

THE
ZIONIST
LITERARY
MAGAZINE



GREEN GOLEM

Issue No. 02
December 2024
Chanukah Edition



Green Wax Golem: Flaming Emet Eyes by BARD



Our Mission

Green Golem: The Zionist Literary Magazine is a not-for-profit publication and advocacy group that seeks to promote artistic creators who support the Jewish people and the State of Israel.

Our mission is to be a space where Zionist and pro-Israel artists, authors, and creators can support each other's work. We aspire to lead by example, as a politically and religiously inclusive space within both the Zionist community and artistic/literary communities, and to encourage more artists, authors, and creators to identify as Zionists.

Zionism has always been a diverse movement with many branches.

We use the Anti-Defamation League's definition, which we believe to be both sufficiently precise and broadly inclusive:

“Zionism is the movement for the self-determination and statehood for the Jewish people in their ancestral homeland, the land of Israel.”

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On the Cover: "Green Wax Golem: Flaming Emet Eyes" by BARD
Green Golem Logo created by Jannete Djemal | @jannetecreates



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Note from the Editor's Desk

As editor-in-chief, I am honored to share Green Golem Issue #02 with you, this Sunday December 22nd 2024, 21 Kislev 5785.

In what my born-in-1998-self can only describe as a difficult year, a doubtful decade, and a very questionable millennium overall, the work of Jewish artists and their allies has been a consistent bright spot for me. The creatives who contributed to Green Golem #02 have gone above and beyond in carrying on that Zionist legacy of wisdom and wit. In the material published here, I have found laughter and wonder; struggle and catharsis; essential truth and essential distraction. I hope the same can be said for you, on whatever level you might wish. I hope you enjoy.

This Chanukah Edition features many incredible works of writing and art, but we are proudest of all to be posthumously publishing a short story by the late, great Jewish-Russian refusenik author David Shroyer-Petrov (1936-2024), translated into English by his son Professor Maxim D. Shroyer. David submitted the piece to us through Maxim in March 2024, shortly after the release of Green Golem #01; we accepted it for publication in April; and David passed away in June.

The story, originally written in Russian in 2011 and never before published, is called “Mansion Over the Town Fields” (pages 08-12). It is an incisive investigation into the hypocrisies and antisemitism underlying the heart of that era’s Occupy Wall Street Movement. The piece demonstrated Shroyer-Petrov’s remarkable talent for nuance: it is equal parts heartfelt and cynical, and not a single word could be adequately described with any label but “genuine”. With the student encampments of today, the failed, decade-stale movement David investigates here has never been more relevant. Most of all, it does what any good piece of prose fiction must do: its characters come alive on the page.

Shroyer-Petrov’s work is accompanied by a stunning illustration from the hands of our Art Director, Oklahoma’s own Charis Nwaozuzu, a Jewish member of the Cherokee Nation. We are excited to share this story with you, in honor of David’s memory. Proverbs tell us, “The memory of the righteous is a blessing” — we at GG feel very blessed indeed.

Am yisrael chai, my friends; Hashem Bless America; and remember — keep those pencils sharp! We’re gonna need ‘em.



Alex Horn

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF



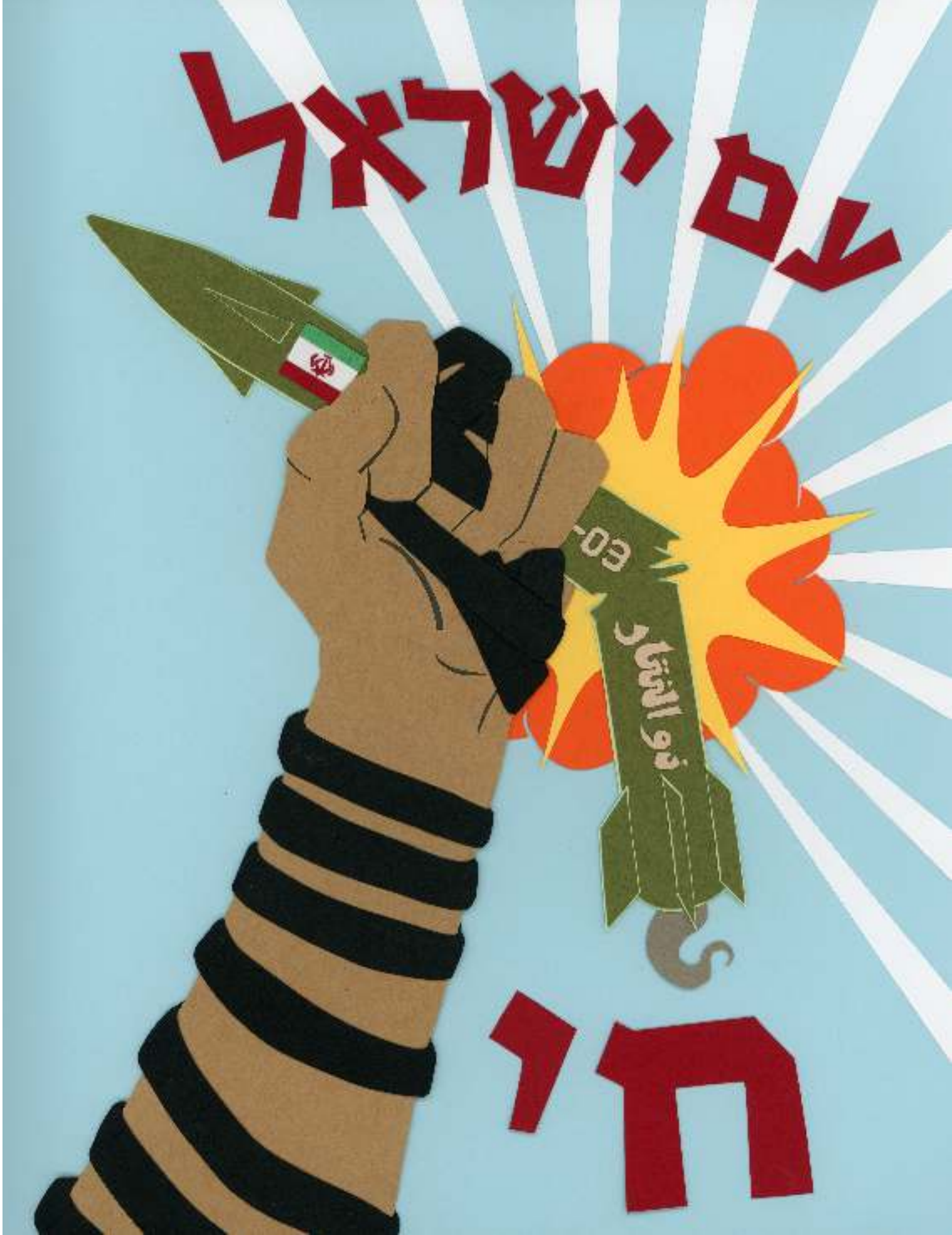
Photograph of Shani Louk by Rom Eliaz @_.rompho._
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Micky Levy is a writer and filmmaker. She was born in Israel to cinephile parents and grew up watching movies and writing poetry and short stories. After arriving in Los Angeles by herself at the age of 17, Micky caught the eye of Alison Eastwood and Warner Bros. with her script *RAILS & TIES*. The film starred Kevin Bacon and Marcia Gay Harden and played in Telluride and TIFF, among other festivals of note. Micky has completed several book adaptations, including *AMISH GRACE* for which she received a Humanitas Prize nomination. Currently, she's adapting Mark Griffin's Holly Wakefield novels for television.

For Shani

Micky Levy

Dance, Little Fairy, dance,
Music in your veins,
Pulsating, beating
Love.
You are light,
Inking,
And art,
Freedom and dreams.
But where is your armor?
Where are your wings?
Little Fairy, hush!
The wolves are coming!
Run, run, run!
Terror,
Spit, panic,
The wolves, the wolves!
Hide, hide, hide!
Rip, rape,
Bash, bleed,
Defile, display,
Didn't anyone tell you?
Es gibt Wölfe!
Little Fairy, oh, little one...
They broke you.
Little Fairy, oh, little one,
They took so much.
Holy spirit rest,
Cleansed,
Washed,
Wrapped,
The wolves can't get you now.
Little Fairy, dance, dance, dance!





Mansion over the Town Fields

David Shrayer-Petrov z”l

Translated from the Russian
by Maxim D. Shrayer

They had been out to see a movie in Coolidge Corner. Afterwards they went to a pizza parlor next door to the movie theater. They weren’t ready to part. Unhurriedly, they walked in the direction of her house, which stood on a hill overlooking the town fields. The playfields were in a large public park, and the grass there looked evergreen even in winter, because the sun often visited the park and warmed the ground, helping the grass to grow and preserving it until the next spring. Behind the park fence there was a conservation area with a pond stocked with types of fish native to the Northeast. Around the pond one could observe different birds—birds one didn’t encounter very often in urban areas. For instance, the blue heron.

He sometimes said to her: “Your eyes are the color of this blue heron. And you have long legs.”

“Do I also need to stand for hours on one leg?” she would reply with a mock feistiness. He then kissed her on the warm lips.

It took them a while to say goodbye in front of the mansion where she lived with her parents. Her older brother used to live there, too. But three years ago he was accepted to Berkeley, and now he only came home from California twice a year, for Thanksgiving and Passover. He loved his university life, where quickly he became engrossed in experimental biology research, and even if he came back East to spend the last week of August at the family cottage on Cape Cod, he wouldn’t stay in Brookline for Rosh Hashanah, which often fell in September. Theirs was a Jewish nontraditional home, where everything was allowed, except you couldn’t forget your origins and you had to know the main tenets of Jewish history. And one more thing: boys weren’t allowed to stay over. Her male guests were expected to leave no later than midnight. Those were the house rules. Her father, a senior bank executive, followed them religiously.

Her name was Margaret, Margo, Marge. She had dark chestnut hair, smooth cheek bones, blue eyes, bright lips; an iridescent smile flowed in and out of her mouth—slightly ajar like that of a marathon runner. And she had long shapely legs. In the fall Margaret liked to go around in a black pea coat. It was now October. She was a student at Boston Conservatory and dreamed of becoming a concert pianist.

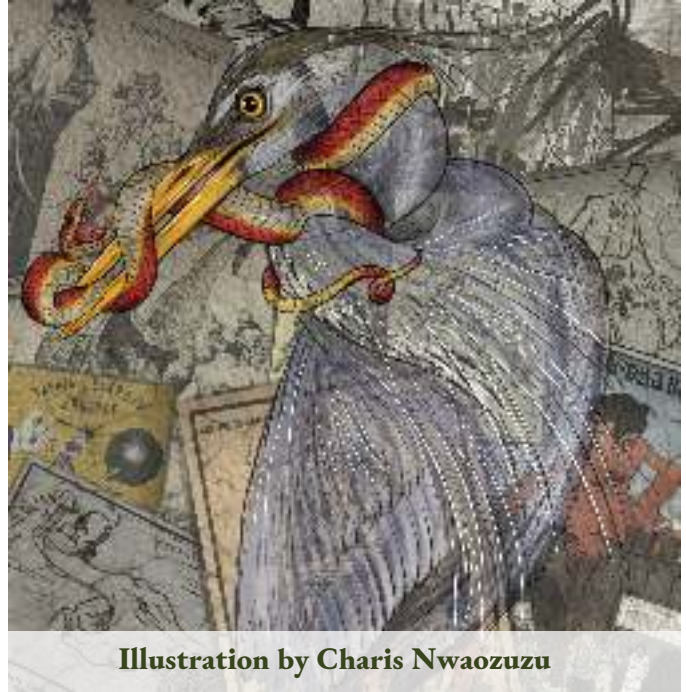


Illustration by Charis Nwaozuzu

His name was Christopher; Chris. In moments of tenderness she called him Christy. Friends had a nickname for him: “the Skald.” He wrote poetry. Red curls fell down his shoulders; under T-shirts or sweaters, his shoulder muscles bulged, taut like sailboat lines. When they spoke about politics, Margaret would chuckle mysteriously, as though she took for a given the many amusing imperfections of human society, even if this miniature society was just the two of them. Chris openly laughed at liberals and conservatives alike, not even in derision, but because he most valued in humans and humanity those qualities that he found unique to the point of ridiculousness. Politicians’ laughable or extravagant qualities would become more obvious on the TV screen—in speeches and interviews. Chris was especially fond of an aging, athletic Black congressman who always resorted to combinations of apples and oranges while discussing economics and politics.

Chris couldn’t stand—and generally avoided—self-righteous persons who go to bed on time, wake up with the alarm clock, pay bills when they are due, and agonize over matters of widely accepted morality. Chris was unfussy about living conditions. His weathered barn jacket had become a part of his whole being. Hand-printed on the back of his barn jacket was a quote



from the dissident bard Leonard Cohen: “First we take Manhattan, then we take Berlin.”

Chris was of working-class background. For many years his father, whose parents immigrated from Ireland and from Norway, and his mother, who as a child was brought to America from postwar Poland, had been breaking their backs—literally, in keeping with this staid metaphor of hard physical labor. Chris’s father had spent twenty years either lying under cars in the shop or darting between cars at the gas pump. Finally, by the time they had reached their forties, Chris’s parents had saved enough to put down ten percent toward the purchase of a Shell gas station in their neighborhood, which was being offered for sale at a moderate price. His father entered the entrepreneurial class, but this in no way changed his lifestyle. He still worked on cars, except now he spent less time at the fuel dispensers, inserting nozzles into gas tanks, collecting cash from the customers or running credit cards through the machine. Another employee, a college dropout, now handled these tasks; he had studied literature, took pride in Pushkin’s African roots and liked to quote the line “Under the sky of Africa mine....” Despite the grinding monthly payments they owed the bank for the gas station, Chris’s father sent his son to Emmanuel College, hoping that his ancestors would look gladly at the first lawyer in their lineage.

The film Margaret and Chris had seen that evening was French, a traditional family drama. Woven into the story, which was set during the German occupation of Paris, were destinies of French Jews. The heroine of the film had lived through the war and occupation. Although married to a prominent banker, a Catholic and an heir to an old French aristocratic family, she was Jewish by birth. Long before the war she had concealed her origins, knowing all too well that her fiancé’s family wasn’t too fond of Jews. By carefully practicing mimicry as a French woman and wife of a French Catholic banker, she was able to avoid deportation and survived. All would have been well, had a little animal called conscience not awakened by the end of her life—somewhere in the left side of her chest. This little animal of a conscience brought to mind the myth of a Spartan boy, who put a little fox under his shirt, and then the little fox bit through the boy’s skin and ate through his flesh right at the heart, causing the boy’s terrible torments and killing him. The remorse—the moral suffering of the banker’s wife—was no less terrible than the Spartan boy’s physical pain. She had been enduring it and suffering her entire life, but she didn’t want to die a malefactor, choosing instead to confess her lifelong lie to her son and grandchildren.

Margaret and Chris walked slowly, as if each of them was reflecting on the film, recalling the most burning shots and viewing them again. The odd part was that as they watched the film together, Margaret was several times on the verge of leaving, so repulsed she was by the ruminations of the banker’s old wife. Hadn’t the war and occupation been long over? Did the cursed Jewish question still matter somehow, Margaret mused. Probably here, in America, it didn’t matter, but in France it did. And still does. Otherwise, why would the banker’s wife be so surreptitious in opening her secret to her son and grandchildren? Was her secret—being a Jewess—really so terrible? Margaret caught herself thinking that she wasn’t sure whether she should discuss the Jewish question with Chris. There was a chance he wouldn’t understand her own doubts and ruminations, so far many Americans were from these problems. To them these weren’t problems at all. And yet, perhaps she should discuss the subject with him, she wondered. Unremitted, like discrete matter, the history of humankind keeps returning to its eternal stories. And if so, aren’t there always traces of the past in the present?

