TEKIAH

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Jewish on Campus GW

TABLE OF CONTENTS

2
CULTURE

6
HOLIDAYS

9
INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

12
NEWS

14
OPINIONS

16
ARTS AND LITERATURE

17
CONTRIBUTORS

AN IRANIAN JEW TODAY

BY DANIELLA NISSIM

My grandmother keeps a photograph of Tehran on her kitchen wall from over thirty years ago. Not a postcard but a real photograph, blurry and sun-yellowed, of the Alborz Mountains rising behind the city she left in 1979. She never went back. Being born in America, I never got to visit the place she calls home. I have never needed to go back to feel the pull of a place that shaped everything about who I am.

That pull has never felt more complicated than it does right now.

The Jewish presence in Iran is among the oldest continuous Jewish communities in the world, with roots historians trace back more than two millennia. We were there under Cyrus the Great, who permitted the Jews to return to Jerusalem. We were there under the Safavids, the Qajars, the Pahlavis. Before the Islamic Revolution in 1979, there were over 100,000 Jews in Iran. That community of doctors, merchants, musicians, and bankers was not a guest community. It was a Persian community. And then, almost overnight, most of us were gone.

My family left with two suitcases and whatever cash they could smuggle out in the lining of a coat. What they could not carry—the house, the carpets, the photographs on every wall except one—was left behind. My grandmother still describes Kashan the way other people describe a first love: with an ache she has learned to live around.

On February 28, 2026, the United States and Israel launched joint airstrikes on multiple sites across Iran, killing Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei. In the days that followed, I sat in my living room in Great Neck, refreshing news feeds with shaking hands—not knowing exactly what I was hoping to read, or dreading. That disorientation, I have come to understand, is not a personal failure. It is the condition of being Persian and Jewish at this specific moment in history.

My hometown of Great Neck is home to one of the largest Iranian communities outside of Iran, including tens of thousands of Iranian Jews. I grew up embedded in that world—in synagogues where the prayers were in Hebrew but the gossip was in Farsi, at Passover Seders where the table also held ash reshteh and kuku sabzi (classic Persian dishes), at New Year's celebrations that honored both Rosh Hashanah and Nowruz with equal reverence. My identity was never a contradiction to me. It was a layering—Persian first, then Jewish, then American—each one inseparable from the others.

In the weeks since the strikes, that layered identity has felt newly exposed. Conversations that once felt casual now carry a kind of edge, as if people are trying to place me within a conflict they only understand in binaries. I find myself explaining things I never had to explain before—that Iranian does not mean the regime, that Jewish does not erase where my family comes from, that history is rarely as clean as the

headlines make it seem. There is a shift in how people listen, as though they are waiting for me to resolve something that cannot be resolved in a single sentence.

But the world has rarely been comfortable with that complexity.

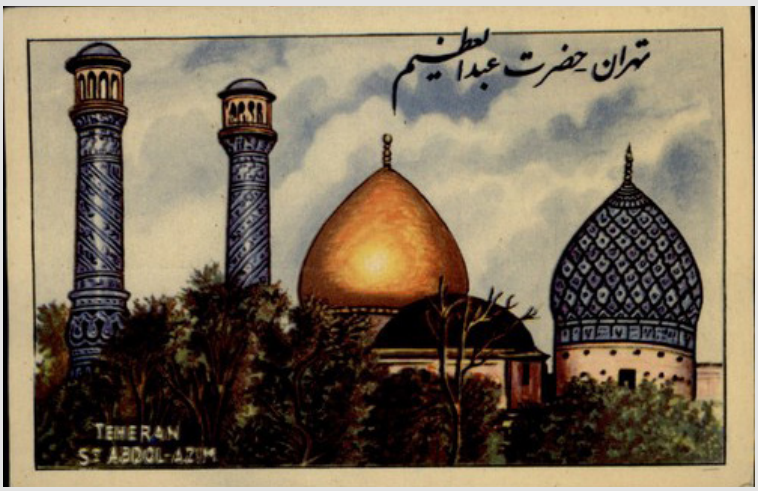
As the war rages, Iranian Jews in the United States are experiencing a familiar, almost generational whiplash: fear and hope, pride and anxiety intertwined. I feel all of it simultaneously. I want the regime that terrorized my family's country for 47 years to be gone. I also watch footage of Tehran's neighborhoods in flames and hear Farsi voices crying, and something in me fractures. Those voices are not the regime. They are the people.

This past month, Jews around the world celebrated Purim, commemorating the ancient Persian story of Queen Esther and the salvation of the Jewish people from a royal decree of annihilation. Soon after comes Nowruz, the Persian New Year, a holiday rooted in renewal and rebirth. The collision of these two calendars—one Jewish, one Persian, both mine—feels almost unbearably symbolic this year. Purim is the story of a Jewish woman saving her people in Persia. Nowruz is the Persian new year, 3,000 years old, a celebration of fire and light and the defeat of darkness. I will observe both.

What I have found hardest to bear is the expectation, from all sides, that I choose. Persians online are asking me how I can support Israel. Jewish friends ask how I can grieve Iran. The question assumes that these loyalties are zero-sum—that one person's pain cancels out another's. It does not. There is a profound sense of hope among many Persian Jews that the potential for change in Iran could eventually mean freedom not only for the Iranian people but also the possibility of peace in the Middle East. I share that hope. But hope, for us, has always been complicated. We hoped in 1979 that the storm would pass quickly. It did not pass for forty-seven years.

My grandmother's photograph is now on my wall. The mountains behind Tehran are still there. One day, I want to see them with my own eyes — not as a tourist, but as someone returning. Whether that will ever be possible, I don't yet know.

I am not a contradiction. I am a continuation. Of a 2,700-year-old story that has never been simple, and has never, despite everything, been broken.✸



Credit: Umpteen Postcards

WHAT A JEWISH MEMORY SEES IN IRAN TODAY

BY DAVID DEMAKOS

It is unsettling for me to watch what is happening in Iran right now in a way that can't quite be put into words. It's not just any other foreign policy crisis that I kindly scroll past on my phone; it's people my age who are risking their lives to protest a repressive regime that no longer represents them. And as a Jew, I can't separate this moment from the long and complicated history that connects the Jewish people to Persia, a history that the regime is constantly trying to erase or weaponize.

Today, Iran is defined by exhaustion. Years of corruption, collapse, and international isolation have again pushed people back on the street because silence has become impossible. The Ayatollah's response has been predictable: internet shutdowns, violence, mass arrest and a claim that internal dissent is foreign-driven. What strikes me most is how disconnected this rhetoric feels from reality. The Iranian people want affordable food and better futures. They don't want leaders who view suffering as collateral damage.

While Iranians are protesting the regime in the streets, the regime is anchoring its identity in opposition to Israel and, by extension, Jewish identity. Growing up Jewish, I was taught that Persia was a place of refuge– the land of Cyrus the Great, who allowed Jews to return home after exile, not as a place of hostility. This story sits at the center of modern Jewish memory regarding Iran. It's painful, but not surprising, to watch a modern Iranian government claim the highest moral authority, while erasing the two-millennium history of Jewish life in the region.

