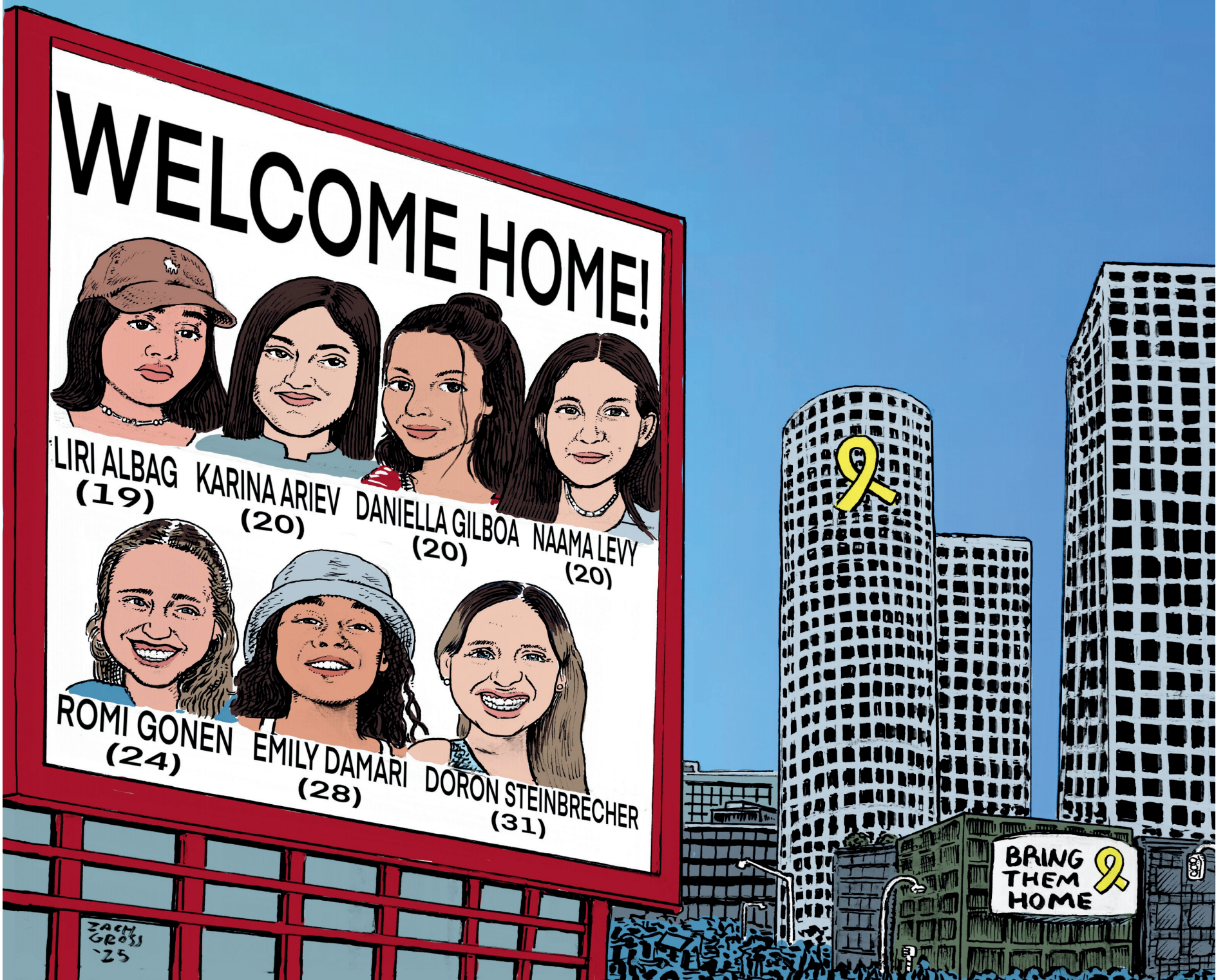


The White and Blue

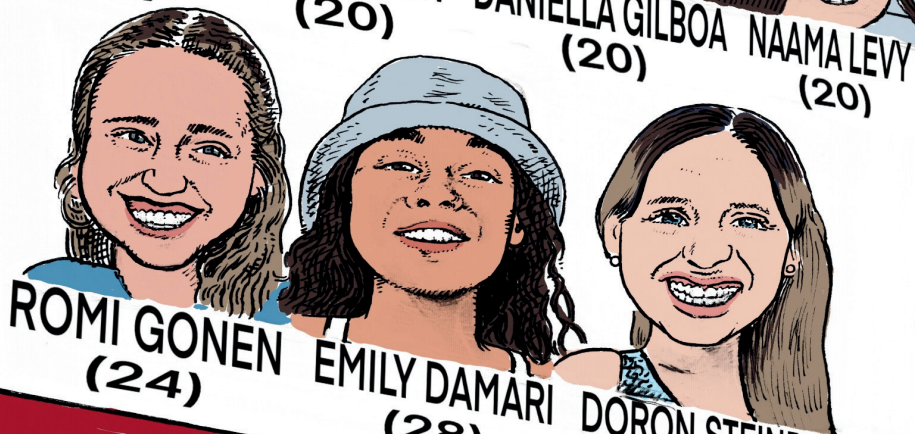
February 14, 2025



WELCOME HOME!



LIRI ALBAG (19) KARINA ARIEV (20) DANIELLA GILBOA (20) NAAMA LEVY (20)



ROMI GONEN (24) EMILY DAMARI (28) DORON STEINBRECHER (31)

ZACH GROSS '25

BRING THEM HOME

Yoseph Haddad: Partnership Not Coexistence

Raihaana Adira

Director of Outreach and Allyship



In December 2024, Allied Voices for Israel brought Yoseph Haddad, a prominent Israeli Arab advocate, to speak to Jewish communities across Canada. Over a week, Haddad visited universities, synagogues, and Jewish day schools in Montreal, Toronto, Calgary, and Vancouver. His message was simple but powerful: Israel's future relies not on mere coexistence between Jews and Arabs but on true partnership built on shared values, mutual respect, and collective responsibility.

Haddad's life story is as compelling as his message. Born and raised in Nazareth, a predominantly Arab city in Israel, he grew up in a community where Jews, Muslims, Christians, and Druze interacted daily. This early exposure to diversity shaped Haddad's belief in the potential for unity among Israel's citizens, regardless of ethnicity or religion. Engaging in Sports, namely Soccer, taught the orthodox Christian advocate that collaboration was not only possible but natural when people shared common goals. Most Arab Israelis are exempt from mandatory military service. However,

Haddad voluntarily joined the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) at 18 and served in the highly decorated Golani Brigade. His rise to the rank of commander was groundbreaking, as he led Jewish soldiers in a military often viewed to be divided by ethnicity and religion. Haddad's experience in the IDF solidified his commitment to Israel, a nation he calls "my country." He often recalls that during battles, the terrorists they fought did not distinguish between Jewish and Arab Israelis; both were targets. This reality underscored his belief in a shared destiny for all Israeli citizens. Haddad's recent Canadian tour focused on countering misinformation about Israel, particularly claims of apartheid and genocide. At each event, he dismantled