gershwin theater just before Halloween on Oct. 30, 2003, the musical *Wicked* has been a smash hit. The show is based on the original novel published in 1995 by Gregory Maguire that tells the untold tale of the *Wicked Witch of the West*. The Broadway show itself is the fourth-longest-running show in the history of Broadway, grossing almost \$1.8 billion and counting in its 22-year run.

In 2016, the project to adapt this musical to the big screen began, and in Nov. 2024 director Jon Chu finally led the release of part one of this two-part movie series. The movie, starring Cynthia Erivo as Elphaba and Ariana Grande as Glinda, made over \$750 million in the past year alone.

Beyond its commercial success, *Wicked* has also led to commentary about how it can be described as an allegory for the Jewish struggle. Maguire has noted in interviews through the years that his original book intentionally tells a story of prejudice, but describes his work as not aligning with a certain group that has been discriminated against, more so as an overall representation of what prejudice and discrimination may look like. Even so, the allegory towards Jews seems to be too prevalent to not make note of.

Adaptations have slightly changed over the years, but in the original book by Maguire, Elphaba was noted to have a large, hooked nose. This was not an offhanded description, but a characteristic that was repeatedly brought up throughout the novel. Large noses have been a typical stereotype associated with Jewish people for centuries. This harmful cliché began in medieval Europe, when Christian artists would depict Jews as having large noses to prove them as “other” and solidify the separation of them from Christian Europeans.

Another way that Elphaba is a physical depiction of the idea of being “other” is her obvious green skin. By making her skin tone such a vibrant, unusual, and fictional color, Maguire is highlighting her difference from the rest of the characters to the extreme. He also includes this as a key detail of the storyline, as she is bullied for her skin color, and ends up having to live a large portion of her life in isolation. This is taken even

more to the extreme in the musical adaptation than originally represented in the book as well. Even so, both rely heavily on central political themes of social injustice due to appearances or societal alienation.

A common theme shown throughout *Wicked* is the idea of scapegoating. Scapegoating is the act of blaming a person or group for issues that they are not the cause of. This is what happens to Elphaba when everyone is quick to believe the lies that are being spread about her by Madam Morrible and the Wizard to hide their own actions, simply because she looks different than the rest of them.

Throughout history, the Jewish people have been used as scapegoats in many settings. The most prominent example was during the Holocaust when Hitler took advantage of previous prejudice against Jews and spread the ideology that Jewish people were to blame for all of Germany's issues at the time. He did this through changing textbooks in school, placing posters around, and showing Germans films that depicted Jews as diseased and dangerous people. Similarly, in *Wicked*, clips in the movie show posters being hung around Oz that depict Elphaba as an ugly and dangerous witch, blaming her for problems she did not create.

In both these instances, by creating the visual of such an evil "other," they were able to grow such mass support because people liked the idea of having someone to blame for issues that were not themselves. This led to mass persecution in both cases, of Jewish people during the Holocaust and of the animals in *Wicked*.

Another way that this franchise represents the Jewish struggle is through Elphaba's own relationship with her identity. In the novel, Elphaba is shown to feel misunderstood by even those closest to her, including her family and closest friends. This is a common feeling amongst many Jews even in the modern day. Because of misrepresentations and stereotypes of Jewish people in history, many people do not fully understand Jews, even if they are not actively persecuting them.

In the beginning of the book when Elphaba is made to feel othered, she chooses to hide her identity rather than accept it. This is also a common theme throughout Jewish history. An example of this is the Spanish Inquisition in medieval Europe, where Jewish people were forced to either be expelled from the country or convert to Christianity. In this time period, there were many people who chose to stay and appear as though they had converted to Christianity on the outside, but still practiced Judaism in secret.

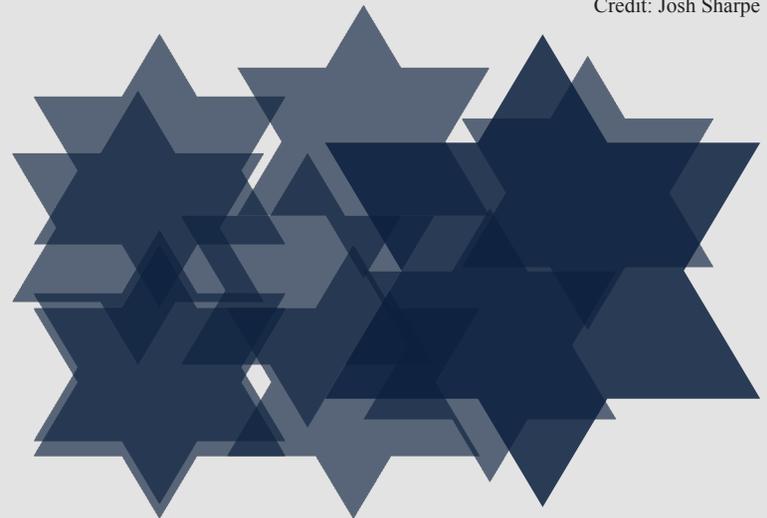
A final aspect of Judaism that is reflected throughout Elphaba's journey is the Jewish principle of *tikkun olam*, or "repairing the world." This principle advises on Jewish people to stand up for moral good, even when they are faced with adversity. In the novel, Elphaba goes against society to fight for her own moral beliefs and stand up for the animals that are being persecuted, even though mostly everyone in her life is telling her not to. This is a prime example of Elphaba following the idea of *tikkun olam* and doing what she can to help the overall moral good, even though she is misunderstood in doing so.

Ultimately, *Wicked* is not just a raging success on paper,

stage, and screen, but it also highlights the centuries-old struggle that is social inequality and the feeling of alienation due to appearances or genetics. These themes throughout Gregory Maguire's original storyline provide a blatant allegory for the Jewish struggle, and remind us all that these themes are real even in our society today, and we must stand up for justice and truth when we see these values being twisted. ★



Credit: Josh Sharpe





CONTRIBUTORS

KEY CONTRIBUTORS:

Evan Gower, Sr.
 The Starr Family
 Jonathan and Shelley Riegel
 Rachel Weintraub
 Anonymous
 Julie Starr
 Deborah Riegel
 Arthur Riegel
 Nancy Assuncao Sanchez
 Deb Riegel
 Fredda Romano
 Beth Feldman
 Emma Rosenstein

BOARD:

Mara Riegel: Editor-in-Chief
 Alan Sukharev: Co-Managing Editor
 Sophie Starr: Co-Managing Editor
 Van Gower: Head of Finance
 Ben Daniel: Head of Outreach
 Alex Batzar: Layout Designer, Head of
 Social Media and Marketing
 Anna Falcone: Freshman Representative

SECTION EDITORS:

News: Julia Bakman
 Culture: Marni Shepard
 Holidays: Nathan Arst
 Art and Literature: Ben Daniel
 International Affairs: Annabel Honigstein
 Opinions and Editorials: Yonah Cohen

TO CONTRIBUTE AND/OR TO GET INVOLVED,
 PLEASE FOLLOW US ON INSTAGRAM @ TEKIAH-
 AHMAG AND EMAIL US AT TEKIAHMAG@
 GMAIL.COM.



SPECIAL THANKS TO JEWISH ON CAMPUS AT
 THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY!