This connection is not as ancient as it seems. There are still Jews who live in Iran today: families who speak Persian, who see themselves as Iranian, who have survived revolution, war, and decades of suspicion. On paper, Jews are "protected" and granted recognition and a seat in parliament. The reality is starkly different. The protection comes with certain conditions. Silence. Loyalty performances. Public denunciations of Israel when tensions flare up. The existence of Jews in Iran is the regime's proof that they aren't antisemitic, even as antisemitic conspiracies fly around Tehran.

I don't pretend to speak for Iranian Jews or Iranian protesters, but I can recognize a pattern. Authoritarian regimes rely on scapegoats to justify their failures. In Iran, Jews, Israel, and the US serve that purpose. Anti-zionism becomes a tool for internal control and not just foreign policy. The regime can redirect rage towards Israel rather than acknowledge that it is its own people that are suffering the most.

Now, many Iranians are no longer playing. Protesters want domestic change rather than ideological wars abroad. They are tired of being sacrificed for slogans, and are rejecting hostilities altogether, not because they have aligned with Israel but because they want their government to care for them. This public rejection matters. It cracked the illusion that the regime says it speaks for the Iranian people.

This moment resonates deeply with Jewish history and values. Judaism has been shaped by the diaspora, by being in exile, and the insistence that power must be accountable. The Torah is careful not to glorify rulers who rule through fear; Pharaoh ruled through fear and God took his eldest son from him and reigned havoc on Egypt. The story of Persia is unique in this cycle of oppression that the Jewish people have faced. Cyrus the Great, Koroosh, is remembered because he allowed exiled people to return home. He is revered in the Jewish tradition and is a part of Judaism's moral memory. Sadly, the Iranian regime is no different than Pharaoh. They won't let their own people go.

This is why the Iranian regime's treatment of its citizens and Jewish minority matters so deeply. When protests are blamed on "foreign enemies," and when economic collapse is justified through endless confrontation, and Jews in Iran are forced to publicly denounce Israel for their safety, it violates moral norms that Jews have held on to for centuries. Jewish tradition does not value political theatre, human dignity comes first, and suffering cannot be excused by ideology. These are the lessons that Jews have learned because Jews have lived at the mercy of unchecked power.

In demonstrations outside of Iran, Israeli flags and Iranian opposition flags have flown side by side. At universities, students have been careful not to walk over Israeli and American flags placed by the government. These actions are a refusal to perform the regime's demanded hatred.

What is happening right now in Iran is not a Jewish issue, but it is an issue that Jews should recognize and take to heart. It is the exact struggle that Jews have faced for millenia; the struggle of a people demanding dignity by a system that survives by denying it. These protests crack the regime's main lie that they speak for the Iranian people. They don't. As a Jew, watching Iranians risk their lives feels painfully familiar. It echoes what Judaism stands for. A government that cannot protect its people has already forfeited its moral authority. ✸

Credit: USA Today

PROFILE: OHIO CONGRESSMAN GREG LANDSMAN

BY MARA RIEGEL

When Congressman Greg Landsman, a Democrat representing Ohio's first congressional district, agreed to let me interview him for this article, the opportunity felt frankly surreal. Choosing Rep. Landsman felt sort of symmetrical to choosing to interview the representative who I voted for. I voted for a non-Jew to represent a traditionally purple congressional district with a large Jewish population, this being Laura Gillen of New York's fourth district. Rep. Landsman is a Jewish representative in a traditionally purple district in a roughly 10% Jewish area.

Credit: Rep. Greg Landsman's Office

Congressman Landsman is currently serving his second term in office, having first been elected in the 2022 midterm cycle during which he defeated a 13-term incumbent. Before his time in office, Landsman served as a public school teacher, after which he was elected to the local Cincinnati City Council.

Since joining the House of Representatives, Landsman has successfully introduced bipartisan legislation aimed at lowering prescription drug costs, protecting public safety efforts, funding $14 million worth of projects impacting his home district, and protecting veterans, as well as his work on the House Energy and Commerce Committee.

These initial impressions of generosity and unfeigned

care, which are clearly exemplified through Rep. Landsman's legislative priorities were reinforced when I actually met him. When I entered the Congressman's DC office, I was immediately nervous. I had never gone on my own to meet with any member of Congress before.

But as soon as I walked into the room in which I interviewed Rep. Landsman, there were no theatrics to daunt me further, just a kind staffer whom I was already familiar with, and the Congressman himself sitting behind a simple table, initially asking me about myself before anything else. This gesture of consideration and curiosity meant a lot to me, and it truly helped me see Rep. Landsman not just as an elected official but as another normal person like myself.

Having a first-hand role in witnessing the state of antisemitism and how the government handles such issues, particularly in higher education settings, I took the opportunity to ask the Congressman about where the line is between free speech and necessary protection of Jewish students and what role legislators have in that balance. The Congressman answered with a "two-fold" approach.

"As lawmakers and national figures, we have to explain what the rules really are, and yes, that means embracing free speech; it's one of the most important constitutional rights we have. Not all speech is protected, and when you are on a campus, for example, there are other rules that come into play. Being able to explain to folks, 'Look, yes, you have the right to free speech and the right to assemble and speak your mind for sure, but you can't just say anything, there are things that are problematic, and those include things that are hateful that could cause violence, could cause unrest, or could lead to people getting hurt.'"

He continued with the second part of his philosophy, prefacing that rules of expression are different on college campuses and then stating, "[T]he best approach is to say, 'Look, here's where we're gonna allow people to protest, it's gonna be nearby, but not in the middle of everything, and you can protest there, and you have free speech. However, we're also going to help you understand where the line is. And so if you say these things, we have the right to say that's your warning, and if you keep saying it, we have the right to remove you, because we have to protect everybody, including you.'"

The Congressman continued, outlining a standard where rules are clearly defined, as are consequences. The overarching message was that protestors are entitled to their speech and opinions as much as anyone else, and that protecting students of all kinds, not just Jewish students, does not have to come at the expense of losing speech.

The Congressman was further asked about how he has learned to work constructively and disagree with his colleagues in Congress who may dislike his identity as a Jew and his related stances. He said, "I try to talk openly and honestly, and I think it's important to have a relationship if you can and talk these things out, which I do. I find that I ultimately lose to the internet and social media, meaning that I make some progress, but then the internet, for some of these folks, always wins. And that's part of the challenge, is that if you've got an extreme view, or a view that's outside the mainstream on this issue or others, odds are you're too online."