these accusations with personal anecdotes and evidence. For instance, he highlighted that Arab Israelis, who make up 20% of Israel's population, participate fully in society as doctors, teachers, athletes, and even IDF commanders like himself. Israel is not perfect," Haddad acknowledged, "but the apartheid narrative is a gross distortion." He pointed to shared spaces like hospitals, where Arab doctors treat Jewish patients and vice versa, as proof of integration rather than separation. However, Haddad's Canadian tour did draw controversy. At Concordia University in Montreal, protests erupted and Haddad described the protestors as extremists unwilling to engage in dialogue. He expressed frustration that his message—one of partnership and peace—was met with hostility, particularly in a country like Canada that prides itself on free speech.

Haddad emphasized that such incidents reveal a troubling trend: when an Arab Israeli defends Israel, they are often labelled either as a traitor or as delusional. Central to Haddad's advocacy is his critique of the concept of coexistence. For Haddad, coexistence implies merely tolerating one another, which he argues is insufficient to address the challenges facing Israeli society. Instead, he champions partnership, a model where Jews and Arabs actively work together to build a shared future. Through his organization, Together – Vouch for Each Other, Haddad fosters dialogue and collaboration between Arab and Jewish Israelis. His work aims to break down barriers of mistrust and create opportunities for meaningful engagement. Haddad's perspective also extends to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. He rejects claims that Israel is committing genocide in Gaza, calling such allegations baseless and rooted in propaganda. He critiques organizations like Amnesty International for failing to differentiate between civilians and combatants in their casualty reports. Haddad argues that the IDF operates with unparalleled moral standards, often at great risk to its own soldiers, to minimize civilian harm. He also stresses that Hamas, not Israel, is the primary obstacle to peace, using its own people as human shields while waging a campaign of terror.