As if reading her thoughts, Chris said: “Some sort of a demented French lady. Here in the US we don’t have such old ladies.”

“Because here it doesn’t matter who you are—Jew, Catholic, Protestant,” Margaret said with feeling. “Tell me, Christy, does it matter to you that I’m Jewish?”

“The important thing is that we love each other.”

He drew her close and they started kissing.

They walked, then stopped again to kiss, then walked on before they finally reached Margaret’s house. Lights were on outside the front door. On the third floor, in her father’s study, a green lamp shone like a Turkish moon. He never went to bed before Margaret got home.

Margaret had met Chris less than three months ago. He came with college friends to a recital by Boston Conservatory students. During the intermission, without saying anything to his friends, he went backstage, found Margaret and asked her to have a drink after the concert. That’s when it all started. They had been spending a lot of time together. And yet, despite her invitations, Chris never set foot in her house.

“Why not? Are you shy?” Margaret asked him.

“Do I seem shy to you?” he answered, laughing. “I love the area near the town fields. It’s so open, spacious. What do we need inside your mansion?”

Margaret wondered why Chris didn’t want to come inside. Was he embarrassed? Was something bothering him? And if not, why does he refuse?



One time he invited Margaret over to his house in the middle of the day. Chris's family lived on the Brookline-Boston line, where the T tracks and the routes of the city buses converged, an area always overcrowded by heavy trucks, taxi cabs and delivery vehicles. It was a fiefdom of gas stations, auto parts stores and collision repair shops, as well as new and used car dealerships. From morning until evening this area was bustling with hoots, rattles, honks, whistles, and bells. Chris loved these street sounds and noises. Amid them he was at home the way a farmer is at home in a cornfield, amid the swoosh of husks and rustle of stalks. Chris's father was working at his gas station. His mother had gone to Worcester to visit her older sister. Margaret and Chris were completely alone. Nobody stood in the way of their love. She loved him with passion, Chris could see and feel it. No other lips but hers kissed him with such desire; no other lips could imbibe every tiny cell of his body. And never before had she yearned for anybody this way.

And even after this, Chris wouldn't go inside her house. Why? She asked herself, and, burdened by her intuition, she no longer insisted.

The exact same thing happened at her family's Cape Cod place. He adamantly refused to spend time inside their cottage, and wouldn't even want to stay over when her parents went back to Boston earlier to see a play or attend a social event. Twice Chris came down to the Cape on a Saturday or a Sunday. He called her on her cell phone. They drove to the beach, swam and cavorted like carefree children while it was still warm. The second time, at the end of September, they just strolled on the beach. They walked for a very long time before they found themselves outside a large waterfront estate surrounded by a mauve stone wall, behind which there stood a castle with a tower, capped with a parody of an emerald cone.

"Yeah, these ones have walled themselves off from the world," Chris pressed out and spat through the teeth.

Usually, before having breakfast and taking the T to the music conservatory, Margaret would pull on navy exercise pants and a matching navy top with a white trim and head to the park to do her stretches and then run. At this early hour the main field, still bright green even though it was the middle of October, would be the domain of dogs who chased each other while their owners (would it be more appropriate to call them nannies, guardians, protectors, trainers—anything but owners?) stood there, undone and unwanted leashes in their hands, mirthfully observing their wards and occupying themselves with soulful conversations on dog-related subjects. On that particular early morning everything was the same, and

yet something new had sprouted up. Strewn across the green field, which was still dewy from the night, were various uncharacteristic objects: sleeping bags, blankets, shopping carts, large thermoses, folding tables and chairs, packages of bottled water and many other things usually found at a tourist campsite, or perhaps in a refugee camp. And she could see drowsy faces of the inhabitants of this encampment peering out of the sleeping bags and from under the blankets and covers. At first the thought flashed through Margaret's mind that this was an athletic competition, a temporary station, perhaps a fall outdoor training of one sort or another. But she quickly rejected the thought, because the vagrant camp was a scene of utter chaos. Even dogs, usually romping around on the field, now wandered in disbelief amid the alien objects and strange people.

Margaret had no time to investigate the origins of the gathering, so unusual for their town park and fields. She finished her run and did some more stretching exercises beside the bench erected there a few years ago with the funds donated by her father, to which a brass plaque with his name attested. She hurried back home to shower and change, have breakfast and catch the T to a piano lesson with a Russian lady who had once been a famous performer.

It was Friday. Chris had some urgent work and couldn't see Margaret, and the following morning she and her parents left for Cape Cod. Her father drove their Mercedes, discussing something with her mother. Even though he spoke in a quiet staccato, so characteristic of his personality, from the back seat Margaret could hear scraps of his phrases—something about a movement against the banking industry, something under the main slogan "Occupy Wall Street." She wasn't really focusing on her parents' exchange, preoccupied with thoughts about the new piano piece she needed to master by the following week. She liked, before sitting at the piano, to read the notes with her eyes only, hearing the music from within. She tried to figure things out by herself. This was true of her studies, her family, her relationship with Chris. Margaret had one very close girlfriend, Abby, with whom she could talk about anything, including her love for Chris. But Abby had gone to New York for a couple of days...

A relaxing weekend routine awaited them at the Cape: walks by the ocean, choosing a restaurant for lunch, getting together with friends who had houses within a short drive from their cottage. They had lunch at the Yacht Club dining room and then drove back to the cottage. Margaret sat at the piano and practiced for a while, still reluctant to join her parents on a visit



to a friends' house. Eventually she agreed, but not after her father looked at her, his eyes the misty color of morning sky, and said, "Please come with us, sweetheart. We hardly see each other during the week."

Later Margaret regretted her acquiescence. She would have been better off staying behind and lying in the hammock, reading and following the convoluted storyline in Bashevis Singer's *Enemies: A Love Story*. This would have been more fun than having to endure a long discussion about some protesters, who had flooded the area of lower Manhattan around Wall Street. During cocktails at their friends' house, one of the guests brought up the tent city, which had sprouted in the vicinity of Wall Street, and also spoke of the crowd's anarchic hatred of banks and bankers. From the TV screen, the audacious slogan "Occupy Wall Street" kept sounding again and again. Margaret thought that the ironic tone, with which her parents and their hosts repeated the slogan, masked their unease.

What's all the commotion about? Margaret was thinking. Those leftists; yet another round of demanding the impossible. Who would support them? But then she doubted her own judgment as she recalled the recent morning at the park, sleeping bags and tents with their peculiar inhabitants. Margaret didn't want to give the impression that the discussion of a crowd armed with protest slogans concerned her directly. Did it concern her directly because of Chris? And where was he, anyway? She missed him. What if their love suddenly came to an end—love yielding to indifference? She started wondering if this transition from love to indifference wasn't somehow connected with her morning run and the alien tents raised on the grounds of the town fields. Shaking off her thoughts, she glanced at the TV screen. The camera showed a close-up of a small group of protesters. Fluttering over their heads was a banner with the words "Down with Jewish Bankers." A heavy silence now hung in the living room. The host, himself a financier, pushed aside his martini glass and sprang up from his chair.

"I can't bear watching this filth," he said and turned off the TV.

"I just hope this filth doesn't turn into something like the marches of Nazi stormtroopers," Margaret's father said. "They, too, had started by parading their socialist-anarchist views." When her father's eyes met Margaret's, she noticed that they had turned from sky blue to the dark color of ocean before the storm.

After they got back home to Brookline, Margaret's father went jogging in the park; he liked to stretch out his limbs after sitting in the car. And later, Margaret could tell from his alarmed face that he had seen the tent encampment.

A week went by. The local news channels showed groups of protesters moving across downtown Boston and carrying solidarity banners, "We Support Occupy Wall Street," and also banners with the words "Occupy Boston." Margaret had invented some perfectly natural excuses not to go running in the park. Chris hadn't called for a whole week. And Margaret had also come up with an acceptable explanation: he must be overwhelmed with papers and deadlines.

Late Friday night she drove to the Cape with her parents. They hit the usual weekend traffic. Margaret stared at the flashing masts of tall roadside pines and thought about Chris. Why hadn't he called? Things at school? What if...? Margaret mulled over possible reasons, some logical and others utterly senseless and conflicting, behind his silence. She couldn't share any of this with her mother. In the past she might have done so, as she had previously told her mother about the boys she was dating. But this time she was embarrassed. Almost as though her fear of opening up to her family was somehow linked to the park and town fields, which their mansion overlooked, and also to the news coverage of the people who had been openly protesting banks and bankers. Was she afraid she might see Chris among the protesters?

As usual, they returned to Brookline on Sunday toward the evening. Before the latest weekend at Cape Cod, Margaret had resolved to wait until the strange tourist encampment, which looked more like a demesne of vagabonds, would disappear without a trace. She had now recognized a common thread among the vagabonds at the town fields, the crowd in Manhattan calling for the occupation of Wall Street, and the local news reports of protestors who had taken over Dewey Square in downtown Boston.

Something akin to clairvoyance, which one experiences during critical turns of one's life story, pushed her to return to the park the following morning, even though her previous visit had left her with a muddy aftertaste. At about seven in the morning Margaret left her house and walked down the sloping hill studded with old oak trees, their feet sunken under piles of acorns. The acorns made her think of little people dressed in funny hats tilted to the side, and she chuckled at her own ability to find distraction in something so simple and silly.



Margaret came down the slope and ran toward the main field. The encampment was gone. Almost entirely gone. Only a couple of tents remained. Their inhabitants must have slept through reveille and were hurriedly dismantling and folding their tents, deflating and rolling up the mattresses, stuffing their camping gear into backpacks. Margaret was familiar with the life of campers. In high school, especially at a summer Jewish camp in New Hampshire, she had participated in hikes to low wooded mountains, followed by overnight camping at a lake waterfront. She understood the inner workings of the summer campers' easygoing life: field cooking, lake swimming, sing-alongs by the campfire, trading glances with boys, and rushed, furtive kissing behind the shields of ancient tree trunks. When she saw the last remains of the departing group of campers, she felt relieved. Her premonitions must have all been wrong, and this had nothing to do with her Chris. She was about to resume her morning run when she found herself face to face with a short fellow wearing a wide-brimmed leather hat and gaudy cowboy boots. The fellow looked familiar; she might have seen him at the bar in Coolidge Corner, where she and Chris had gone for drinks a few times. The fellow was stuffing a metallic blue tent into the bag, shaking his head so that the copper crescents of his earrings jingled like a gypsy band from an old movie.

"You haven't seen Chris, have you?" Margaret suddenly asked the fellow.

"You mean, the Skald?" the fellow replied.

"Yes, the Skald."

"Sure I have. He's one of our protest leaders. He and the main group went to Dewey Square. That's where they are now."

Margaret dragged her cotton ball feet back home. She quickly changed, ran out and got into a cab in front of the nearby Holiday Inn. "Dewey Square, please hurry," she told the driver, who had a Russian name. He just grinned back.

Twenty minutes later Margaret jumped out of the cab and saw a tent city right before her eyes. Tents had been put up sloppily; here and there, dirty mattresses jutted out. Overflowing trash bins stood akimbo. There were buckets filled with junk. Scraps of newspapers and posters were scattered on the ground. Primitive cooking stoves emitted smoke, and she could also see sundry objects of what could be imagined as a nomadic encampment, a town under siege or a community of hobos.

Flapping in the wind were hastily and crudely painted banners with the most revolutionary of demands addressed to the authorities, to financial magnates, to big corporations and various other powerful offices and institutions—slogans made on behalf of the world brotherhood of people brought to the point of desperation. Nobody paid attention to Margaret as she searched for Chris in the crowd.

"Let's go to Park Plaza... Israeli Consulate," she heard one of the protestors shout. Two new banners soared above the crowd: "Israel Must Go" and "Free Palestine." Scanning the crowd with his eyes, Chris the Skald walked ahead of a group of protestors. He spotted his girlfriend but didn't stop. He was leading the protesters in the direction of a police cordon, holding one side of a large banner with the words "Occupy Boston" painted on it. Overpowering the voices of his comrades, he waved with his free hand and called out:

"Margo, over here. Come with us."

"Israel Must Go," echoed the crowd. "Israel Must Go. Israel Must Go."

"Chris, no. I can't!" Margaret shouted, speaking more to herself than to the man she loved. "I'll never go with you. Israel will stand forever."

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David Shrayer-Petrov (z"l), writer, medical scientist, and former refusenik activist, was born in Leningrad (St. Petersburg) in 1936, immigrated to the United States in 1987, and died in Boston on June 9th, 2024. He published twenty-six books of poetry, fiction and nonfiction in his native Russian. Shrayer-Petrov's books of fiction in English include collections of stories such as *Jonah and Sarah, Autumn in Yalta, Dinner with Stalin and Other Stories*, and the novel *Doctor Levitin*.

Maxim D. Shrayer, the author's son, is a professor at Boston College and a bilingual author and translator. Shrayer is the author, most recently, of *Kinship*, a poetry collection.



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By cultivating a vibrant roster of creators assisted by a global team, stretching across both many fields and many nations, we aim to showcase some of the very best artists, creatives, and intellectuals of the day while bringing their work to new mediums and new audiences. With headquarters in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA; and an Eastern office in Jaipur, Rajasthan, India; Horn Talent Management offers the best of both worlds: an American-owned, cousin-operated, client-centered agency with a truly global reach.

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girl in the back of the truck

Dave Lewis

the music was loud at the festival of peace
she smiled as she danced, never suspecting
that the end of her world was only hours away

when she heard the absurd bullets crack
and saw the bearded men approach in jeeps
she knew she was going to die on a Saturday

taken to the land of Magog they beat her
half unconscious, with guns waving they took turns,
her helpless body becoming papier-mâché

with the flames spreading deep inside her
she prays for the big sleep to take away the pain
for her Supernova Tribe on judgement day

blood-soaked panties exposed to the world
through a gloating YouTube live stream
crowds praising the gang rape passion play

women and children cheer the dearly departed,
beautiful cargo, her limbs jack-knifed in death
tattooed poster girl for the media to portray

and meanwhile in London, the world's capital
pink-haired girls wear swastikas with pride
flags wave, flags wave for their own doomsday

Dave Lewis is a working class writer, poet and photographer from Pontypridd. He read zoology at Cardiff University. He runs the International Welsh Poetry Competition and the International Poetry Book Awards. He has self-published over twenty books; including four crime thrillers and ten poetry collections. Resolutely untrendy, he's shunned by the literature establishment in Wales. He likes real ale, photographing animals and going to Africa.

Find his website at
www.david-lewis.co.uk



October 7

Dave Lewis

Fire-inked arms dangle lifeless
over the torn skin of a drum kit.
They raped her.

Eating braised chicken with lemons,
dried limes and orange juice
the party begins.

Children watching cartoons
decapitated for mother's eyes.
They raped them too.

We'd prepared shakshuka, hummus
and labneh. Chard-wrapped fish
with couscous.

Who puts a baby in an oven
or ties children with wire
before burning them alive?

Then the phone call, then the TV.
We were used to the daily rockets
but not this holocaust.