I was further curious about why the Congressman initially became involved in politics, and how his identity as a Jew impacted that choice and his legislative philosophy. Landsman detailed the core Jewish belief of healing the world, or tikkun olam, noting that "You appreciate very early that you have a role to play in helping people's lives. And that can be the immediate world around you, your family, your friends, but you start to discover that the world can be bigger if you want it to be." He explained that these beliefs were certainly part of why he became involved in politics, further responding that this was also part of why he went into teaching.

As many Jewish students are scared to express their identities today, I asked Rep. Landsman what advice he would give to these young adults. He replied, "It is entirely understandable that you want to be careful and protect yourself, but you'll feel better in the community. The more community you find, the safer you'll feel."

I concluded our interview by asking the Congressman something lighter: which colleague he would bring to Shabbos of all of them. He responded jokingly, "I think I get enough time with them as it is." He further responded more seriously, "Jennifer McClellan, I love Jennifer McClellan." McClellan represents Virginia's fourth district as a Democrat. ww

This meeting gave me a very realistic picture of what dealing with antisemitism and Jewish issues on the national level really looks like. It showed me that there are elected officials who care in a way that is more than lip service, and that there are ways to make things feel better even while maintaining the full rights that come with disagreeing in America. Tekiah and I are very grateful for the opportunity to have learned this.

PASSOVER FOR DUMMIES

BY JOSEPHINA HOWARD

Pesach is not about matzah. Or at least, it is not just about matzah. The holiday is built around a story—one about slavery, resistance, and freedom—and the rules people focus on are really just a way of forcing you to pay attention to that story.

The story of Pesach comes from the Book of Exodus. At its core, it is about slavery, resistance, and ultimately, freedom. More specifically, it follows the Israelites in Egypt and their escape from oppression under Pharaoh. The story starts with the Israelites living in Egypt, where they are enslaved and forced into hard labor. A new Pharaoh comes to power and, worried about how large and powerful they are becoming, starts making their lives significantly worse. This includes ordering the killing of Hebrew baby boys, which is as brutal as it sounds and sets the tone for everything that follows.

One child, Moses, is saved when he is placed in a basket in the Nile and ends up being raised in Pharaoh's own household, which is kind of ironic when you think about it. He grows up inside the system that is actively hurting his people. As an adult, Moses realizes who he is and what is happening. He ends up fleeing Egypt, and later has this encounter with God in the form of a burning bush, where he is told to go back and demand that Pharaoh free the Israelites. He is not exactly excited about this, but he goes anyway and delivers the now-famous line: "Let my people go." Pharaoh refuses.

In response, God sends ten plagues to Egypt—everything from water turning to blood to total darkness. Each time, Pharaoh either says no or changes his mind right after. It is frustrating on purpose. The story makes it clear that change does not happen quickly, even when it obviously should. The final plague, the death of the firstborn sons, is what finally forces Pharaoh to give in.

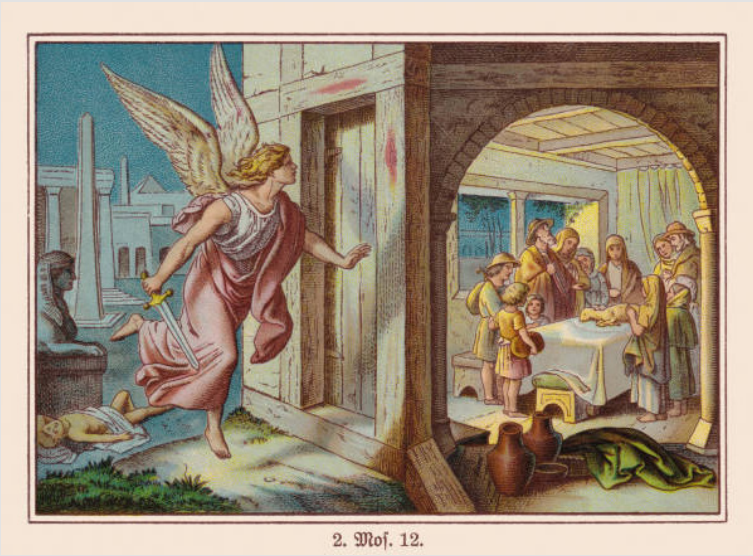
Before that last plague, the Israelites are told to mark their doorposts with lamb's blood so the plague will "pass over" their homes—hence the name Passover, or Pesach. After this, Pharaoh finally lets them leave. They leave fast, without time for their bread to rise, which is why matzah becomes such a big part of the holiday. It is a small detail, but it sticks, which says a lot about how people remember things.

Almost immediately, Pharaoh changes his mind again and sends his army after them. The Israelites end up stuck between the army and the Red Sea, which is not a great position to be in. Then the sea splits, they cross, and the Egyptian army follows and is drowned when the water comes back. At that point, the Israelites are no longer enslaved—but they are also not settled anywhere. They are free, but still figuring out what that actually means.

That is really where the meaning of Pesach comes in. It is not just about leaving Egypt; it is about what comes after. Freedom sounds simple, but the story makes it clear that it is not. It is

something you have to adjust to, and that process is messy and uncomfortable.

For me, Pesach is less about the rules themselves and more about what they make you think about. Getting rid of chametz—or unkosher for Passover food—is inconvenient, but that is kind of the point. It forces you to change your routine and actually notice what you are eating and doing. The story being repeated every year does the same thing—it is not just something that happened once, it is something you are supposed to think about now.



2. Mos. 12.

The most central ritual of Pesach is the Seder, which is basically a very structured dinner on the first two nights. During the Seder, the story of Exodus is retold using a text called the Haggadah, which walks you through everything step by step. There are symbolic foods—bitter herbs for suffering, salt water for tears, and matzah for both hardship and urgency. Nothing is random, even if it sometimes feels that way.

There are also ways to keep people engaged, especially kids, like the "Four Questions," which all start with "Why is this night different from all other nights?" The goal is not just to repeat the story, but to actually think about it and question it. That part is important.

Throughout the holiday, observant Jews avoid chametz, which includes most leavened grains like bread and pasta. Instead, matzah replaces them. This is probably the most noticeable part of the holiday—and, depending on who you ask, the hardest. It takes effort and planning, and it pulls you out of your normal habits, which again is the point. The length of the holiday also depends on where you are: in Israel, Pesach lasts seven days, while in the diaspora it is typically observed for eight.

Pesach is ultimately about memory and meaning. It asks people not just to remember a story, but to see themselves in it—to understand that freedom is not guaranteed and not passive. This Pesach, take the time to actually understand what is being remembered. The story is widely known, but the meaning is easy to miss if you are not paying attention. Talk to people who celebrate it, go to a Seder if you can, and notice the details. They are there for a reason. ✸

PURIM FOR DUMMIES

BY MARA RIEGEL

On Monday, March 2, 2026, the festival of Purim began at sundown. The festival lasted through Tuesday the 3rd, though in Jerusalem it will extend through Wednesday the 4th. This date is not the same on the English calendar every year, but on the Hebrew calendar it is. Purim falls on the 14th day of the month of Adar, the sixth month of the Hebrew year.

The Purim story comes from the Megillah, more commonly known as the Book of Esther. In a nutshell, the story of Purim is one of endurance, and one of the early examples of the Jewish people surviving the plot of other people to annihilate them in their entirety.

The story begins with a king named Ahasuerus (pronounced ah-hash-veh-rosh) and his wife Vashti. Vashti disobeys the king, not wanting to attend one of his parties to show off on his behalf, so he has her executed. Upon his newfound bachelor status, the king decided to hold a beauty pageant to find a new queen. At this pageant, a lovely girl named Esther caught the king's eye, and he decided to marry her, even without her having divulged her nationality to him.

Esther had an uncle named Mordechai, and he was the leader of the Jews, thus making Esther a Jew, too. The king's top advisor, however, was a man named Haman (frequently pronounced hey-min) who absolutely hated the Jews.

One day, Mordechai overheard a plot by two guards to assassinate the king, but he foiled it and the guards themselves were executed. His act of heroism was noted by the king's court. Haman and Mordechai meet one day, and Haman commands Mordechai to bow to him, which he disobeys.

Absolutely enraged at the disrespect from Mordechai, Haman goes to the king and requests his funds and permission to kill not only Mordechai, but the entirety of the Jewish people as punishment. Mordechai, as leader of the Jews, commanded everyone to pray, repent, and fast upon learning of the impending execution of his community.

"This story serves as a testament to the endurance of our people, and as a parable about acting in secret and by pretending, both as people and from God's perspective."

Mordechai, in a last-ditch effort to save his people, sent a message to his niece, Esther, to see if she could do something to stop it. Esther explained to her uncle that she could not approach the king, nor could anyone else, at the risk of being executed. She decided that she would pray and fast for three days and then approach the king, disregarding her own risk of

death. On day three, she invited her husband to a feast to be shared with Haman.

Meanwhile, Haman was offended yet again as Mordechai further refused to bow to him. At the urging of his wife, he constructs a public gallows and resolves to hang him the next day. Later on, the king asks for the court's records to be read to him to help him sleep and discovers what Mordechai did for him. He asks aloud what should be done to honor Mordechai. Haman then appears, and assuming that the king seeks to honor him, outlines a plan for the man to be led around on a royal horse in royal robes. Haman is thrilled about this until the king instructs him to issue this honor to Mordechai.

Later, Haman and King Ahasuerus attend Esther's banquet, wherein she finally reveals that she is indeed Jewish. Ahasuerus is absolutely outraged that someone would dare try to kill his beloved wife and her people, and orders Haman to be executed on the very gallows he built for Mordechai. Because the order could not be reversed, the king allows Mordechai and Esther to write a new order to preemptively kill their attackers, of which 10 were Haman's sons. The Jews then lived to fight another day, and Mordechai rose to the rank just under the king himself.

This story serves as a testament to the endurance of our people, and as a parable about acting in secret and by pretending, both as people and from God's perspective. The story outlines a series of actions that come from the shadows, both for and against the Jewish people. Esther hides her identity as a Jew, and she moves quietly and from the shadows around that identity. Mordechai operated quietly to save the king, and sought no esteem as a result. On the part of God, he pretended that he would allow the slaughter of the Jews, when he ultimately did not.

Credit: Southern Jewish Historical Society

Personally, I observe the lessons of Purim quietly and introspectively each time the holiday rolls around. I think about the fact that Mordechai acted out of goodness and not out of a desire for recognition and was later rewarded anyway. It serves as a reminder to me to be good not for the sake of praise, but just for the sake of being a good person. I think about Esther weighing the likelihood of being killed for speaking up, and doing it anyway. It reminds me of the bravery I should seek to aspire to.

So how do Jews celebrate this holiday and all of its lessons? An important practice is to give to those in need, following the example of Mordechai. The holiday emphasizes providing for the less fortunate as a sign of unity and care for others.

Many children and adults also frequently dress up in costumes as a reminder of the pretending that occurred in this story. Many people hold feasts or carnivals. More observant Jews will often choose to hear the megillah read aloud. Frequently at services where the story is read, people use a noisemaker called a grogger (or grager) to signify booing whenever Haman's name is mentioned.

Most popularly, people eat a baked good called Hamantaschen to commemorate the occasion. These pastries are triangle-shaped tarts filled in an open center with many different fillings. These pastries are shaped like triangles because Haman was known to wear a triangle shaped hat.

Around Purim, talk to the Jews in your life about the story. Celebrate with them and learn with and from them. It is a beautiful holiday, and many would be happy to share it with you.✸

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

THE INTERESTING EXPERIENCE OF VENEZUELAN JUDAISM

BY BRADY WILSON

Venezuela's Jewish population has declined from about 25,000 in the late 20th century to an estimated 4,000 to 6,000 by 2026 during Nicolás Maduro's presidency (The American Israelite). The community, once Venezuela's largest in South America after Argentina and Brazil, now ranks among the world's fastest-shrinking Jewish populations.

The decline occurred during a period of hyperinflation, which peaked at around 1,000,000% in 2018, along with severe food shortages, long lines for necessities, and antisemitic incidents that community leaders and analysts have linked to the government's ties with Iran and Hezbollah. The Pittsburgh Jewish Chronicle states that over 20,000 Venezuelan Jews have emigrated since Chávez took power, settling mostly in South Florida, Israel, and Spanish-speaking countries such as Panama and Mexico.

Entire families left homes and businesses at huge losses just to escape. The main synagogue in Venezuela's capital, Caracas, now relies on private security following past bomb threats and attacks. Many Jewish leaders, such as Daniel Behar, a Venezuelan Jew now living in Israel, and Samy Yecutieli of the Israel-Latin America Chamber of Commerce's Security Forum, say they avoid openly criticizing the government out of fear for their safety. The Times of Israel reports that many families who fled have built new community networks abroad, helping to establish Venezuelan Jewish schools, social clubs, and synagogues in Miami, Panama City, and Madrid, preserving cultural identity while maintaining close ties with those still in Caracas.

Credit: CNN

Tensions with the Jewish community deepened under Hugo Chávez, beginning in 1998. Jewish Journal (2003) writes that at the peak of the boom years, the '60s and '70s, it was estimated

that affiliated Jews numbered approximately 30,000, supporting community centers, kosher markets, youth groups, summer camps, and cultural events that created a vibrant Jewish life for families.

They celebrated bar mitzvahs with hundreds of guests and held huge Hanukkah celebrations downtown. This ultimately led to strong ties with Israel, which Venezuela recognized in 1948. Providence Magazine quotes former Chief Rabbi Pynchas Brener: "We had wonderful relations with the Catholic Church. We created the Committee of Liaisons between Churches and Synagogues...We organized TV programs," describing an era older Venezuelan Jews recall as one of coexistence when Jewish and Catholic schools collaborated on programs, a sharp contrast to the last two decades of polarization fueled by politics and rising hostility.