Families tortured to death
by UN-sponsored billionaires
hiding in Qatar.

The falafels and zhoug harden,
goat's cheese smells of mint
as our blood boils.

So now it's Old Testament time;
bombs and body bags
beneath the olive trees.





Green Glowing Golem: The Golem Within Us All

Mike Wirth

Wirth was inspired to create this artwork by the teachings of Rav Isaac Luria, also known as the Ari. Born in Jerusalem in 1535, the Ari was a master of kabbalah and Jewish mystic theology.

In his book, “Gate of Reincarnations”, the Ari explains that there are five levels of consciousness within the soul. From lowest to highest, they are Nefesh (“Being”), Ruach (“Spirit”), Neshamah (“Soul”), Chayah (“Living”), and Yechida (“Oneness”).

These levels of soul also interact with the kabbalistic concept of “sephirot”: ten creative forces which mediate between God and the physical world. Two of these sephirot are Chesed (“Kindness”) and Gevurah (“Strength”). These values may seem to be in conflict, but in reality, the two opposing forces work together in harmony as part of God’s plan — rather like a Jewish parallel to the Taoist yin and yang. As Aish.com puts it: “chesed and gevurah are acting simultaneously towards the same goal -- by exerting forces in opposite directions.”

Wirth was inspired by the idea of a golem achieving spiritual consciousness through the necessary tension between Chesed and Gevurah.

Mike Wirth is a visual artist, digital experience designer, and muralist, best known for his thoughtful murals, public art installations, and client-driven commercial design work that focus on major social justice issues and his identity as a Southern, Jewish-American. Over the past 20 years, Wirth’s murals, published works, and digital museum exhibits have appeared in New York, Miami, Charlotte, NC, and internationally in Croatia, Poland, and Germany. Wirth is an avid educator, serving as Associate Professor of Graphic Design at Queens University and as artist-in-residence with the Stan Greenspon Center for Holocaust and Social Justice Education. In mentoring programs such as Five Sense, Iconic Charlotte: A Civic Symbol Design Initiative, and Project Protege’. He is a founding member and board mentor for the Talking Walls Festival, Charlotte’s first annual, citywide mural and public art festival. In 2021, Wirth was one of 10 artists-in-residence selected for Charlotte’s wildly successful Immersive Van Gogh Exhibition. In December of 2022, Mike was a featured artist in the JADA art fair during Miami Art Week.

Follow Mike on Instagram @mikewirth and find his website at www.mikewirthart.com



A Jewish Family's European Vacation: A Trio of Poems From Summer 2024

Hana Tzipora

Three poems written in three different countries, within the span of fourteen days during the author's family vacation this past summer. Three different Jewish encounters, all tied together by the same common thread of a post-October 7th Jewish world.

Find Hana on Instagram as @that.intersectional.zionist

1: Zurich, Switzerland

To the boy working the check-in desk at the hotel in Zurich, (the man, really, he's older than me I think) who told my mom "you've come to the right place" when he saw her מִגֵּן דָּוִד and unbuttoned the top of his uniform shirt to show her his. Who gave us a discount on the penthouse room and beamed when my mom told him "מזל טוב" on his graduation from university and smiled at me when I waved to him this morning on my way to breakfast, both of us touching the hollow just below our collarbones where our necklaces sit, mine over my shirt, his under.

I'll never see you again, Fennec who taught my mother to pronounce his name, but I'll think of you.

2: Cologne, Germany

To the women at the chocolate museum in Cologne, (mother and daughter, I think but cannot know) Speaking Hebrew to each other as they tried to find the little viewport of the factory Who I approached and directed in soft words Whose eyes widened in unison when they heard our language from another's lips And when I walked away, then turned back, one of them caught my eye, and nodded, her white hair reflecting light from the window overlooking the river

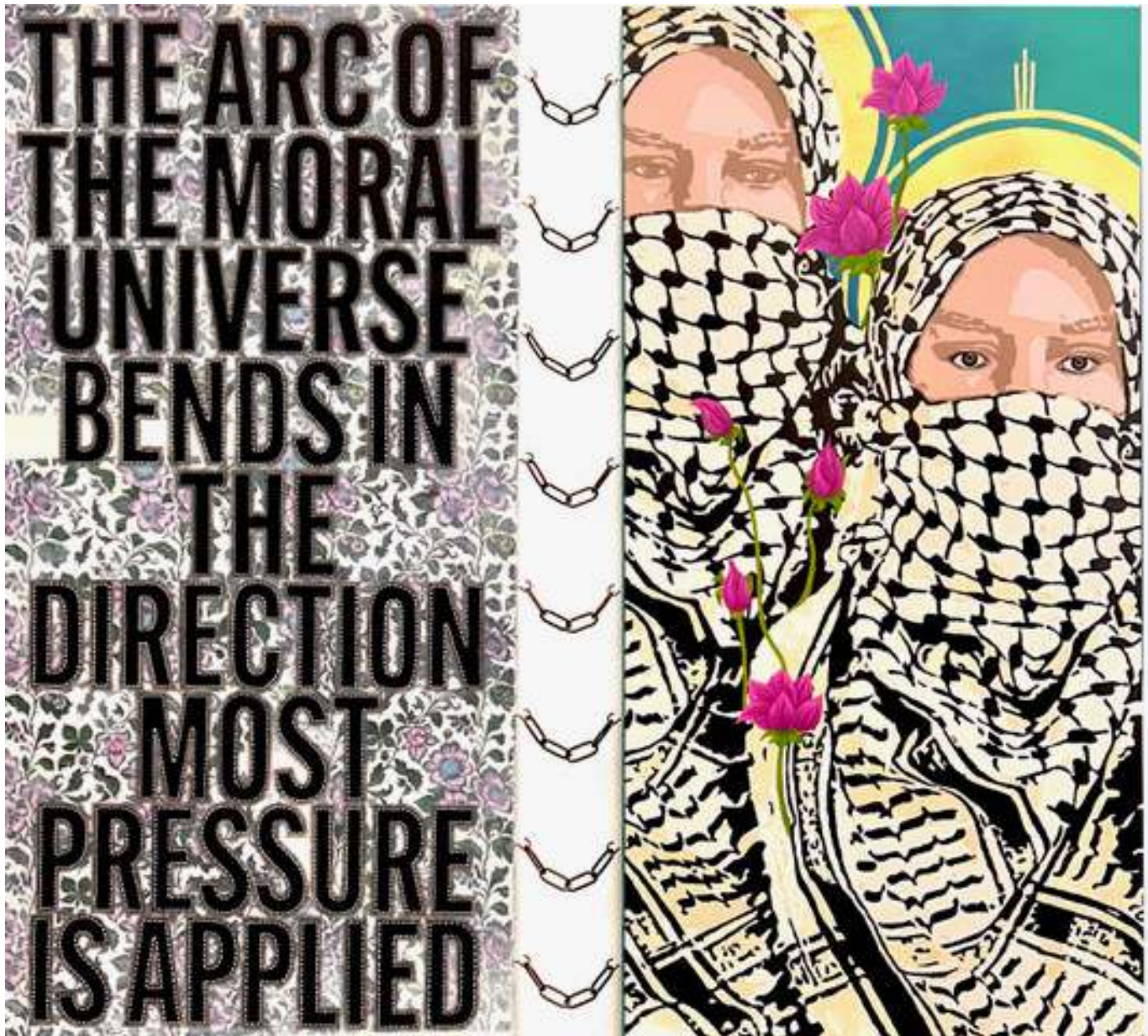
To them, I hope that little piece of chocolate melted on your tongue as sweetly as it did on mine.

3: Amsterdam, Netherlands

To the woman in the Lego store in Amsterdam with who I think were her children and grandchildren who stepped a little to the side so that I could share the breeze of the standing fan and did a double-take when I said "תודה" (I had been trying to find a way to speak to her) and asked, "עברית?" and smiled when I nodded The woman from Netanya here with her family ("for the post-trauma," she said, and did not elaborate) who asked me every question save my name who called for a long-haired child to *hurry and finish up with the minifigures, מוֹתֵק, we do not have all day,* who shrugged at me with a twinkle in her eye while I chuckled, still trying to cool off, Who smiled again when I went back to say "שלום, יום טוב" before leaving with my family and then turned back to the counter to buy so many Lego sets for her grandchildren.

Perhaps someday we will meet again, in Netanya where I have never been, and her grandchildren will be smiling wider

and so will we.



Holy Martyr (Murder), 2024 (54” x 48”)

Michelle Moore

Michelle Moore is a first-generation descendant of North African Jewish immigrants. Born in Israel, she emigrated to the US as a young child. Growing up in a Detroit suburb, she later returned to Israel to serve in the army and then attend the Bezalel Art Academy in Jerusalem. She continued her education in San Francisco, then working as a Creative Director in advertising and commercial art. After building two successful business, including the handmade jewelry line 7stitches.com, Moore returned to her passion for painting, as a means to communicate the absurdities and dualities in the social constructs we have all been forced to accept as normal. Michelle currently resides in San Diego, California.



What Do You Do When the Protestors Speak Hebrew?

Omry Hananya

This might surprise you, but managing video content and writing for Green Golem is not my full-time job. I spend most of my time planning and managing events for a Jewish foundation, which uses the money we fundraise to build, and since the seventh, rebuild communities in Israel.

Three things should go without saying after reading that statement-

1. Most of our attendees and donors are Jewish.
2. Events are heavily protested.
3. Security is a top priority.

The other night, we were having an Hannukah event at an art gallery in downtown Manhattan — latkes, soofganiot, and drinks were had by all. The owner of the gallery said a few words, then one moment proceeded to mar the entire evening. Two people stepped to the front, pulled a cloth banner from one of their pockets and proceeded to shout their pre-rehearsed phrases and struggle against both security and one very active chair of the committee. Eventually, the useless agitators were thrown out and the door was locked behind them.

Since then — at the event that evening; afterwards; and at our office in recent days — the same conversation has been happening again and again. On a slightly smaller scale, I imagine it is somewhat like the conversation our Israeli

government and military have been asking themselves internally about the events of October 7th 2023. This conversation boils down to three hard-to-answer questions. How did this happen? How did we miss it? And, the kicker: how do we stop it from happening again?

I, however, have been dealing with a different, rather more internal, conversation. At our Hannukah event, I was the first one to notify security — not because my event manager instincts kicked in and I had to save everyone’s good time, but because — as you have probably guessed from reading the title of this essay, both the agitators and I speak Hebrew as our first language.

Instead of shouting “End the Occupation” these particular protestors were shouting “די לכיבוש” meaning “End the Occupation” in Hebrew. That bothered me more than anything else.

Whether I like it or not, and whether they like it or not, these people were my brothers and sisters, joined together in, take your pick, either a covenant with God or the circumstances of our birth. Either way, it mattered. It matters. It matters to me. How have we drifted so far apart that these men and women are protesting an event celebrating our culture? In such circumstances, doubt is inevitable. On some level, at least, could these others be right?



Photo donated by Isabelle Young @isabellepaintedsky



These thoughts bothered me vaguely for a while, before I realized the real, specific thorn at my side. My favorite part of Judaism is the fact that it contains multitudes —not of people but of opinions. A great deal many traditions bind us as a people, but perhaps none other than “the argument” itself. There are a lot of stereotypes describing Jewish people, but perhaps none more accurate than the argumentative and relentlessly contrarian guy at the party that is making good points but needs to shut up. I love it. I am it. My girlfriend is unhappy about it. You get the picture.

And God damn it if I did not want to sit down with those likely-intelligent, unbearable idiots ruining my event and have a conversation with them to see just how they ended up here. Both literally and metaphorically. Did they take the train? Did they read “Das Kapital”? Did they think it would make us reconsider our allegiances? I genuinely wanted to know.

It was not the time or the place, of course, but I’m a Jew — when isn’t it a good time for a nice friendly shouting match? Of course, I would never get that opportunity. Ideas of anti-normalization are hardwired into the very DNA of much of the Pro-Palestine movement. Many if not most of the leading spokespeople of the movement refuse to talk to those who disagree with them— which, to my mind, really calls the whole concept of “leading spokespeople” into question.

On top of everything else I find to be wrong about the current wave of antisemites and anti-Zionists accosting us, one of the most personally frustrating is the sheer intolerance for genuine diversity within its ranks. Debate, discord, and disagreement are not diversity’s fears: they are its best and most valuable attributes. I grew up in Israel, believe me I hate Netanyahu as much if not more than you — talk to me, damn it!

Anyway: this particular situation made me think about a different incident from a couple months prior. I was performing at a comedy show in Bushwick — not the most supportive of audiences on any given day, if you can believe. But I brought up being from Israel about six minutes into my set, and as almost always happens just about everywhere, quite a few sphincters were clenched. This time, someone proceeded to yell “It’s called Palestine!”, thereby clenching the other half of the room and rendering the whole vibe incredibly un-groovy baby.

He proceeded to yell scattered phrases, when the only response I had for him was a very bro-like “naw...” that thankfully cut the tension in the room, but only by a little. The man proceeded to self-evacuate when I didn’t give him what he wanted.

The true miracle happened after the show. Multiple anti-Zionist Jews — watermelon-pin wearing, “Free Palestine”-bracelet donning anti-Zionist New York Jews — came up to me and apologized on his behalf. This simple act led to hours of talking, arguing and mutual learning that everyone else in the room found heavy and inappropriate. At that moment, I felt hope.

The conclusion I’m getting at with this piece is both simple and obvious: you need to talk to people who disagree with you. The action it calls for however is hard and annoying- YOU need to talk to people who disagree with YOU.

And yes, some people will stand a few feet away from you and tell you, to your face they don’t think you have a right to be alive. But I have yet to find a better solution than talking to people. Even if they are your annoying cousin, or some moron in your class, people need to talk to people, and Jews need to talk to Jews.

Omry Hananya is a writer, stand-up comedian, debater and proud IDF veteran. He was born and raised in moshav rishpon, which his family helped found in the 1930's. After his service he moved to New York City where he works in comedy, videography, and multimedia editing. He is the Media Director for *Green Golem: The Zionist Literary Magazine*.



Don't Let the Light Be Seen

Leah Kogen Elimeliah

How unfortunate that December of 1988 brought no miracles. The heavy, sorrowful snow outside covered the streets of Moscow's brimmed sidewalks with dismay and uncertainty amid the pure intentions of those getting out of the heap of confusion and winter foolery.

Vladimir had just opened the front door as the sun set, concealing the whereabouts of the season. He returned from the Medical Academy and was already huffing and puffing about the uneventfulness of his bus ride home. Papa was in his art studio, which was also the only real bedroom in our small apartment on Dubninskaya Street, where Vladimir and I slept. With seven years between us and for the longest time Vladimir was my only brother. Our half brother lived outside of us. The room where papa worked and we slept was bedecked with religious icons but not because we were devout Russian Orthodox, no — we were the zhidi the (Jews) from the fifth floor. At the time, the news about papa's masterly talents as an artist and an antique restorer traveled quickly throughout the Moscow BLACK market. He often serviced the shady buyers who brought their goods for restoration — usually someone's inheritance — so they could eventually be resold under the table. Papa never got a cut, he was not a businessman nor was he an opportunist.

Religious paraphernalia was a high commodity at the time and was on the same list of valuable items as milk, bread, salami, even sardines, all of which were missing from the shelves of a supermarket and were hard to come by. You had to know people. At times shady antique dealers would repay papa with produce. He'd walk through the door and shout, "I got treats for dinner."