As Chávez increased his anti-Israel rhetoric, state media and pro-government outlets called for boycotts of Jewish-owned businesses, and antisemitic graffiti began to appear in Caracas. A Caracas synagogue was heavily damaged in a 2009 attack in which Torah scrolls were destroyed, and antisemitic graffiti vandalized the synagogue, including phrases such as "Jews go home" and "Death to Israel," all alongside swastikas. "People are being taught to hate. Venezuela has never seen anything like this before," Chief Rabbi Pynchas Brener told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency (JTA) in 2009; he moved to Miami two years later. Chávez's government expelled Israel's ambassador in 2009, further isolating the community.

Maduro, who has claimed Sephardic ancestry through grandparents who converted to Catholicism, maintained close ties with Iran and repeatedly used strong anti-Israel rhetoric. That relationship, impacted by joint military deals, oil exchanges, and Iran's support for Maduro, contributed to strained relations with Israel. Venezuelan state television and allied media regularly broadcast anti-Israel rhetoric and conspiracy theories, while magazines and outlets ran antisemitic cartoons blaming 'Zionist' or Jewish financiers for the country's economic crisis.

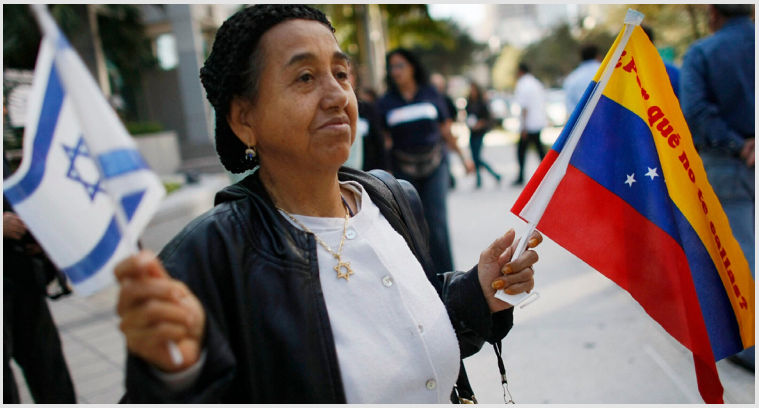
"You have to remember that we are talking about one of the most violent countries in the world. The regime has used a constant threat of violence to repress its people," analyst Gustavo Aristegui told The Times of Israel. "Often, what looks like a mugging is really a political assassination," Aristegui added in the same report. In response, Jewish institutions adopted round-the-clock guards amid community concern.

On January 3, 2026, U.S. Special Forces captured Maduro and his wife, Cilia Flores, in a raid in Caracas and surrounding areas, after which they were taken to New York to face narcotrafficking charges. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu called the U.S. operation in Venezuela "bold and historic" in a post on X (formerly Twitter) on January 3, 2026, congratulating President Trump on "the brilliant action of your brave soldiers."

As news of Maduro's capture spread, exiled Venezuelans, including many Jews, celebrated in plazas and communities abroad, though celebrations were tempered by uncertainty about what would follow. In Venezuela, the country's small Jewish community adopted what one report called a "wait-and-see" approach, staying low-profile out of fear of retaliation from loyalists. Venezuela's acting leader, Vice President Delcy Rodríguez, said in a televised speech on Venezolana de Televisión (VTV) that the operation had a "Zionist-tinted" plot on state television.

As Venezuela enters a fragile transition, many Jewish exiles say they are relieved by Maduro's removal but do not expect to return soon without clear security guarantees and economic recovery. "The Jewish population is on standby. Everyone is staying low-profile. The regime controls everything, and repression could still be very aggressive," Samy Yecutieli, executive director of the Israel–Latin America Chamber of Commerce, told The Times of Israel. Jewish leaders who remain in Caracas describe cautious optimism about new channels of communication with transitional officials but stress that the community is still on guard.

Daniel Behar, in an interview with The Times of Israel, stated: "There is fear that the entire community might face repercussions later on," enhancing the idea that real safety will depend on the country moving away from rhetoric, rebuilding institutions, and ensuring that minorities are not blamed for future crises. The coming months will test whether a post-Maduro Venezuela can truly rebuild, or whether decades of distrust will leave lasting impacts on its remaining Jewish population. Many Jews who left Venezuela say they hope to visit again one day, but only if the country becomes safe and stable.✸



Credit: Joe Raedle/Getty Images

THIS SEMESTER IN JEWISH GW'S ACHIEVEMENTS

BY THE TEKIAH BOARD

The Spring 2026 semester has proven to be a particularly successful time for achievements local to the GW Jewish community. From advocating for the rights of students on campus against antisemitism to cultural and religious celebrations, our Jewish population has done incredible work throughout the semester.

In February, two current students and one former student spoke publicly at the United States Commission on Civil Rights. Archer Berenson, Mara Riegel, and Sabrina Soffer (class of 2025) spoke about their experiences with antisemitism on this campus, the broader trends they have noticed from both students and administrators, and their hopes for how antisemitism will be handled going forward.

This testimony came during a public comment session wherein the students spoke directly to Commissioners, including a former Congressman. The hearing was attended by professors, students, and other parties with an interest in on-campus antisemitism coming from near and far, including the president of Alpha Epsilon Pi Fraternity at UC Santa Barbara who was hosted by the GW chapter of AEPi shortly beforehand.

Following this testimony, a select few board members of GW for Israel (GWI) published a response to this testimony in the Hatchet. Their stance was that while the experience of those who testified is personally true, their experience dealing with administrators on the same subject matter has been different.

This article was read broadly and showcased the difference in experience and perspective within the Jewish community, from those who have directly dealt with the CESA process, to those who have chosen to bring their grievances up more informally. It should be noted as a point of strength that our community is close enough to exemplify these differences and still be unified and aligned on the issues that matter, including the fight against the hatred of Jews all around.

Credit: Zach Crystal

In further news, two different GW Jewish organizations brought members of Congress to speak to students this semester. On March 24th, Jewish on Campus brought Congresswoman Debbie Wasserman-Schultz (FL-25) to Elliott to discuss governing while Jewish, the handling of antisemitism over time, and her hope for young Jewish-American students.

The Congresswoman gave a wonderful account of what it means to govern with Jewish values in mind. The conversation was engaging, authentic, and important, and JOC is grateful for the Congresswoman's participation and insight.

The following day on March 25th, GW for Israel brought Congressman Josh Gottheimer (NJ-05) to Elliott for his own discussion about the future of Israel and other related Jewish issues. The appearance was part of a larger evening centered on Jewish student leadership, and it included a further conversation with Bradley Tauber, a legislative staffer for Congressman Greg Landsman (OH-01).

Credit: GW For Israel

The evening was spearheaded by Margaux Jubin and Joshua Horwich, who further conducted the moderation of both discussions. The event drew Jewish leaders from a broad range of organizations across the school, and went beautifully. This opportunity was an incredible chance for Jewish leaders to gain exposure to the very people making policy concerning them and gain a perspective as to how to advance their own work and leadership skills.