He took up his restoration hobby when my grandmother's antique vase broke into one hundred sixty eight pieces and he couldn't bring himself to throwing it out without first trying to restore it, "bring it back to life," as he used to say. Calling himself the DOCTOR of art. That's when he decided to stop working as an architect and a city planning engineer and make restoration of antiques his primary profession.

Illustration by Elisabetta Furcht



Mama stood above the couch in the living room sorting laundry. In her apron, wearing large black thick square glass frames, she shouted, telling me not to touch the antique Dresden saucers from Germany, which she inherited from babushka Henya — who inherited them from her mother Zelda, my great grandmother — who thank goodness salvaged them four decades prior, in 1946, when NKVD officers, known as the Soviet Secret Police, unexpectedly barged into their one shared room which was part of a communal apartment on Gorky Street — occupied by a family of five — and confiscated all of their inheritance.



In the decades following the Russian Revolution, the Bolshevik government imposed a new rule that families had to give up their apartments and move into a shared one, occupied by sometimes seven families. The government considered having your own apartment a luxury. Of course the post war housing crisis didn't help the situation.

Each family was assigned a room.

The bathroom and kitchen were shared by all the families who lived in this one single apartment.

The families had a set schedule when each of them would use the toilet, the washroom, the kitchen to cook meals for their own.

Who would be in charge of cleaning the very long extended hallways of Soviet apartments, running at times forty meters long, which approximately equals to one hundred thirty feet.

People lived under these forced conditions for decades, until the collapse of communism in 1991.

And, NKVD was efficient in their tactics — mama who was only twelve then, recalled how one officer stood at the entrance of their room, holding a large notepad, meticulously jotting down each item individually;

six chairs, a buffet, two side tables, several hundred books by name, among them books that were of course banned, written by Jews like Mandelshtam and Babel — confiscating eighteen pieces of porcelain chinaware, crystal wine and drinking glasses — each itemized piece of jewelry, including the money hidden in drawers of dressers — for emergencies.

As the officers carried on, extracting our family's belongings, they made sure to pocket all things shiny and sentimental.

That was in 1946, a cruel and bitter year, that shamelessly didn't bring miracles either. It was the same year that my grandfather, Henya's husband, was taken prisoner by Stalin's officers and sent to the Gulag — a slave labor camp on the outskirts of Siberia.

As for me, I was a petite nine year old who was frequently referred to as clumsy or wild, climbed up on a small wooden stool in our yellow kitchen, facing the triangular China closet which fit perfectly in the corner. It was right next to a window from which mama would often

throw me change wrapped in a plastic bag with a rubber band tight around the top, so I can run down the block to get ice cream with my cousin, Polina.

I carefully pulled out the blue cobalt porcelain saucers out of the China closet. And no, We did not inherit those. Making sure we had eight, I counted them one by one and brought them into the living room.

Mama instructed me that we would put out one candle at a time for eight nights. We positioned and slightly melted each candle on the saucer against the backdrop of another brutal Russian winter. Our first Chanukah!

I didn't know then what any of the ritualistic practices we were implementing meant, but I was excited to participate in the newly acquired tradition, that only a few years later, upon arriving in New York, I would find out was quite ancient, and which at the time I never believed or thought I could relate or connect with.

The holiday of Chanukah is a story of the Maccabees, a group of Jewish warriors, who fought off their enemies in the second century BCE. Jews were not allowed to practice their traditions or cultural practices and were often forced to convert to other faiths. Judah the Maccabee and his army defeated one of the strongest armies of the time and reclaimed their heritage and the Holy Temple. They wanted to light the Temple menorah to celebrate their victory but there wasn't enough oil. Most of it was contaminated and impure. They found a single night's worth of oil to light up the Temple, which lasted them eight days.

And that was a Miracle!

I remember when I heard this story from my brother I thought it was so fantastical. Knowing that my ancestors were forced to hide their traditions, unable to perform rituals, or even call themselves Jewish, something in me began to take shape — my personal story suddenly had a direct relation to the origin of my ancestral narrative.

Vladimir practiced the blessing for two weeks, eager to light the candles and perform the prayer. As he was about to light, papa quickly interrupted him, suggesting we keep quiet as we recite the words in Hebrew, "we don't want the neighbors to hear or they will report us," he said. His voice — deep with concern, slightly overshadowing his fearlessness.

Later in the week, further into the celebration, papa was in the art studio, tinkering with a shattered image of a dream on an ancient Mesopotamian clay vase, looking for certainty that the chimera depicted and displayed was the original representation.

Vladimir was sitting at the round table in our living room, focusing and strategizing for his upcoming chess match. Mama, as usual, was preparing dinner in the kitchen.

I had put out four saucers for that night — not the inherited ones — and was going to light the fourth candle when a knock was heard throughout the house.



Papa impetuously gestured for us all to be quiet. He quickly put away the candles and the saucers. Under his arm, he hurriedly carried the prayer book to its hiding place, which was inside a wall blocked by a dark, heavy, velvet armchair.

Inside the hollow wall cavity that papa fabricated, were mama's stored canned foods that she had prepared for the year ahead. An assortment of flavored jams and preserves, pickled tomatoes, cucumbers, cabbage, and mushrooms. Towards the back, behind the food reserve was where papa hid the ancient Hebrew bible, a prayer shawl, banned books and relics that were prohibited.

A KGB officer who was our neighbor from the fourth floor, showed up. Before entering he told us to stand back.

"I need to investigate," he said scoffing, "it was reported by the neighbors that your family has been practicing your religion — which as you know is against Soviet policy— against Mother Russia. "Some of the neighbors had seen lit candles through your window. Do you confirm this accusation?" said the uniformed neighbor.

Spying was popular during those days as well as in the days when my grandfather was taken to the gulag back in 1946. Communal apartments were perfectly organized hives for police informants. It wasn't unusual for a neighbor to observe, look or listen in on their neighbor — gossip about their whereabouts. For decades, people were encouraged to denounce their neighbors. Many often did to ensure their own safety. But oftentimes, it was about taking over their neighbor's room and even stealing neighbors' belongings.

But the victims of the system were either evicted, imprisoned, like my grandfather, and in some cases even killed, like my grandfather.

Back on Dubninskaya Street, papa stood at the entrance of our apartment, waving his hand, welcoming the KGB officer inside. As the intruder proceeded, so did his men.

Everything around us was flipped about — overturned. Books, papers, papa's art supplies, couch pillows, even the refrigerator — our living quarters — were left an uncivilized mess.

At last, the intruders were finished and the KGB officer was satisfied. Before walking out of our apartment with a cunning grin on his face, he turned to papa and said, "Mr. K., I am glad we are neighbors, this way I can keep my eye on you."

Trembling, we shut the door behind them. That night we quietly began to piece back together the inheritance of our broken tradition, hoping that next year will bring a miracle.

In the winter of 1989, on the last day of December, my family gave up their Soviet citizenship. The government considered us traitors, nevertheless, we were now granted permission to leave as asylum seekers. Papa, mama, Vladimir and I journeyed through Vienna and Italy for several months before arriving in New York City. When we finally crossed over — we realized it was already time for Passover — a Jewish hallmark of "passing over," "a return," — "redemption from iron fist."

***Don't Let the Light Be Seen* is a short story by poet and writer Leah Kogen-Elimehiah. Originally from Moscow, Leah now lives in New York City, working in the English Department of the City College of New York, where she earned her MFA and is now an Adjunct Professor. She is the Founder and Director of *WordShedNYC Reading Series*, an "all-inclusive interdisciplinary community" that brings together diverse and imaginative artists and writers in the New York City area. She is also a mentor with *Girls Write Now*, a leading national program for arts education and leadership mentoring for young women.**

Find Leah on Instagram as @LeahElimehiah

TATTOOS ARE JEWISH



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COMING SOON



Torn Edges

Hannah Finkelshteyn



She Was to Be My Wife

Ted Goldstein

She was to be my wife,
She was to be my bride,
She was with me to spend a life,
Before they took her from my side.
She loved to go to concerts,
She had an angel's voice,
Her smile was the sunshine,
She was a light of joy.
I met her on the bus,
I met her on the train,
I loved her for an hour,
Yet I loved her all the same.
But she was to be my wife,
In this daydream fantasy,
Until they stole her life,
And nightmared my reverie.
How many lovers swoon,
How many lovers ache?

Our wives are all marooned,
Beyond their hellish gate.
They have stole my woman,
They have stole my light.
My heart would bid me weep,
But my hands would have me fight.
And If I Were a Man,
Si C'était Une Homme,
I'd do more than hatch a plan,
I'd do more than write this poem.
I was taught we should not fight,
I was taught we should not hit,
But men who know their wrong from right,
Cannot abide this shit.
She was to be my wife,
Nearly one year ago,
Since then she's been kidnapped,
So no, I can't let go.

Ted Goldstein is a Jewish Poet and Educator from Los Angeles, CA. He studied History at Princeton University and now writes essays concerning the rampant growth of antisemitism in American universities. He is a Lobel Classical Education Fellow at the Tikvah Fund.

Subscribe to Ted's substack *The Zionist Voice* (@tedgoldstein)

Find his work at www.thezionistvoice.com

Follow him on Instagram: @24_karat_goldstein

GOOD JEWISH BOYS

BEING A GOOD JEWISH BOY ISN'T ABOUT BEING "NICE."

NICE IS SURFACE-LEVEL, A SMILE TO AVOID CONFLICT.

GOOD? GOOD IS ROOTED IN VALUES. GOOD STANDS UP WHEN OTHERS STAY SILENT. GOOD FIGHTS FOR JUSTICE, PROTECTS COMMUNITY, & LEANS INTO DIFFICULT TRUTHS.

A GOOD JEWISH BOY DEFENDS WHAT MATTERS, LOVES FIERCELY, AND SHOWS UP—EVEN WHEN IT'S UNCOMFORTABLE.

BECAUSE "NICE" WON'T CHANGE THE WORLD. BUT GOOD? GOOD LEAVES A LEGACY.



Good Jewish Boys

@goodjewishboys

“Good Jewish Boys” was born out of a desire to challenge the culture of performative niceness when addressing antisemitism. It’s about fostering honest, unapologetic conversations, embracing our identities fully, and standing firm against prejudice—not with politeness, but with purpose and pride.

Are you a Good Jewish Boy? Do you know a Good Jewish Boy? Let us know!

Follow the Good Jewish Boys Project on Instagram: @goodjewishboys



VOICES ISRAEL

ANTHOLOGY

The submission period
has opened and will
remain open through

**MARCH
15TH,
2025**

The *Voices Israel* Group of Poets
in English publishes an annual
anthology of poetry. Submissions are
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An Unorthodox Golem

BARD

A modern golem, crafted from materials as humble as earth—air-dry clay and hot glue. Inspired by colorful melted candle wax left behind each night of Chanukah. Roaming the world, mistaken for Bigfoot... or just about to start their stand-up routine?





The Ten Amendments of America-First Zionism: Or, Why I Love Israel and Will (Probably) Never Make Aliyah

Alex Horn

Disclaimer: The political views expressed in this piece reflect the personal opinions of the author, Alex Horn, who is the founder and editor-in-chief of this publication. His individual views at the time of publication have no primacy whatsoever on the moral and ideological standards of Green Golem: The Zionist Literary Magazine as a pro-Israel artistic not-for-profit organization, and have no bearing on the individual beliefs of any of Green Golem’s other members or collaborators. For more information, please email editors@greengolemmag.com.

*We see so many tribes overrun and undermined
While their invaders dream of lands they've left behind
Better people, better food, and better beer
Why move around the world when Eden was so near?*

— *Song: “Territories”*; lyrics by Neil Peart; music by Geddy Lee, Alex Lifeson, and Neil Peart; from the album *Power Windows*, recorded between April and August of 1985 in England and Montserrat; first released in Canada on October 11th, 1985 and the United States of America on October 21st, 1985

<i>I'm All-American</i>	<i>I'm playing wichu</i>
<i>All-American</i>	<i>I be smilin' wide</i>
<i>God is on my side</i>	<i>You see it on my face</i>
<i>There's nothing left to say</i>	<i>You see it on my face</i>
<i>There's nothing left to say</i>	<i>Now I'm hanging wicha</i>

— *Song: “Just a Dream”*; music and lyrics by Jewish Israeli-American rapper and singer Joey Aronskind; co-created by Grammy-nominated producer Jayme Silverstein; recorded in 2022 in California and included in the 2023 album *All-American Aronskind's*





*I have spent both the best
And the worst
Days of my life
In the Land of Israel;
That land of life and death
That hellish, hell-less heaven.*

*And when El Al next comes to get me
In some voluntary forced aliyah
(what could it ever mean to “choose”?)
I’ll get stuck in America’s craw
Like a poppy seed betwixt
Washington’s slave-teeth dentures*

*My mere existence
An inconvenient truth*

*My exodus, inevitable
Like a bird flung out the nest*



— *Poem: “Judean-American Exodus”*; by Alex Horn; written in Cherry Hill, New Jersey, USA on Tuesday, March 26th, 2024; first published in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA and online on Sunday, December 22nd, 2024 in this issue of *Green Golem: The Zionist Literary Magazine*

This is where I live. This is my favorite place.

— *Wisdom on a wall in a town square, beside a parking lot and a CVS Pharmacy*: by the third and fourth graders of Harvey Rice Elementary School in Cleveland, Ohio, USA: accompanying photo taken by Alex Horn in Shaker Square, Cleveland, on Sunday, December 8th, 2024; exact date and origin of quote unknown to this author

In early 2022, when COVID was still COVID, and I was very much a different man, I was for the second time in my life living and breathing and waking and eating in the Land of Israel — the land of my ancestors — and for the first time in that Land, though not quite the first time ever, I wanted very much to die.



In early 2022, when COVID was still COVID and I was very much a different man, I was for the second time in my life living and breathing and waking and eating in the Land of Israel — the land of my ancestors — and for the first time in that Land, though not quite the first time ever, I wanted very much to die.

It was the dying days of March; the birth of April. The Palestinian murderer Diaa Hamarsheh had killed five people in Bnei Brak, including an Arab Christian police officer and two Ukrainian guest workers. American actor Will Smith had slapped American comedian Chris Rock on live TV at the Oscars, which the world found much more important. I was in no place to judge. I spent a great deal of time that lonely Levantine spring trying to pick up a cigarette addiction, which I did not have and which would not stick; resisting all attempts to pick up a word of Hebrew or an ounce of common sense; consuming grilled meats, raw vegetables, pickled lemons, canned Coca-Cola, and a bitter surplus of self-pity; and writing or dreaming or coughing when I was not sleeping or crying or staring. Such was the sum of my second stint in the Holy Land.

I ate several excellent meals all by myself. I wore not-inexpensive clothes in a state of counterproductive dirt and disrepair and walked several miles one Shabbos morning to find an Arab laundry to assist me on Jerusalem's Sabbath, more out of a subconsciously self-hating, anti-observant spite than a genuine need to look good on a Saturday night. I was rather drunk in company where I would have perhaps been better off sober, and stone-cold sober in company where I really ought to have joined in and had some wine. I spoke incessantly to those to whom I had nothing to say; even more to those who did not wish to hear from me in the first place; and snubbed entirely all who might have needed or wanted or deserved my time or care or words. I embarrassed some people more than others; no one so very much, I think; and no one worse than myself.