GWI also partnered with their American University counterpart, Chabad AU, and Chabad GW to bring two surviving IDF soldiers of the October 7th attack to campus. These brave soldiers who were injured in the process of saving their fellow soldiers and citizens came to GW to provide accounts of their sacrifice, persistence, and subsequent recovery since the attack in a deeply moving conversation.

Continuing along the vein of organizations with an explicit interest in Israel and the Middle East, J Street GW held their own event this semester. J Street hosted GW Professor Arie Dubnov, J Street National VP Adina Vogel-Ayalon, and Author Peter Beinart for a panel on the future of Israel and Palestine, encouraging the intellectual variety present within our community.

Continuing on, TAMID at GW, a subsidiary of the TAMID Group, which focuses on finance and consulting for Israeli startups businesses, has done excellent work this semester in giving students the opportunity to delve deeper into the world of business and finance. On March 29th, TAMID GW and their Georgetown and University of Maryland counterparts hosted Ron Kimhi, the Head of Global GTM at Monday.com for a discussion about his experiences with entrepreneurship and his specific work at Monday.com.

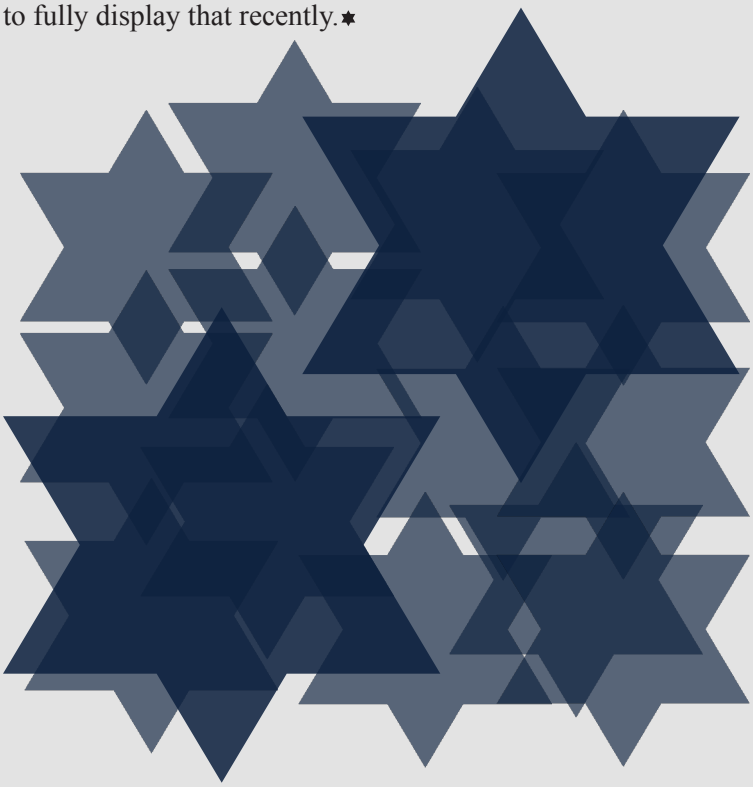
Chabad GW as well as Chabad Rohr have also both held many events this semester for Jewish students, some of which were designed to be impactful and reflective, while others were geared toward being fun and celebratory. Both Chabads have held regular baking events, themed shabbats, social gatherings, and Hebrew and Torah learning classes. Both Chabads, as well as GW Hillel, have further celebrated Purim and Passover in their own ways, each holding respective celebratory and religious events to commemorate the holidays.

Chabad GW has specifically held a speed-dating event for Jewish students to meet one another in the hopes of finding their besheret, with students coming both from GW and American. They have further held tefillin-wrapping sessions every Sunday morning called BLT (bagels, lox, tefillin).

Chabad Rohr has also entertained multiple collaborative events with Jewish students from University of Maryland this past semester, typically more local to UMD. They have further held more specific social events, including a gathering for senior students.

This semester GW Hillel and the Jewish Student Association have held a wide variety of cultural and religiously-engaging events, from events focused on arts, to prayer, to the holidays. With Hillel, there is no shortage of options from which students can choose if they are hoping to become more in touch with their Jewish identity, be it religious, cultural, or ethnic.

All of these amazing events and successes showcase the incredible work and effort put in by GW's Jewish community this semester. We are a community of diversity in thought, action, and goals, and we are so proud to have had the chance to fully display that recently.✸



WHY CAMPUS DIALOGUE SHOULD NOT BE TWO-DIMENSIONAL

BY JORDAN GROSSMAN

As college students, we all make emotional investments into different ideas and groups as we work out which frameworks we will use to approach the world around us—politics, religious identity, and cultural values especially. Over the last couple of years, we've been pressured to choose between them. Aligning with any one specific side often demands a sacrifice: friends with different political views, future career prospects, and sometimes even your mental wellbeing. In some cases, people have been socially isolated or publicly confronted for their views. But we need to be honest with ourselves.

Our political views and positions of support for Palestine and for Israel do not need to be mutually exclusive. Is it really necessary to never speak to a lifelong friend again because they disagreed with you about the legitimacy of Israel? Were people cruel to you because they wanted to hurt you or because they didn't understand how much Israel and/or Palestine meant to you? Why do we treat our views as so self-defining that hearing another perspective becomes so intolerable that it oppresses us?

This absolutist dichotomy is difficult for on campus dialogue, and it can have a chilling effect on the Jewish community. As Jewish students on campus, we are socially and intellectually blocked off by these obstacles and we build them up around ourselves at the same time.

It is essential that we maintain our connections with our friends and family members, even those that have radically different opinions than us. If we don't, we risk letting people forget what we believe as our communities become more and more isolated. I can speak from my own experience.

Credit: London School of Economics

When I started at GW in Fall 2023, I had no idea that my new liberal and internationalist friends would soon seem as politically distant as the Bolsheviks. But after October 7th, they did. I didn't want to see them. I didn't want to hear them say that violent resistance was justified. I didn't want to hear my classmates debate my identity group in class. I didn't want to see my Jewish friends sobbing at Hillel. I didn't want to see anyone. I didn't know what to do.

It was one of my apolitical friends here that stayed with me and listened to my first terrified questions and bitter thoughts. It was my conservative friend back home that texted me to see if it was ok. Support came from unexpected places. I can attribute that to the loyalty and kindness of friends that put me first and politics second. These are the most valuable kinds of connection that a person can have.

As the initial shock wore off, though, like many other Jewish students at GW I was deeply worried about whether my friends, apolitical and radical and religious and otherwise, would stay by my side as casualty rates climbed. Couldn't we at least talk about what was happening? If I had the chance to explain myself, maybe they would still see me as worthy of their friendship. Instead, I began to police my own words, assuming I would be judged before I even spoke.