I worked, badly; I traveled, meaninglessly; I spoke, empty, without even hearing myself, and I certainly did not listen to anyone else. I had never felt more seen, or more unseen; more supported, or more alone. I stood on several high-enough places throughout the city of Jerusalem, from Har Nof to Nachlaot to Kiryat Moshe — as a New Yorker by blood and a Philly boy by birth, deeply disturbed by Yerushalayim's relative lack of skyscrapers — and in each place contemplated with more or less seriousness the prospects that approached me if I were to jump off. Broken leg. Broken arm. Broken spirit.

Coma. Death. Paralysis. Embarrassment. Humiliation. Institutionalization. Broken neck. Broken spine. Bruised tailbone. Sprained ankle. Death. Death. Death. Relief. Revenge. Remorse. Reincarnation? No. Disappointment. Yes. Yes. Disappointment. Devastation. Death.

The exact reasons for this situation do not matter so very much. That is, they matter very much to me, but would be incredibly boring to you — and let's face it, I'm not going to tell you anyway. I hope you're not disappointed. You shouldn't be. In my years as a self-described storyteller, I have found that while the individual human reaction to grief is always incredibly fascinating, the particular causes of its manifestation are only very rarely anything special. In this view, I side with the great Spokane Native American author Sherman Alexie, when he said, "Great pain is repetitive. Grief is repetitive." As Alexie put the same essential wisdom in another context: "Poverty doesn't give you strength or teach you lessons about perseverance. Poverty only teaches you how to be poor."

Or, as my privileged ass has come to know it: hurting yourself doesn't teach you very much. It certainly doesn't teach you how to help anyone — not others and not yourself. At best, it makes you an expert in how one might and might not get through the sorts of days you're doing. There are no interest payments on self-abuse — not the kind you'd care to cash, anyway. As I put it back in my "absurdly self-aware sadboi" phase:

*if you sit in the corner
in the dark
holding your knees
and licking your wounds
for long enough;*

*you'll acquire a squint;
pins-and-needles;
and a taste for blood.*

– *Poem: "Best Practice" by Alex Horn, written in 2021, previously unpublished*

Trauma, it turns out, can be very boring indeed. Good people find value in hardship all the time, but the value they find is inside *themselves*. There is no inherent meaning in suffering — or if there is, I've never found it. That's ok, though. There is no need, as the writers of *BoJack Horseman* put it, to "fetishize our



grief.” Sure: everyone’s got trauma like everyone’s got Insta. So what? Yeah: pain is cheap. It’s what we do with it that matters.

Yeah, yeah, I know: that’s the easy answer. Turns out it’s the true one, too. Isn’t that a bitch? When the right thing is the simple thing. The easy thing. As it turns out, the hard thing. Because when the answer is easy, that means there is no answer. No “solution”. Nothing clever. Just a new day to get through. A lost password, and a missed credit card bill. An anniversary and an alarm clock. Nothing special. Nothing romantic. Nothing fun. Just what’s next.

So. So. You’re sad. That’s great. So what? Your dream is dead. I’ve heard. Old news. What’s next?

And in my case, what was next was this:

I kept on drinking my sugar-cane-kosher Coca-Cola; kept on burning my half-inhaled cigarettes; kept on putting my salary towards headphones and head shops and Jerusalem Mixed Grill; kept on pointing my head towards the clouds and my heart towards the fog; kept on acting, on the whole, like an idiot, which is to say, twenty-three and male and me.

But I didn’t jump.

And, as it happens, I left the land of Solomon and David not too very long after that, and whether by God or choice or circumstance, I haven’t been back since.

They say if you ask two Jews, you get three opinions. In my experience, it’s more like ask two Jews, get five opinions, four anecdotes, two follow-up questions, and one furious denial. But there are always exceptions. For instance: if the question was “who was the holiest Jewish man in living memory?” and you asked five Chabadniks, the answer would be pretty clear across the board. And even if you just asked a random assortment of folks in Katz’s Deli, I think the Rebbe still might score three or four out of five.

Suffice it to say, I don’t think I can match Schneerson’s numbers on that scale. Even if you asked my closest friends that question — “who was the holiest Jewish man in living memory?” — I don’t suppose I would score well — partially, I suspect, because all the Christians and half the Muslims would just say “Jesus”. Fair enough. But partially just ‘cause I’m not very holy. Menachem Mendel’s got me on that count. I’m just not all that holy, turns out. Game respect game.

In one specific instance, however, I would humbly submit that the great Lubavitcher Rebbe Menachem Mendel Schneerson — a figure of American Jewry larger both than life and than death — have something in common: the holy Rebbe made no great fuss about going to Israel. Not in his

own holy person, anyway. In fact, in a way, I have him beat: I’ve been twice, and he never went at all. Not once. Eat your heart out, Birthright. C’est la vie, Olami.

Even once the Rebbe had had convinced all questioners that he did indeed intend to keep both his residence and the Chabad movement centered in New York, he offered a rather fascinating explanation for why he didn’t at least visit Israel even once — not on vacation, or on a charity mission, or on a religious pilgrimage, or anything. Schneerson certainly sent many delegates, so to speak, to Israel, both directly and indirectly. His work as the final recognized leader and greatest ever popularizer of the Chabad movement, which, more than any other Orthodox movement focuses on outreach to secular Jews, has undoubtedly made him one of the single largest contributors to Jewish-Americans making aliyah. But he never went to the Holy Land himself.

The Rebbe’s reason for this was relatively simple, on the surface: he followed Maimonides in observing the principle such that “it is forbidden to leave the Land of Israel for the Diaspora at all times except to study Torah, to marry, or to save one’s property from the gentiles. After accomplishing these objectives, one must return to the Land of Israel.” Such a prohibition goes back to the Tanakh itself, when Moses sent twelve chieftains to survey the land — one from each of the Tribes — and they brought back reports which sparked unwarranted doubt and dismay. One does not make aliyah — nor even buy a round-trip to Ben-Gurion, necessarily — on a whim.

To be sure, Mr. Schneerson had no problem with the idea of other Jews going to Israel and back, even on his express directive. But when it came to him, it seemed, he observed a stricter standard. This was likely connected to his overall explanation for why he did not simply move to Israel permanently: as in a navy ship, the captain does not simply get on the boat when half his men are still out here sinking in the water. The Rebbe would not abandon American Jewry when they needed him. He would not forsake them, even for Jerusalem. He was born in 1902 (5662) in the Russian Empire, in modern-day Ukraine; he died in 1994 (5754) in Manhattan, New York City, USA; and he went down with his ship.

Some people, incidentally, pointed out to the Rebbe that his father-in-law, the previous Lubavitcher Rebbe, had traveled to Israel — had, in fact, visited the Cave of the Patriarchs at Hebron. Schneerson simply nodded and pointed out that his predecessor had had little choice — obligated to pray at the graves of the masters who came before him, and barred by



governments and circumstances from visiting the final resting places of the previous Chabad Rebbes in modern-day Russia and Poland, visiting the site where Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebekah, Jacob, and Leah lay was the only reasonable alternative. When asked why he might not do the same, and visit Hebron, Menachem Mendel Schneerson simply pointed out that his father-in-law was now buried in Queens. Many, many — from Israel and elsewhere — came to New York to consult with the Rebbe. And the Rebbe himself, it turned out, did not need to go far, to seek solace in a soul that he trusted.

And neither do I.

The Rebbe was beloved for many things, but my personal favorite aspect of him — as someone who mostly got to know the man through posthumously surviving YouTube clips — is his ability to speak to just about any kind of person in a way that is effective for that person. In that way, he reminds me of some of the very best mentors in my own life, from Holocaust survivor and speaker Sami Steigmann to author and debater Prakhar Gupta. No matter who someone is, people like the Lubavitcher Rebbe can connect. It's a gift, and one from which we can all benefit — and learn.

In 1983, Rabbi Schneerson received a letter from a Jew in Scottsdale, Arizona, asking why the leader did not simply move himself — and thus the center of the Chabad movement — to Jerusalem, or else to one of the many growing and thriving Jewish communities of Eretz Yisrael.

Rather than risk butchering such a concise and cogent explanation as the Rebbe provided, I will simply let him speak — or, rather, write — for himself:

Mr. _____

Greeting and Blessing:

I am in receipt of your letter, in which you write that you are concerned and puzzled, and urgently request a reply—as to why I do not go to Eretz Yisroel.

With all due respect, I do not understand at all what you will gain by having an answer to this paramount question.

Moreover, in as much as Hashem created everything according to His design, and knowing that nothing is superfluous, it would be a waste of one's time and effort if it were not used productively to the fullest extent.

On the other hand, a Jew's primary mission in life, as the Rabbis express it, "I was created to serve my Master," and this service is carried out by strengthening and spreading Yiddishkeit, first of all in one's own life, and then in one's surroundings, bearing in mind that the mitzvah of v'abavta l're'acha kamocha is the Great Principle of the Torah. Thus, if one should squander one's time and energy on extraneous matters, instead of using them in fulfillment of one's life's task, it would be an obvious waste and a disruption of the whole Divine order.

According to my information, the city in which you live is one where there is a great deal of room to work for the strengthening of Yiddishkeit, insofar as Jews are concerned, as well as for the promotion of the so-called Seven Moral Laws with all their ramifications, insofar as gentiles are concerned, for they were given by G-d to the children of Noah, i.e. all humanity. This is why I am all the more surprised at your question.

Inasmuch as you write that you are very puzzled, and do request an answer, I will not evade giving you one—all the more so since the answer is quite simple. Indeed, it is already implicit in what was said above about the first duty of a Jew, and of any human being, to fulfill his mission in the place where he lives, and only after he has done everything expected of him locally, to consider whether he should go to another place to carry on his mission there. Obviously, one should not abandon "the front" before making sure that everything is in order.

I am using the expression "the front" advisedly. You surely know what is happening around you—the very same thing that is happening wherever Jews live, especially where they are a small minority—in terms of alienation from Yiddishkeit, loss of Jewish identity, intermarriage and outright assimilation. It is the duty of every Jew to do his or her very utmost to combat the forces that are threatening the very foundations of our people—first and foremost where he find them in his immediate surroundings.

With blessing,

Rabbi Mendel Schneerson



On July 22nd, 2011 the Youtube content creator TJ Kirk, more commonly known by his channel's name "The Amazing Atheist," uploaded a video entitled "It's Only Sexist When Men Do It".

In an energetic six-and-a-half-minute rant, recorded while walking down a forested country road, Kirk criticized CBS's daytime talk show "The Talk" — the even less beloved cousin of ABC's "The View" — for an incident in which the show's all-female cast repeatedly ridiculed the victim of a 2011 incident of severe spousal assault.

In July 2011, during an in-progress divorce, a California woman drugged her soon-to-be-ex-husband, chopped off his genitals, and then placed them in the garbage disposal, with the clearly premeditated intent to render them irreparably destroyed and un-reattachable. To T.J. Kirk's horror — and all of ours, I would hope — the cast of "The Talk" cackled about the incident as if it was somehow an example of girl power. Co-host Sharon Osbourne, in particular stretched even her network's questionable sense of good taste by calling the woman's actions "quite fabulous" and then offering a lurid description of the man's maimed and violated body parts "whizzing around" in the kitchen sink. T.J. Kirk quite correctly pointed out that the opposite situation — a hypothetical panel of men on American daytime T.V. cackling and back-slapping about a man who similarly maimed his wife's body — would never be tolerated, or even come close to toleration, and rightly so.

By 2011, The Amazing Atheist had been releasing regular Youtube videos on atheism, skepticism, and politics for five years already. But this video on gender relations, feminism, and men's rights struck a nerve, catapulting his channel into wider attention. In the years since, Kirk has never stopped making regular videos on the platform. But even more than a decade later, the 2.5 million views on "It's Only Sexist When Men Do It" still place the video in his top-ten most viewed. Prior to this 2011 video, "The Amazing Atheist" channel was a small, libertarian weirdo making videos about skepticism, Christopher Hitchens, and trashing on George W. Bush. But after this 2011 video, Kirk spent the next half-decade or so reaching a much wider audience as one of the first wave of true "anti-woke" Youtubers. The Amazing Atheist of this era — what we might term "the tweens and the teens" — was an anti-progressive, anti-feminism, anti-institutionalist who tangled with Anita Sarkeesian, pontificated with Joe Rogan, and ranted about everything from the lack of butts in videogames to the surplus of political correctness on BuzzFeed. T.J. Kirk

rode his particular blend of apartisan, anti-establishment politics and weird movie reviews for all it was worth, and converted it into millions of views, a couple decent books, and something approaching fame.

At this point, the Jewish leftists and Zionist liberals in our readership — and I know there are many of you — may be close to gagging. Yeah, you might say: so, this God-hater rode that for all it was worth, and when it was done, he switched to women-hating? So? What's the point?

Well, the point is this: if you think that TJ Kirk is an unfriendly, misanthropic, asocial YouTube pariah, I really wouldn't argue with you. Nor, I think, would TJ. But if you think that he's some kind of anti-trans, anti-liberal regressive — if you think that he is that now, certainly; or even that he was that, then — you'd be very, very wrong.

Just about a month ago, on November 21, 2024, TJ Kirk published a video to The Amazing Atheist channel called "The Rise and Fall of New Atheism: A Forgotten Relic." The video is, in part, a direct response to a video made by a Youtube user named "MagicMush", called "The Story of TJ Kirk: The Relic of a Forgotten Age."

TJ doesn't spend much of the video responding, though. Partially, I think, this is a matter of seniority. Sure — these days, MagicMush's average video view counts are regularly ten or even twenty times that of The Amazing Atheist's, despite TJ's 900k+ subscribers dwarfing Mush's 200k. On YouTube, subscribers are a function of time on the platform in years past; but current views are a function of time spent on the platform in the present; and current views are where the money, and the attention, can be found. But even so. MagicMush's very first video came out in 2022. A full decade before that, back in 2012, TJ Kirk was already a seasoned YouTube veteran, riding the wave of a slew of loosely aligned micro-movements he had helped to spark. His career since has been a rocky wave of ups and downs. Mostly downs. But it hasn't gone anywhere. It hasn't stopped.

As TJ explains in his recent video, he was a leading member of the New Atheist movement — for a time, in the early 2010s, an argument could be made that he was among its most influential faces — but he was never accepted into their ranks. In fact, to say that he was not accepted is a gross understatement: he was hardly even recognized.

During the decade of my childhood — known memorably, and perhaps unfairly, as "the aughts" — public interest in atheism reached heights that had not been reached in recent memory, and which have certainly not been seen since. In



2007, the great rhetorician Christopher Hitchens coined the term “the Four Horsemen of New Atheism” to refer to himself and his fellow writers and philosophers Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris and Daniel Dennet. Other atheist figures, from Victor J. Stenger to Ayaan Hirsi Ali, soon joined in to lend their unique perspectives towards the burgeoning public interest in secularism and rationality. As TJ Kirk noted, “Of the ten best-selling atheist books of all time, eight of them were published between 2004 and 2007”.

From an atheist’s or agnostic’s perspective, it was too good to be true. From a believer’s perspective, it was too unholy to last. Both, in fact, were true.

As many have noted, “atheism” — a lack of belief in a God or gods — is not a religion. Nor is it a coherent ideological movement. It is not a movement at all. It is not even a belief. It is only the lack of belief — and not even the lack of a very specific belief. Consequently, the popularity of the label has varied wildly. As TJ Kirk noted in his recent video, polling data suggests that some people who identify as atheists may technically be agnostics or deists, while an even higher number of people, who do not identify as atheists, may actually qualify under the dictionary definition.

To zoom out for a moment, Zionists — anything here sound familiar?

Due to its lack of a clear organizing principle or ideology beyond a general belief in rationality, the New Atheist movement soon scattered. Its greatest exponents, most notably Christopher Hitchens, died young. Its leftists joined in with the old atheist crowd led by PZ Meyers and founded “Atheism+”, a movement which tried to merge atheism and progressivism, in an attempt so ill-conceived and so poorly communicated that the phrase “dead on arrival” almost seems too generous. “Atheism+” did however succeed in driving out the remaining centrists and conservatives. Ayaan Hirsi Ali, who had fled hardline Islam for atheism, recently converted to Christianity. Even Richard Dawkins, that most hated of anti-theists and evolutionary theorists, now calls himself a “cultural Christians” and sings the praises of carols and hymns.

And on Youtube, meanwhile, where the real quantity of eyeballs are, everything swung back towards Jesus. Well, Jesus, it turned out — and Trump.

As *The Amazing Atheist* put it in his recent video:

“R/atheism was removed from the Reddit default list amid growing public sentiment that atheists were a bunch of obnoxious assholes. Content creators like me transitioned away from atheist content into an era of anti-feminist and anti-SJW content, which was

ultimately subsumed by the MAGA movement and consequently cemented itself back into Christianity. Which is why you have creators who once proudly identified as skeptics now carrying water for Western religious traditions.”

The Amazing Atheist channel experienced fertile growth from 2010 to 2016. Then Trump came into office, and the wind went out his sails. For some creators, that happened because they were mediocre satirists, and given Trump was a walking joke already, they couldn’t figure out how to make fun of him effectively. TJ Kirk was never a satirist, though, not truly: he was the satire. The Trump presidency killed TJ because the Trump presidency killed political discourse on Youtube. Suddenly, the zeitgeist was swinging, and with the proverbial rock approaching the literal hard place, there was no room for a weirdo like TJ.

For TJ is not the conservative you might assume from this intro. TJ Kirk was, essentially, a BernieBro. He’s queer and trans friendly. He trashed Hilary Clinton and Ted Cruz with equal vigor, and has spent quite a bit more time trashing the Bush’s and the neocons than anyone else. He beefed with JK Rowling on Twitter. He had a minor sex scandal and wasn’t even a little embarrassed about it. He kinda hates Israel, sure, and America — but he kinda hates everyone, to be fair, and he doesn’t hate us any more than most. He’s more socialist than fascist, but he doesn’t peddle lies for Cuba or North Korea. He’s more woke than enlightened, by my lights, but hey — who am I to judge? My 2022 was not so very long ago.

The fact is, Sharon Osbourne’s joke — making fun of a man whose genitals had just been horrifically mutilated — was pretty horrifying, especially given the context in which she delivered it. And yet — it was a joke. TJ Kirk likes jokes. So did his heroes, from Christopher Hitchens to George Carlin. Those men didn’t always love Israel. But they didn’t love antisemites either. They didn’t love hypocrites. They loved truth. Ozzie’s wife was born Sharon Rachel Levy in 1952, and honestly, she did the best she could with a pretty weak cast, on *The Talk*. You can quote me on that.

And TJ Kirk — leftist, anti-Zionist, anti-theist misanthrope that he is — is no man’s friend, so far as I can tell. But he’s no man’s liar, either. He is his own man. A goyish Chasid’s dynasty of one.

Movements can’t cohere without solid organizing principles.

Do we have one?

Well: “Let’s support Israel” is a good start. “Let’s support Jews is even better.”

But is it gonna be enough?



The American President (1995, rated PG-13) is not a perfect movie by any means. But it is, by my lights anyway, a very, very good one. Towards the end of the film, liberal-as-the-day-is-long President Andrew Shepherd — the words of Aaron Sorkin in the voice and heart of Michael Douglas — comes out of a self-induced seclusion from the press and delivers a blistering defense of both his actions and his friends. My favorite part goes like this:

America is advanced citizenship. You gotta want it bad, 'cause it's gonna put up a fight. It's gonna say, "You want free speech? Let's see you acknowledge a man whose words make your blood boil, who's standing center stage and advocating at the top of his lungs that which you would spend a lifetime opposing at the top of yours. You want to claim this land as the land of the free? Then the symbol of your country can't just be a flag; the symbol also has to be one of its citizens exercising his right to burn that flag in protest." Show me that, defend that, celebrate that in your classrooms. Then, you can stand up and sing about the "land of the free."

Canadian Youtuber J.J. McCullough is, at present, my favorite social and cultural commentator in the world. McCullough, age 40, is loosely aligned with the Canadian Conservative Party, and has long been one of the freshest and most novel online exponents of its particular brand of modern conservatism. McCullough is my type of creator — in one word, complex. J.J. is gay, but not very vocal about issues of sexuality; he is conservative, but well-beloved by many liberals; he is a friend of Israel, but not a self-described Zionist. He first became well known as a young person for his opposition to the continued prominence of the British monarchy in Canadian currency and diplomatic procedure — nowadays, it seems he doesn't care very much about that cause. He has, I suppose, bigger fish to fry.

In several videos, McCullough describes his political philosophy, which he frames uniquely, but which I would argue is quite common, even among those who would not call it as such. I will term under a phrase that J.J. nearly — but never quite — uses himself: *"gratitude conservatism"*. As he puts it:

"I am the product of a comfortably middle-class, First World family and community. . . my gratitude for the comforts that I have enjoyed has disposed me to be conservative towards the status quo."

Or, as that rather better known, much more controversial Canadian speaker, Jordan Peterson, put it: *"Before trying to save the world try cleaning your room first."*

If this moderate, gratitude-based conservatism sounds a bit too much like the self-satisfied self-justifications of the comfortable, educated center-right — well, you wouldn't be entirely wrong. But the comfortable, educated center-left can't have all the fun. In fact, they don't seem to have much at all these days. As the British philosopher Bertrand Russell put it: "People's opinions are mainly designed to make them feel comfortable; truth, for most people is a secondary consideration."

Well — maybe we ought to change that. Starting with our own backyards. In his brilliant recent book *The War on the West*, British author Douglas Murray quotes a passage from *The Brothers Karamazov* where Dostoevsky's devil casually notes that his "best feelings, gratitude, for example, are formally forbidden" to him. Or, in other words: you better take some joy in your lot.

To take it back to our very own Rebbe, Menachem Mendel Schneerson: *"The first duty of a Jew, and of any human being, [is] to fulfill his mission in the place where he lives."*

It is not bad for us to think big. In fact, it is essential that we think big. But in thinking big, we must always be careful to think beyond ourselves. We are ourselves. We will always be ourselves. But we are not everything. And we will never will be everything.

I am a Jew. And yet I learned brotherhood from the son of American Quakers and masculinity from the son of American lesbians. A Christian father taught me calculus, and an atheist misanthrope taught me God. I learned love from the granddaughter of an Italian Catholic and grief from the son of a Brazilian Catholic and sex from a straight-up Irish Catholic. An Indian Hindu and a California Sikh spent seven years trying to teach me sense, and when the dust settled from my private, noisy despair, I found they had led me not to their particular words or wisdom, but to some silence of my own. My story is not over. In some ways, it has, I hope, hardly begun. But wherever it goes — wherever I go — my story will be an American story. Of that, I am quite sure.

To be clear: there have been many, many Jews in that story. To be sure. Lots of Jews. Great Jews. Important Jews. Israelis and Americans; family and friends; lovers and mentors. I fail to highlight their contributions, not to diminish my debt to them, but rather to prove a point about myself. Stories, by



their nature, are inherently incomplete. A picture is worth a thousand words, but a lifetime is worth much more than a million. No eight-hour epic can cover a soul. We creators choose which details to emphasize; which to obscure; which to withhold. But some parts of the story can never be obfuscated; never ignored; or, at least, should not be; because those parts are where the truth, for whatever it may be worth, can be found. And in this case, my truth is this: my particular story can be told quite well without much reference to my ethnicity; to my familial origins; to my faith, or lack thereof. I would not necessarily choose to do so — but it could be done. I was influenced by T.J. Kirk and by J.J. McCollough; by John Green and by Hank Green; by Rhett James McLaughlin and Charles “Link” Lincoln Neal III; by Matt Guion and Jesse Coder. That’s not even all the Youtubers, let alone all the rest — and of those I named there, all of them were vital to making me me, and none of them were Jews.

My Judaism has changed me, but it did not make me. I was made in America. In all likelihood, I’ll rot here, too. If my soul resides anywhere beside my body, in fact, it lives very little in Yerushalayim, and very much in New Jersey — and if you clutch your Magen David and sneer at that, well, remember: the Lenni-Lenape have always liked it just fine here. Anyway, all us Old World types from across the Atlantic had millennia of opportunity to invent maple syrup for ourselves, and we totally blew it. Talk about a lost civilization.

I am not defined by my Judaism, I am elevated by it — and I choose to be elevated most of all, not by my birth, but by my actions. I am a Jew by birth, and always will be, proudly so. I am an American by birth, and I choose to remain that, proudly so. I wouldn’t want to pick between them — but personally, if I had to choose, that second one matters more to me. True, I may say that as a secularist — but I think most of my fellow Zionists would concede that those great Jewish heroes Herzl and Jabotinsky would agree, though not with my decision, at least with my framing of the question. Who are we? Well: we are what we choose.

You pick as you see fit. But I, for one, choose where I was born; where my father was born; where his father, who was born and lived and died before I ever did the first one, spent his life teaching high school history and yeshiva classes not twenty miles from where I went to college. I choose America. If that makes me bellicose, in your book, or wrong, or naive, well — I’ve been wrong and naive and belligerent all my life, usually about things on which I’ve been much less informed. I’ll take my chances. I’ll take my choices. I choose to be American. Not that the 14th Amendment gave me much

choice in the matter. But I choose it anyway. I am not going anywhere. Apologies. Actually, no. No apologies necessary.

And anyway — if I wish to find Jews as fine as any in the world, I have no need to journey far. There are still, for now, more Jews in the United States than in Israel, and even if and when that changes, America will remain a home for Jewish life every bit as real and vibrant and valuable as anything in the Middle East. Israel is great. It is lovely. It is, in fact, my second favorite country on Earth, and always will be (dear apologies to my beloved third-place Canada: Quebec, get yourselves together).

To be clear: I love Florentin’s graffiti and Frishman Beach’s water. I love the quiet dignity of the Gush Katif Museum, and the chaotic humanity of Mahane Yehuda. I love being surrounded by Jewish people upon Jewish people, and for that, nowhere on Earth beats the Land of Israel. That fact is something to celebrate. It has only been like that for a handful of decades. Originally, of course, it was that way, but for millennia it was not. Our liberation is recent. The rights of the natives can never be taken for granted. They are worthy of protecting. Am Yisrael is worthy of protecting. It is worthy of conscriptions; of volunteer lone soldiers; of donations to Magen David Adom; of coordination with AIPAC; of coordination with students in Birthright, Meor, Tikvah, and more. Israel and Israelis are worthy, from Jews around the world, of nothing less than their love. Of belonging; nationhood; nationality. Of shared nationality. Am yisrael chai. I’ll sing it with you till my lungs are sore.

However. As for me; as for the moment; at least when it comes to legalities — I’m good. In fact, quite good. I’m all American, and it’s all alright.

I have no particular desire for any citizenship beyond that claimed by Lenny Bruce, Bob Dylan, Billy Joel, Harrison Ford, Louis Brandeis, and Stan Lee. I could set my sights no higher than to bear the passport held by Gertrude Elion, Elisheva Carlebach, Ruth Bader Ginsberg, Mayim Bialik, Sarah Silverman, and Judy Blume. Find me Israeli performers who you believe showed us what it means to be Jewish better than William Shatner and Leonard Nimoy — and did it without their characters even being Jewish, mind you — and I will listen to them. Gladly. Eagerly. Twice. But do not hold your breath for me to share your ranking on the subject. There is such a thing as hometown pride.

In the memorably named November 2001 *South Park* episode “Osama bin Laden Has Farty Pants” — the first episode of the animated comedy to air after the devastating attacks of September 11th — the episode ends, after many shenanigans,



with the Taliban overthrown and Osama bin Laden dead. Despite this, the victory seems hollow: the main characters — Kyle, voiced by Matt Stone, who is Jewish; and Stan, voiced by Trey Parker, who is not — are dismayed to find that their Afghani pen pals still hate their guts, perhaps even more so after their nation’s victory. As they are leaving, Stan sticks a little American flag in the ground. Surprised, Kyle says he thought perhaps the Afghani kids had convinced Stan to turn his back on his country.

In a delivery that I’ve always found quite touching, Trey Parker’s young Stan says the following:

“No, dude. America may have some problems, but it’s our home, our team. If you don’t want to root for your team, then you should get the hell out of the stadium.”

In the end, our Colorado kid Stan and Kyle — one Jewish, one not; one red-headed, one not — salute the American flag, declare “Go America” and end with an even more enthusiastic “Go Broncos.”

I don’t wish to ruin a joke by explaining it. Nor do I wish to overanalyze *South Park* (although somebody really should). But I will risk both of those for a moment, and simply express what I think Trey and Matt might have been trying to say back in 2001:

Humanism is fantastic. Internationalism is all very well. But at the end of the day, there’s nothing wrong with national pride, or local pride, either. There’s nothing wrong with patriotism; with sports teams; with rivalries; with cliques. As the Irish-American comedian John Mulaney once noted:

A: “*What’s a clique?*”

B: “*It’s when a group of people hang out together.*”

A: “*Oh, you mean like having friends?*”

B: “*No, because these people make fun of other people.*”

A: “*Oh, you mean like having friends?*”

Not all clubs are cults. Not all invite-only events are obnoxious, and not all invite-only meetings are nefarious. Sure — some are. Plenty. But not all. Sometimes — often — it’s just people, making do. Getting by. Sometimes, a kid just wants his treehouse to himself. Jews know that as well as any group.

So, the bad news: things are bad. The good news: things are not so bad as they seem.

We do not get to choose our birth, but we do get to choose our nation. Or nations. As holders of the nationality (though not necessarily citizenship) of two of the world’s most important nations — its oldest on the one hand, and its strongest on the other — Jewish-Americans are not in an unenviable position. But that does not make our position any easier.

It is a question, as it so often as, is of nuance.

It is true that the Jewish notion of being a “Chosen People” is not at all the supremacist nonsense that the antisemites make it out to be. Jews are chosen, by our tradition, to follow a very certain path laid out by God. That does not mean that other people, and other nations, might not be chosen in their own way. We simply believe that we have come to know our own way — our own covenant — with the forces beyond our reckoning. We take on obligations, and we seek righteousness.

It is also true, however, that when some Jews talk of being “Chosen,” they really do think about being “better.”

It is true that 22% of Nobel Prize winners across all fields are Jewish, while Jews are only 0.2% of the world population — and in fact, an argument could be made that the number of Jewish winners should well be even higher. Jews are, by any measure, astonishingly astounding. If my task was to send a single, self-contained culture — one, small nation — off to an alien overlord, as an example of humanity, I think you could really do worse than the Jews. In fact, that might make a good book — pack off a bunch of Chabidniks in a spaceship, come back in seven centuries, and find all the aliens have converted and are searching for the Rebbe next to Alpha Centauri.

Anyway.