But what was I really afraid of? Social ostracization? Being misunderstood? None of those fears were worth retreating into an echo chamber. Even when conversations are uncomfortable, there is still value in listening and engaging, rather than refusing to accept that others could think differently.

Since 2023, I have made difficult choices about who I want to associate with, where I want to work, and even what kinds of news I should read. I have done my best to challenge myself, to force myself to be uncomfortable sometimes, even without compromising my values of Jewish pride, human rights, and peace. In a single day, I speak with people that want to preserve a Jewish Israel and others that want every Jewish person to leave Palestine without seriously compromising any of those values.

It is possible for all of us to engage with these contradictions, if not every day then every semester. It is not easy. It involves rejection, insults, and constant explanation. But it is essential if we are to grow intellectually and build social bridges strong enough to withstand war with Iran, growing political polarization, antisemitism, and take even the tiniest step toward a more peaceful future.

I have found my place in spaces like J Street, where I stay open to dialogue and engage with a range of perspectives. It can be frustrating and even hopeless at times. There are moments when it feels like I am catching flak from both sides, or that no one fully agrees with me or appreciates what I am trying to do. But I am not doing this because it is easy or immediately rewarding.

I do it because it aligns with my values: a commitment to Jewish culture and identity, to human rights, and tolerance and openness. If there is any reward, it is the possibility—however small—of helping someone see a perspective they hadn't considered before.

On campus, we are lucky not to be in a life and death situation. We have room to think, grow, change our minds, or become more ideologically resilient. Most of us students have more freedom to argue and debate and struggle than we realize.

For now, it is essential that we build relationships with people that disagree with us, even if we find them objectively wrong. Simply investing in other people—by listening, understanding, and disagreeing, all while respecting others, will pay off. You don't need to go all in on one side of the campus debate or the other. You just need to find one person that thinks a little differently than you. Start there.✸

THERE IS NO "RIGHT OF RETURN" FOR PALESTINIANS

BY ANONYMOUS

In 2024, Al Jazeera published a story entitled, "Locked Out: Palestinians in Jordan Still Waiting to Return to Stolen Homes." The story follows one man, Omer Ihsan Yaseen, a 20-year-old doctor living in al-Wehdat, a Palestinian refugee camp in Jordan. Within his home, Yaseen proudly displays the memorabilia of his Palestinian ancestors; a black key, ostensibly the one which used to open the doors to their home in modern day Israel (long since burned down), some soil from what is now Tel Aviv, Arabic text, and a small photo of Che Guevara. Yaseen details to the reporter, Nils Adler, how he has always felt that life in this refugee camp was but a temporary waystation before his family's inevitable, triumphant return to their land. On Yaseen, Adler notes, "his eyes reveal a deep generational trauma."

Credit: The World

There is one problem with this story: it is a delusion. It is a delusion which has been inherited over generations, one which has now extended across time and space. The so-called refugee camp in which Yaseen lives, "has long outgrown itself and now melts seamlessly into the surrounding areas of southeast Amman." In other words, this outpost, once used to house actual refugees, has become a suburb of Amman. Adler could not help but remark on the fact that the vast majority of the residents of al-Wehdat, "have lived their whole lives in these camps," yet still think of themselves as refugees; Palestinians lying in wait for the day when they can return to the lands of their ancestors. Adler indulges this self-aggrandizing refugee mythology believed by so many Palestinians today, citing that, "Jordan today hosts about two million Palestinian refugees." This is a most dangerous fiction. Jordan indeed has a Palestinian population today of 2.3 million, but these people are not refugees: they are Palestinians living in Jordan. A rounding error of these Palestinians are genuine refugees, departing from Gaza or the West Bank in the last few decades. By and large, these "refugees" are actually

the descendants of refugees, that is, their ancestors were either forcibly evicted from or chose to depart their homelands within modern day Israel during the Nakba or the 1967 War. What is going on here? Why do the descendants of Palestinian refugees still enjoy refugee status, even when many of them have never been to the Palestinian territories?

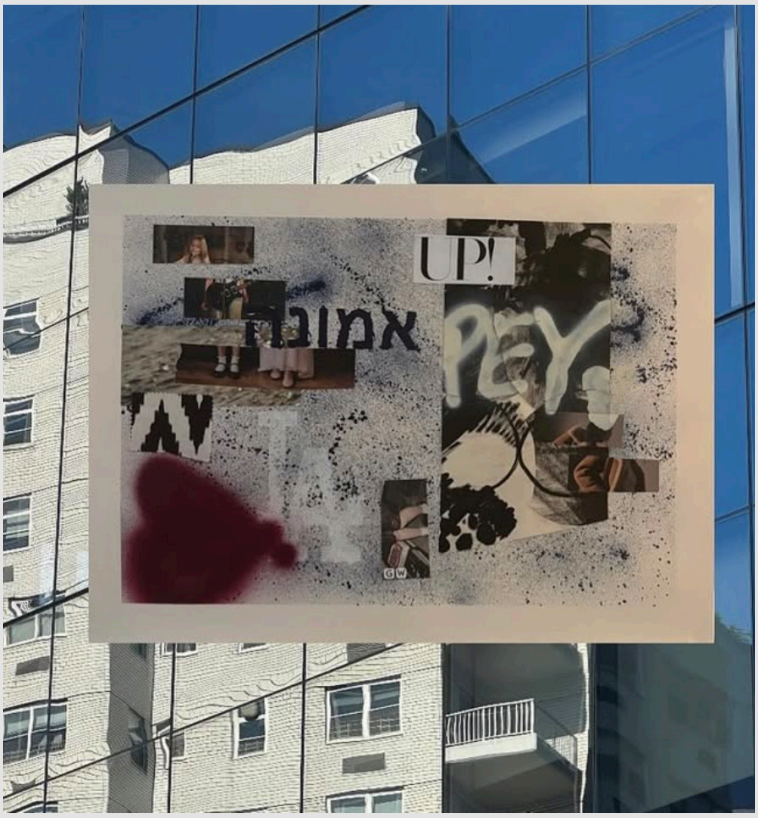
This story begins on December 8, 1949 with the founding of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). As the name implies, UNRWA was founded for the purpose of providing medical, economic, and other forms of support to Palestinian refugees. In 1950, when UNRWA formally began operations, their definition of Palestinian refugees enshrined in their charter was one whose, "normal place of residence was Palestine during the period of June 1, 1946 to May 15, 1948 and who lost both home and means of livelihood as a result of the 1948 conflict." This definition was accepted universally. A refugee, after all, is, "someone who has been forced to flee his or her country because of persecution, war or violence," according to the UN's own High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), a definition which works seamlessly with the above description of Palestinian refugees.