I am a son of Washington more so than Ben-Gurion; a son of Martin Luther King Jr. more so than King Solomon; a son of George C. Marshall, George S. Patton, and Dwight D. Eisenhower, not Yitzhak Rabin, Ariel Sharon, or Moshe Dayan. The historical Abraham that taught me most is buried in Illinois, not Hebron; and my grandfather, Abraham, is buried in New Jersey. Not to speak for them, but as I would see it: my own family’s holy places are on the East Coast, not the Levantine shore. You can call that attitude frivolous; ahistorical; ungrateful; uneducated; unconnected. So be it. I can only call you sectarian; provincial; unimaginative; unaccepting; uninformed.

To quote a heroic poet of the nation of my citizenship:

“Do I contradict myself?

Very well then, I contradict myself,

(I am large, I contain multitudes.)”

— Walt Whitman (1819-1892), “Song of Myself, 51”

Or, to quote a heroic poet of the nation of my birthright, once himself born and living in his own diaspora in Spain:

My heart is in the east, and I in the uttermost west--

How can I find savor in food? How shall it be sweet to me?

How shall I render my vows and my bonds, while yet



*Zion lieth beneath the fetter of Edom, and I in Arab chains?
A light thing would it seem to me to leave all the good things of
Spain --
Seeing how precious in mine eyes to behold the dust of the
desolate sanctuary.*

— “My Heart is in the East” by Judah Halevi (c. 1141) Translated from the Hebrew by Nina Salaman, 1924, Jewish Publication Society of America, *Essential Texts of Zionism* (Jewish Virtual Library)

My depressed 2022 self was, if I may be so bold, Judah Halevi in near-inverse. My heart was in the West, and I in the uttermost Middle East. Conscripted Israeli kids make fun of lone soldiers for a reason — and I was only a post-college transplant. Don’t get me wrong: lone soldiers are heroic. They are vital. They are lovely. They are also, undeniably, cringey as all hell. It’s nothing personal — anything so wholesome, honest, and genuine must be cringey on some level (okay: a few levels), almost by definition. I’m not talking about elite units or anything — and of course, I’ve never served a day in my life in either the Israeli or American Armies — but from what I can tell, there can be a hilariously fine line between your baseline Israeli training unit and a Jewish-American summer camp Counselor-in-training program. Except, I suppose, for the stakes.

Jews have come to be defined by our Diaspora. And now that we have spent seventy-five years with the option of going home, our great national questions are knocking on our mezuzah-clad doors, more loudly and more insistently than ever. Decades of Birthright, hasbara, and Chabad have made it so that for many young Jewish people, ranging all spans of belief and observance, “moving to Israel” can under the right circumstances acquire a similar appeal to “perpetual ecstatic orgasm”. Sometimes — okay, for the religious — I mean that rather literally so. That sounds like vulgar hyperbole — and I suppose it is — but to paraphrase Ecclesiastes, there is a time and place for everything under the sun. Even love. Especially.

In one of his more fascinating, oft-repeated areas of exploration, JJ McCullough notes that Canadian identity has long been defined by a persistent anti-Americanism. He notes the great deal of historical evidence — from taxation to immigration policy to propaganda — suggesting that the British consciously aided and abetted such an attitude, in order to prevent Canada from ever drawing too close to its neighbor to the south. Across several videos, JJ notes that the most prominent form of Canadian patriotism has evolved from a

conservative Anglo-Canadian pride in the British Empire, into a liberal all-Canadian pride in moderate progressivism, but that anti-Americanism was and has been a consistent feature of both. He has noted recently, however, that anti-Americanism is, on the whole, on the decline across Canada, especially among younger people — thanks in part to the equalizing power of the Internet itself, and platforms such as Youtube, which show Canadians and Americans how very much we have in common. JJ also points out that anti-Americanism is not is not unique to Canadians, or to Europeans, or even to foreigners — it is in fact alive and well among American intellectuals across the ideological board, from Tucker Carlson to Rachel Maddow. It lives and breathes, too, among the wealth of foreigners we pay well to insult us while they live here, from John Oliver to Trevor Noah. Much more than celebrities, though — ultimately, who cares? — anti-Americanism is alive in our classrooms, our kitchen tables, and our minds. Both Republicans and Democrats have come to see their country as something dirty; their government as something sinister; their largest corporations as inherently greedy, and their most prominent minds as inherently selfish. These views did not drop from the sky. They are not wholly unwarranted. But they have to change. The reality must change, yes — but so must the perception. One cannot move without the other. So it is with Zionism. If Canadians are insecure about their relationship to America, then Jewish-Americans — self-hating anti-Zionist and and IDF reservists alike — are insecure about their relationship to Israel. And, well — we’re gonna need both.

During one Shabbat weekend of my lonely, lasting, long-gone Jerusalem spring of 2022, I found myself freezing to death in the middle of a desert. That in and of itself wouldn’t have been so bad, but we had functional space heaters; we weren’t using them; I still felt like death; and on top of it all, I was supposed to be enjoying myself. Sure: I was there for so cheap that it almost felt like free. My whole existence was being subsidized. But still. The injustice.

Context is key. Seeing that I was lost and angry, and forgivably — but incorrectly — thinking that I might be responsive to normal human sources of help, an older mentor had directed me to a weekend Shabbaton trip: a bunch of young Jewish folks, driving out to Judea. A bus picked us up in Jerusalem. I’m not the most socially adept guy out there, but I can read



group dynamics like a book, and I read a lot of the books. Before the bus was half-packed, I knew that this group was half-bonded. A quarter old friends; a quarter new ones; a quarter eager outsiders; a quarter the scratch and change, like *kkme*. In normal times, a contrarian comedy-lover like me might have taken this situation — a friendly community eager to chat, laughing while they loaded suitcases — as a lovely opportunity to meet some people in the type of atmosphere in which I normally wouldn't.

At the time, I simply took it as a bad sign.

We made a camp at a couple shacks in the middle of the desert, not a mile from an Arab village. The site we were at was called Jabel Muntar (“The Guards’ mountain” in Arabic): the highest mountain in the Judean Desert. According to tradition, Jabel Muntar is where the Jewish priest would kill the scapegoat, Azazel, on each Yom Kippur Day of Atonement; and is thus also, perhaps, where the demon Azazel, as described in the Book of Enoch, landed from the fall that made him a fallen angel. The Shabbaton was supposed to be fun. It seemed like it was. There were goats, and chickens, and dogs, and even a couple cows. Before Shabbos came in, we marched up the mountains, dogs in tow, and investigated the hill where the best men of their generations plunged their hand into goat guts; where, legends say, a high and holy fell from heaven. We were early 20's, most of us, or mid-20s; all single, except one very loud and happy couple, clearly brand new to the “joys of intimacy” and loving it. We read prayers; sang songs; drank booze; froze our butts off with plentiful electricity all around us, on account of ancient halakha; and probably spoke a thousand thousand thousand words, young Jews of all sorts coming together to wheel and feel and laugh about the world.

Sounds like a good time, right? Yeah, I think so too. I almost wish I could have been there.

I spent most of that weekend trip walking back and forth between the sleeping shack, which was moderately warm; and the bathroom, which was moderately private. 75% of the time, I had my headphones in; 50% of the time, I was looking at a screen. I read a book called *Skyward* in the Kindle App — don't ask me why but Mormon-written science fiction is so often the best kind — and I washed and dried my hands, not for religious import, but only to waste time. If that makes me sound like a loser, well, yeah. Not my brightest days. But I didn't care, at the time; and even in retrospect, that's not the part that bothered me. A man has bigger fish to fry. No one ever put it better than Faulkner: “The only thing worth

writing about is the human heart in conflict with itself.”

Still: it wasn't a good look for me. For much of the trip, and especially the part that mattered, it was Shabbat. Both the organizers and my fellow attendees were either religious or religious enough for this, and not switching on so much as a lightbulb. I used my phone and bluetooth earbuds so much I went through a full two of the three external batteries which I had brought, and was left to privately agonize about if the third would last through tomorrow's bus ride. I did not exactly set myself up to make friends.

In fairness to me, I did not intend to. Remember Ecclesiastes: it was not the time. And in fairness to everyone else, I encountered no cruelty. Not even hostility. No forced friendship, either. I emanated the aura of someone who wished to be left alone — of someone whose heart sang out:

“You are not the person or people to whom I wish to speak; there is nothing for you here with me” — and for the most part, that particular group of thirty-odd young Jewish professionals, men and women, ever polite, obliged ready enough to my whims.

Almost.

At one point, towards the end of the night — trying, perhaps to salvage what was left of the weekend — I poured three inches of bad red wine in a cracked plastic cup and joined a casual group discussion that became less casual the moment I sat down. For a while, I was quiet. Then, I was deferential. Eventually, though, I got dragged into a discussion of why I didn't want to make aliyah.

It was not an idle or irrelevant question, in such a context. This Shabbaton crowd consisted of young Jewish professionals, mostly Americans or Europeans. Or, well — they used to be. Nearly all of them had either already moved to Israel; were in the process of doing so; or were in the process of either being convinced to do so or being convinced to feel guilty about not doing so.

Not in the mood to be drawn into a broader discussion, I gave my simple, stock answer — I'm a human first; an American second; and a Jew third. It might have ended there. But then another young man brought up the example of the German Jews who had similarly said that they were as German as they were Jewish, or *moreso*. It was a perfectly reasonable comparison. Like me, those patriotic German-Jews had relied on their non-Jewish nationality — and, of course, it had let them down. Many of them were the first to be murdered in the Shoah.



Now, of course, I could have offered any number of reasoned responses to that gentleman's relevant point of discussion. Hell: I could have done it then. But I wasn't in the place. I was tired, and cold, and hungry, and miserable. I was surrounded by people I didn't particularly like, and I wasn't even allowed to dislike them; I was in a situation I didn't want to be in, and I wasn't even allowed to hate it. For the first time in my life, I felt what it feels like to still be claustrophobic when you step outside; when you observe the big wide world around you, and it still feels small.

That night, I curled up in my sleeping bag, cursing every Talmudist whose work had resulted in the banning of space heaters on the Sabbath. I jabbed at my phone, bitterly noting on Google Maps that the Gett driver that wouldn't come at midnight from here back to Jerusalem would have traveled less total miles than one from Columbia to NYU. The same guy from before, came over, smiling. I don't know what I was expecting. An apology? No, not that. None was needed.

But still. Something nice.

Instead, he said, "Hey, can you stop using your phone? It's the Sabbath."

I don't remember what I said.

I do remember it wasn't nice.

I think, maybe, I might have just said, "Yes," and gone right back to staring at my screen. Is that better or worse?

I spent a lot, lot longer on my phone after that, if only to prove a point. I wish I could say I went outside and stared at the Israeli stars in the Judean night sky; or beheld the Israeli sun as it rose through the Israeli dawn; or whatever; but I didn't. It was cold, dude. I was angry. I was sad. I stayed cuddled up in my sleeping bag, on my iPhone, probably skimming through fanfiction about Robb Stark, and when the sun rose, I did not believe in God. I did not believe in God before that night, either. I never have. But after that night in particular. I did not believe.

I went back to Jerusalem in a daze, and spent several days going nowhere else and trying desperately — although halfheartedly — to pretend to be where I was. Before Purim, I was halfheartedly invited by one of the Shabbaton cliques to join their little drinking party. Still not really in the place to be human, I was needlessly late — in a city that, to be fair, has a decidedly mixed record for 24/7 public transport — and ended up walking several miles in a drizzle, surrounded by hordes of Orthodox men, presumably on their way to some holy activity to which I was not privy. The men were wearing cloth-or-fur hats which were seemingly wrapped in saran wrap,

and in between listening to Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban and *The Coming of Neo-Feudalism: A Warning to the Global Middle Class* on audiobook, I wondered why, at that point, God couldn't just let them wear plastic hats.

When I finally arrived at the party, I found out why the guy I'd had on Whatsapp hadn't been answering: he was passed out drunk at the kitchen table. So were two other people. Four pretty, smart looking girls were sitting eating pretzels. I said nothing, but charged my phone nearby. Thirty minutes later, it turned out I had arrived just in time for evening prayers. Yippee.

At the shul, I had another moment like my one in the desert. For a moment, I almost let my guard down; almost joined in; almost felt at home. I joined a dancing crowd of boys in the synagogue, and just in the moment I started to almost half-enjoy myself, someone that I could not see grabbed the hood of my coat and yanked it, roughly, over my head.

It was not so much painful as surprising. Actually, maybe it was painful. My head was in the state to receive it as pain.

In any case, I stomped right out without looking back for an explanation that may or may not have been forthcoming anyway, and to this day Purim 2022 is my last time in a Jerusalem shul.

Days went by like that. Eventually, the work ran out.

The night before my flight back to Newark, I could not sleep. Insomnia was the least of my problems, at the time — but still, it felt like the camel's straw, at that point. I liked sleep. My dreams weren't pleasant, but they were sure better than the waking, most times. I laid on my bed in a familiar position — eyes open, heart closed — feeling empty and dull and old. Old at 23. How stupid that sounds, now. But as a young American in Jerusalem, well. It didn't feel so stupid as all that.

My Airbnb near Nachlaot was on the sixth floor of the building. As it turned out, according to the good folks at Google and our A.I. overlords, while falls of just about any height can kill you, a building has to be seven or even eight stories high before it approaches statistical 100% mortality.

Drat. Come on, man. I never did have any luck.

I, for one, have never been much of a gambler. At least — not in circumstances where I actually know the odds.

I felt a buzz from my phone, and turned over in bed to check it. A text from a friend back home. He'd done something stupid. Something funny. Something fun. Something I didn't understand. Something that, in my present, selfish condition, I didn't care about at all.



He'd done it in Texas.

I'd never been to Texas. Never been to California, or Oklahoma, or South Dakota, either. I'd been to New York, sure; and Florida; and Arizona; and Colorado; and Virginia; Delaware, and Georgia, and Massachusetts; but never Texas.

Not once.

I'd never been to Ein Gedi, though, either. Or Haifa. Or Hebron. I'd been to Tel Aviv, and Jerusalem, but never Haifa.

Yet somehow, in that moment, I knew that those two things were very different.

Because Houston where I'd never been, was home. Even if it sucked, parts of it — it was home. I might never even go there. But it'd always be home. And Haifa, where I'd never been, was just another to-be-beloved place I'd probably visit. A Jew in Israel is never a tourist. But nor does that make him an Israeli. Not even a passport can do that, perhaps.

Perhaps it's something more.

A wave of blissful comfort fell over me, at once, and I lapsed into unconsciousness in that rented mattress, passing out without even clicking off the phone.

And when I went, the next day, to the airport — and when I went, the next eighteen months, to face down the unenviable task of rebuilding my life — I did so, at least, well rested.

If I had to put the blissful realization of that Jerusalem bedroom into words, it would go something like this:

"It's okay.

This isn't your place.

You don't belong here."

Those words don't sound very comforting. Not at all. But as so often happens with words of ill-repute, they were exactly what I needed at the time.

I was not a Jew lost and alone in my homeland.

I was a foreigner: an American boy in a strange, strange land.

I would never know what it was like to be Israeli. And that was just fine by me. My Israeli friends would never know what it would be like to be American, either. The dual citizens would have it their way. The lone soldier fellas would spit their truth. It would all be okay.

The words of my soul were not perfect, that night. They were not, as a believer might put it, true wisdom from Above. But they were something close enough. They were enough. They ended:

"You're going home."

Which sounds a lot nicer than the rest of it.

And in the morning, I did.

Yes, yes. It all made sense. I was a foreigner. Of course. Of course. A foreign man, a lost child, a wayward son — an outsider by no wrongdoing of my own — and with that relief to balm my guilty conscience, I found the rest I needed, and flew home to face the music when it stopped.

In the novel *Anna Karenina*, Leo Tolstoy told us: "All happy families are alike; each unhappy family is alike in its own way." As a fiction writer, I am always wary of those who quote passages of fiction free of their context, as though they carry the author's blanket endorsement — the next time someone throws Polonius's "to thyself be true" at Shakespeare's feet, kindly help me kick it aside — but in the case of *Anna Karenina*, I think we can give ourselves a pass. Tolstoy was never much for subterfuge; none of the old Russian masters were, really. When Tolstoy tells us "all happy families are alike," he means it. Happiness, by his lights, is boredom. It is mindlessness. Happiness is a thousand choirs of a thousand angels, a million voices singing prettily without a single ounce of free will. Misery, on the other hand, is the unobstructed beauty of chaos. It is the wild joy of risk; of lust; of discovery. Trauma is endlessly interesting; heartbreak is the real romance; pain is pleasure, and love is loss.

Such an attitude might well have seemed consoling in nineteenth and twentieth century Russia (it might well seem even more consoling in twenty-first century Russia, come to think of it, though I will have to run that by a real Russian or three to make sure).

But at least to me, that kind of thinking stinks of an intellectual laziness born of the same sort of nihilism that has always consigned so many "classic works of literature" — even my relative favorites — to the bottom of my bookshelf. Again, I prefer Sherman Alexie's take. In his young-adult novel *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* (2007), Alexie's pseudo-autobiographical protagonist, Junior, responds directly to Tolstoy, in the context of the rampant alcoholism within his community on a Spokane Reservation:

"Gordie, the white boy genius, gave me this book by a Russian dude named Tolstoy, who wrote, 'Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.' Well, I hate to argue with a Russian genius, but Tolstoy didn't know Indians, and he didn't know that all Indian families are unhappy for the same exact reasons: the frikkin' booze." — Sherman Alexie, *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*, 2007

The Jewish community, of course, has had its own problems



with alcohol. But as much as I hate to argue with the character of young Junior, I suspect that his creator, Sherman Alexie, wouldn't mind me disagreeing a little. The Jewish and the Indian communities both have problems. But more even than substance, I think, it is the disconnection from our land. Diaspora, it turns out, is the worst hangover of all. After millenia of separation from our indigenous homeland, the Jewish people — sons of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, and Moses; daughters of Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, Leah, and Miriam; descendants of the kings of Judea and Samaria and Israel; of Jerusalem and Hebron and Gaza since time immemorial — finally have the opportunity to return.

And I appreciate it.

But I have been granted another choice as well — a choice to join a promise that was made to all of humanity.

In George R.R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* series — the books upon which the *Game of Thrones* T.V. show is based — the world is run by noble houses. Each house has noble words: a family motto which speaks to their character. House Tully is one such noble family.

The Tully's are rich and powerful, to be sure. The Starks, the main characters of the show, are all Tully's on their mother's side. The Tully are a major house, one of the most powerful in the world — but among the major houses, they are arguably the weakest. They are not a joke — never that — but they can be laughed *with*.

They are, in a sense, the Weasleys of this story. Their emblem is a fish; their heir, though kind, is reckless and headstrong; their castle is strong, but small, and easily sieged. One thing House Tully does have, though, is the best House words in the series.

George R.R. Martin has a lot of fun with the house words, and so do the fans. Not all the Houses have known words, but the ones we know are very entertaining. The Starks have the famous "Winter is coming" while the Targaryens have the equally famous "Fire and Blood". The Lannisters have not only the well-known unofficial slogan "A Lannister always pays his debts", but also the much lamer, official version swapped in from Katy Perry: "Hear Me Roar!". Personally, I prefer some of the lesser known house words, from House Baratheon's proud "Ours is the Fury" to House Martell's irresistible "Unbowed. Unbent. Unbroken."

House Tully, though, with their small retinue of knights and their fishy trout banners waving in the wind, always carried this reader's imagination. Their slogan is, simply:

"Family. Duty. Honor."

On the surface, it seems unremarkable. Yeah — noble families made knights, and knights loved their brothers and their fathers and their sisters and their mothers; and their duty to their king and their God; and the honor of their legacy; and not much else. Seems like words which could be given to any family. But in fact, Martin chose them for House Tully for a reason. One of our main characters, Catelyn Stark, is a Tully by birth. And throughout her time in the series, "Cat" — my personal favorite character — continuously uses the House words of her father as, not a trio, but a checklist. "Family. Duty. Honor." She will sacrifice her honor for her duty; her duty for her family; and her family for, well, nothing at all. Family always comes first for Lady Catelyn Tully Stark. That's why, for all the mistakes she makes, I love her more on every re-viewing and every re-reading.

Nerd that I am, I put my own, Alex Horn "House Words" on my Whatsapp. They go like this:

"Human. American. Jew."

That's who I am, if I had to boil it down to three. I'm a human first. An American second. A Jew third.

Jew placing at third isn't so bad. A bronze, after all, is still a medal finish. It comes before writer, fourth; atheist, fifth; and many more besides. I am proud of my heritage.

But I cannot pretend that I value my blood more than my nation or my species. I cannot. I do not.

To quote George Carlin — a late, great Irish-American mind whose record on Israel was deeply imperfect, but whose take I would dearly love today:

"I don't understand this notion of ethnic pride. . . To me, pride should be reserved for something you achieve or obtain on your own, not something that happens by accident of birth. Being Irish isn't a skill... it's a fucking genetic accident. You wouldn't say I'm proud to be 5'11"; I'm proud to have a predisposition for colon cancer. I don't understand ethnic or national pride." — George Carlin, *Napalm and Silly Putty*, book and stand-up comedy material, 2001

Personally, I think that sentiment goes a little far one way. But hey — I think Carlin would say the same thing. That bit, after all, was comedy, not a stump speech. And thank Christ on a bike for that! It was the best kind of comedy: the kind that made people laugh while also making them think. Because it's true. I am proud to be Jewish. Very, very proud. But am I prouder to be born Jewish, or to have done my best to lead my life in "a Jewish way", whatever that has meant to me?



I, of course, can answer that myself. But you already know what I'll say. The real question is for you.

Young American Zionists are the heirs to two great legacies, and if we do not tread carefully, we risk insulting, or even damaging, one, or the other, or both. Elijah is here. Elyahu Hanavi has arrived. He wants to know if we're moving to something absolutely critical to remember. Israel is not a paradise. Israel is not a talking point. Israel is a place, full of people. It is not perfect. It does not need to be. Israel is Israel. Israel is enough.

And as for America, well, let me tell you this:

If I had to pick a single greatest thing that humanity ever invented, the Jewish tradition and the United States of America would both be good contenders. But if I absolutely had to break the tie, the combination of the Internet, the Big Mac, and *Marbury v. Madison* would probably swing it for me. God Bless America. Let's Go Flyers. S'go Birds.

And if you ever come at my country, well, I will simply have to charge up my laptop, sharpen my pencils, pull out my notebook, and give you a response in the spirit that I think every U.S. President would have used in his reply— from Washington to Biden; and from Roosevelt to Roosevelt to Kennedy to Reagan to Obama to Trump.

“Try me.
Try us.
Try us anytime, bro.
We'll win.
You'll lose.
Don't try.”

Cleveland, Ohio is home to a community of Jewish people every bit as diverse, vibrant, and wonderful as anything you'll find in Jerusalem or Netanya or Judea-Samaria. And right in the center of town, you'll find a wall adorned with words from the children of the city -- words that brought me to my knees:

“This is where I live. This is my favorite place.”

— *Harvey Rice Elementary School: 3rd & 4th Grades*

All through years of struggle, I always thought, irrationally, that perhaps if I could only just find the right words, that all my trouble might be solved. But it never works out. To quote the great Christian theologian and professor of English literature C.S. Lewis, who put it like this while describing the mystical workings of magic in his fantasy novel *Prince Caspian*:

“She had spoken to the trees a split second too soon or a split second too late, or used all the right words except one, or put in one word that was just wrong.” — C.S. Lewis, “*Prince Caspian*”

The funny thing is, even that quote from Lewis, which I love — even in its full context — has always sounded just a tiny bit off to me. But isn't that just perfect for it? Isn't that just maybe — and sure, maybe I'm overthinking this — what our friend the Christian was going for?

Sometimes — often — an artist comes damn near close to magic. But it never comes. Art is the spell. Art is the incantation. But other people make magic. Not paintings or poems or prayers. That's where the power is. Other people.

And these public school kids in Ohio had found the ten words I was looking for.

Right here in the good 'ol US of A.

But hey, Israel -- if the white supremacists ever overtake Washington, or the Islamists march on Manhattan, well — you'll know where to find me: Back home in Jerusalem, safe and sound and grateful, and very much alive. — Alex Horn

Philadelphia, USA, 12/22/24





THE TEN AMENDMENTS OF AMERICA-FIRST ZIONISM

by Alex Horn

These are “amendments”, not “commandments” — that is, they are suggestions, not instructions; and I wrote them first as an American, and second as a Jew. However, if anyone does care to join me in signing my name to them, well – I’m always looking for some folks with both nicely sounding names and some nice John Hancocks to sign them.

First Amendment of America-First Zionism:

Jewish-American citizens shall willingly, proudly recognize their shared “dual loyalty” to the United States of America and to the State of Israel; will disavow the antisemitic slander that such national pride makes them any less American, or any different from other immigrants and national groupings within the American melting pot, who likewise have a love for their native homelands; and will strive to act always, irrespective of citizenship status, in the best interests of both Israel and the USA, their dual national homes.

Second Amendment of America-First Zionism

A well-regulated Palestinian Militia, being necessary to the security and dignity of a free and independent Palestine, and therefore to the stability and security of both the State of Israel and the United States of America, the right of the Palestinian people to command and protect their own borders and their own citizens shall not be infringed.

Third Amendment of America-First Zionism

Jewish-American U.S. citizens shall recognize the heroism of the Israel Defense Forces — composed of not just Jewish soldiers, but also Druze, Muslims, Christians, atheists, and more — for protecting the State of Israel and ensuring the survival of the Jewish people, while also willingly recognizing that their ultimate loyalty and appreciation is owed not to them but to the Armed Forces of the United States of America, for ensuring their rights and freedoms on a daily basis.

Fourth Amendment of America-First Zionism

The sole purpose of all American tax dollars, being the same as the sole purpose of all American politicians — to serve the will of the American people — all funding and support provided by the United States of America to Israel shall serve both the short-term and long-term interests of the United States and its citizenry.

Fifth Amendment of America-First Zionism

The sole purpose of all Israeli tax dollars, being the same as the sole purpose of all Israeli politicians — to serve the will of the Israeli people — all funding and support provided by Israel to the United States of America shall serve both the short-term and long-term interests of both the Jewish people generally and the State of Israel’s entire citizenry particularly.



Sixth Amendment of America-First Zionism

The religion of Christianity is of fundamental and undeniable importance to the history and survival of the State of Israel, and should, alongside Judaism, be treated as co-equal in status to Samaritanism, Druzism, Islam, and the other Abrahamic faiths as being part of the ineffable cultural heritage of the lands known as Judea, Samaria, Israel, Falastin, and Gaza.

Seventh Amendment of America-First Zionism

The philosophies of atheism, agnosticism, rationalism, and secularism have been crucial to the success of many of Zionism’s greatest exponents, and should always be treated with respect by Jews and by our governments.

Eighth Amendment of America-First Zionism

All Jews everywhere shall strive to live by the spirit of the Ruach Tzahal — the Code of Ethics of the Israel Defense Forces — especially insofar as the IDF’s fundamental guiding value of Human Dignity. All Jews are obligated to preserve human dignity. All human beings are of inherent value, regardless of race, creed, nationality, gender, or status.

Ninth Amendment of America-First Zionism

All Jewish-American citizens of the United States, if choosing to depart the nation of their birth, to journey to Israel or elsewhere, temporarily or permanently, shall still carry with them in their minds and hearts this part of our national heritage, from the Declaration of Independence which is the birthright of each of our citizens, born or naturalized: “Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, -- That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness.”

Tenth Amendment of America-First Zionism

“Zionist,” like all labels, is ultimately arbitrary. To be a Zionist, one simply needs to support Jewish self-determination in the Jewish ancestral indigenous homeland, Eretz Yisrael. No specifics beyond that are needed. However, although all supporters of Israel may be Zionists, they do not have to be. No one is a Zionist unless they not only support the existence of Israel, but also identify as a Zionist. All who support Israel and who wish to be Zionists are Zionists.

Alex Horn is a writer, editor, director, lyricist, and talent manager from the United States of America. He is the CEO of Horn Talent Management, a career-development agency for all kinds of creators, with offices in Philadelphia, USA, and Jaipur, India.

He is the founder and editor-in-chief of *Green Golem: The Zionist Literary Magazine*, a charity publication with the sole purpose of supporting Jewish and Israeli artists and their allies.

He is also the managing partner at TattoosAreJewish.com, an indigenous-owned online Jewish marketplace for offbeat Judaica and one-of-a-kind Zionist merch.

Alex studied English Literature and Creative Writing at Columbia University in the City of New York (CC ‘21) and is preparing to attend law school. He spends his free time watching ice hockey, reading Haruki Murakami, and playing with his baby cousins (though rarely all three at once).



MASHA THE GUARDIAN

Masha

My illustrations and paintings are inspired by myth, fairytales, and dreams. I'm a nature-lover and a daydreamer. Drawing and painting help me make sense of the feelings I have trouble articulating, where I take the deep down buried thoughts, and create something emotional and colorful from them. I am a self-taught artist, and I reside in Los Angeles with my partner. Although I am proud of my Jewish identity, I don't make specifically Jewish art, rather art for everyone to relate to and enjoy.

Rose Lanning

During these turbulent times, however, where antisemitism is at an all time high across the globe, I retreat into my imagination for comfort. times I created a wolf character named Masha, an big black wolf, an eternal being, protector, guardian of nature and of the Jewish people. I imagine her watching over the Israeli hostages in Gaza, especially the children. Although a childish fantasy, it gives me comfort in an utterly helpless period of time. **Baruch Hashem, bring them home now.** — *Rose Lanning @roesedraws*



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EMPOWERMENT THROUGH ART

"Dump Your Antisemitic Friends" vintage tees and ringers have arrived.

The Jewish people are eternal. Unfortunately, some of our friendships aren't. Show your disdain for antisemites in style with these new vintage tees and vintage croptop ringers.

alexwozart.com



The Inaugural



2024 STEIGMANN AWARDS



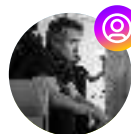
The Steigmann Awards are an honorary recognition awarded by the Editorial Board of *Green Golem: The Zionist Literary Magazine*, to express our appreciation to those individuals, organizations, or businesses which we deem to have done an outstanding job of serving Jewish-Americans, Jewish-Israelis, or Jews globally. This Award is named in honor of our co-founder and Chief Advisor: public speaker, author, actor, and educator Sami Steigmann of New York City, who as a child survived the Shoah.



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@thechevra



Ari Lesser
@aribletter



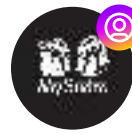
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We welcome a spectrum of viewpoints and topics, and would love to hear from you.

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