In 1965, facing increasing political pressure to prove that it was fulfilling its mandate and a growing population of children in refugee camps, UNRWA leaders made a shocking decision: they expanded their mandate, extending refugee status to up-to third-generation Palestinians whose ancestors had been displaced. This was quietly done as merely an administrative clarification, but the impact has been immense. There are now many second or third generation Palestinians living abroad who truly see themselves as refugees, even though this view of what a refugee is is totally discordant with the definition provided by the UNHCR. In 1982, this administrative clarification was extended to all descendants of Palestinians displaced by conflict with Israel, giving to Palestinians living abroad an unremitting feeling of legal entitlement to land which is no longer theirs, and hasn't been theirs for decades.

"Even if the basis of the claim regarding the Right of Return is legally dubious," you might be tempted to argue, "isn't denying Palestinians return to their ancestral lands morally indefensible?". Allow me to use myself and my own family anecdotally to demonstrate the absurdity of the above idea. My Jewish great-grandparents were ethnically cleansed from Kyiv, Ukraine (then the Russian Empire) around 1912. The Russian Empire kept meticulous records. It would not be difficult to find the exact house they were kicked out of by antisemitic pogromists. Do I have a right to return to that house? How about the rest of my family, can I bring them with me? The answer to these questions is clearly "no," because moral injury does not transmit indefinitely across generations as a property right. Human history is a complex tapestry of people being displaced, either violently or otherwise. Connections to land become more and more tenuous each generation. For example, what percentage of your lineage has to belong to a Palestinian who was displaced by the Nakba for you to claim the Right of Return? 100%? 50%? Is 25% sufficient to protest against Israel with righteous indignation and demand your grandfather's or great grandfather's land be returned to you? How far into the past must we go to determine whose land is whose? These questions, for which there are no good answers, are the reason why we must no longer tolerate the delusion of the Right of Return.

To be crystal clear: Palestinians are the only ethnic group in the history of the world for whom the descendents of their refugees are considered refugees themselves. The exceptionalism is staggering, and has had profound consequences. Millions of Palestinians living abroad have been placed into a juridical limbo where their very identities are frozen in international law. It has also encouraged maximalist demands from the Palestinian side, one of several roadblocks preventing lasting peace between Israelis and Palestinians. To make headway in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Palestinians must first relinquish the fantasy of the Right of Return. It is logistically impractical, legally meritricious and ethically nonsensical. Until this fiction is abandoned, peace will remain not a political problem to be solved, but a hostage to an inherited myth. ✸

ARTS AND LITERATURE



BY HELEN KNAPP

This piece wasn't really designed. It was gathered. Every torn photograph, every scrap of text, every mark on the page was chosen because it meant something: not because it looked good in a composition, but because when you choose pieces with someone in mind, it comes together much more organically than when you try to make a collage. It inspires a feeling worth keeping and emanates that person. This piece was made for my friend Peyton.

The background came first. Blue ink and pigment sprayed and splattered across the surface, falling the way the wind intended. It wasn't meant to be controlled. But when everything else was layered on top, the piece starts to come together. Things landed where they needed to. That shift, from disorder to something legible, is the way the piece is crafted to mean something, not just to be a mindless background item.

The burgundy in the lower left is the heaviest color in the work. Red carries a lot: vitality, sacrifice, the body, loss, renewal. It keeps the piece from feeling too light or too sentimental. It grounds the piece.✸

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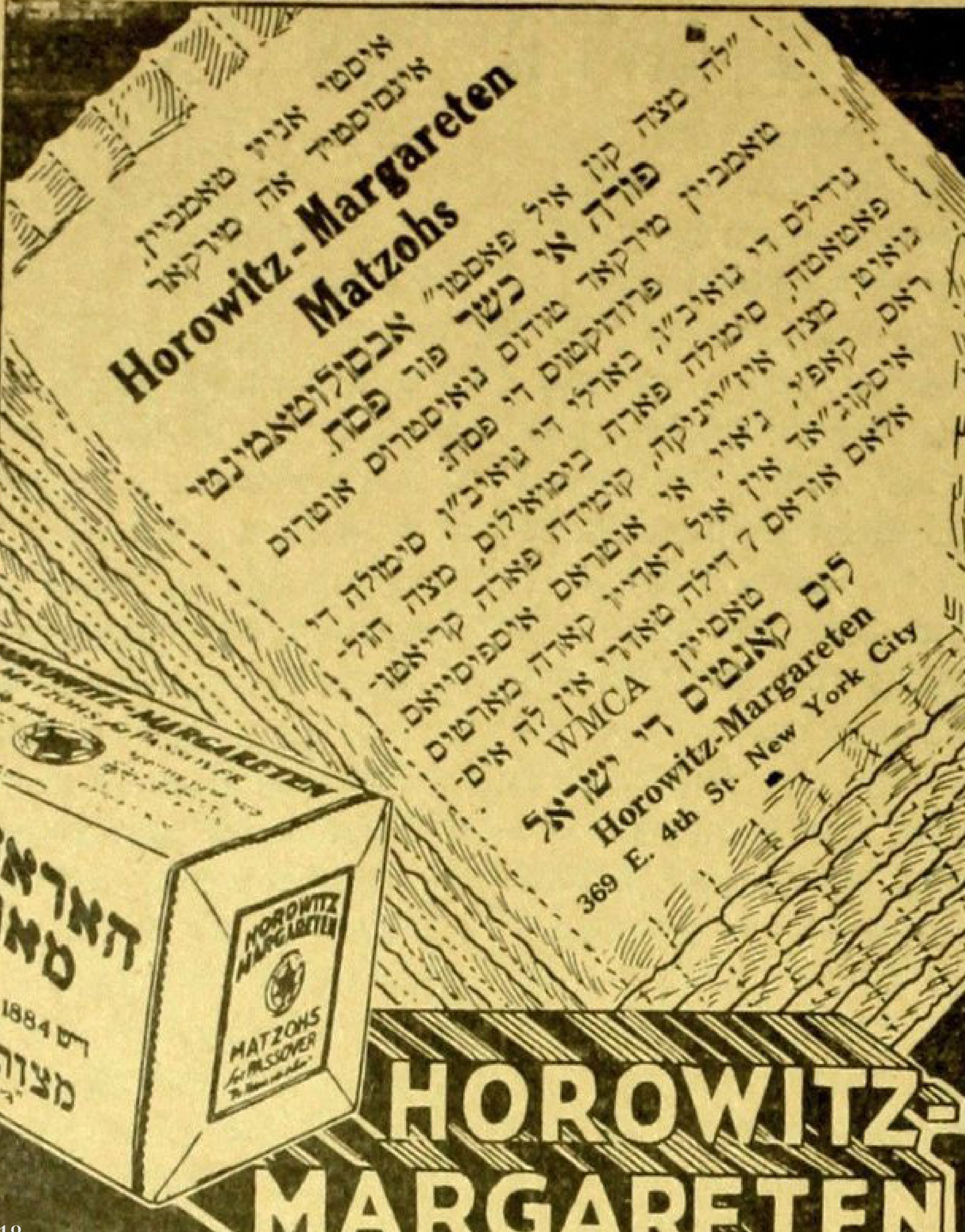
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