Despite the challenges, Haddad remains optimistic about the future. He believes peace is possible if efforts focus on eradicating terrorism and reforming education systems that perpetuate hatred. He envisions a generation of Palestinians raised with the values of coexistence and partnership, who will

elect leaders willing to negotiate for a lasting peace with Israel.

Haddad's tour across Canada was a call to action for Jewish communities and beyond: to support not just Israel's right to exist but its efforts to thrive as a democratic, pluralistic society. His message, grounded in personal experience and unyielding hope, is a reminder that the path to peace lies not in merely coexisting but in building partnerships that transcend divisions. The theme of Partnership Not Coexistence is one many took to heart and is a theme that will be taught to generations of students to come.

“He often recalls that during battles, the terrorists they fought did not distinguish between Jewish and Arab Israelis; both were targets”

Why You Should Care About the SSMU Antisemitism Policy

Emmy Rubin

Editor-in-Chief

For university students, an inbox can feel like a vortex of anxiety, constantly pulling you in with a perpetual influx of class announcements, last-minute cancellations, grades, and more. Students must prioritize which messages deserve attention, leading many to quickly disregard superfluous emails from various student association representatives, for the sake of their mental health, of course. However, in times like these, when every elected student official seems to hold an anti-Israel stance, these seemingly innocuous messages can serve as the perfect hiding place for the student government's dangerous and problematic initiatives. It was in such an email that the VP Internal of the Students' Society of McGill University (SSMU), Hugo Victor-Solomon, announced to the student body that one of SSMU's ongoing projects was a "Policy Against Antisemitism." For those unaware, at the time the email proposing the new antisemitism policy was sent out, McGill already had (and still has) an antisemitism policy established by SSMU.

In 2018, after an incident involving an SSMU executive member encouraging people on social media to "punch a Zionist," a ratified antisemitism policy was put in place. The consultations between the various Jewish groups involved (Chabad, Hillel, and Independent Jewish Voices) were arduous but ultimately fruitful, as they led to an antisemitism policy that all Jewish organizations agreed upon for six years.

If McGill already has a Policy Against Antisemitism in place, why was the VP Internal of SSMU working on a new one? The main difference in this proposed policy lies in a section detailing what does not constitute antisemitism. Some highlights of this section, taken verbatim from the proposed "Policy Against Antisemitism," include the following:

"It is not antisemitic to support arrangements that grant full legal equality to all inhabitants 'between the river and the sea'... Paying disproportionate attention to Israel and treating Israel differently than other countries is not prima facie proof of antisemitism... For example: journalism, speech, or media using some or all of the words occupation, apartheid, and genocide to describe fact-based, internationally recognized, and

thoroughly documented actions of the Israeli government are ostensibly not antisemitic, so long as the content is verifiably factual. Similarly, speech or media addressing verified and well-evidenced racial discrimination and systemically racist structures, including apartheid, is not antisemitic." If this "Policy Against Antisemitism" appears to have been presented to the SSMU community without consultation from Zionist organizations on campus, that's because it was. Additionally, the Jewish and Zionist clubs at McGill that were consulted (Hillel and Chabad) were only informed of the policy a few days after the change in Dean of Students, even though it became evident that Victor-Solomon, the author of the policy, had been working on it for several months.

This "Policy Against Antisemitism" essentially gives a blank check to the keffiyeh-clad, anti-Israel crowds to continue perpetuating their violence and blatant antisemitism. If SSMU approves legislation that explicitly states that the phrase "from the river to the sea" is not antisemitic, it is permitting a call for the ethnic cleansing of the 7.2 million Jews living in Israel. If SSMU passes a motion stating that it is not inherently antisemitic to "pay disproportionate attention to Israel and treat Israel

differently than other countries," then SSMU is endorsing a double standard against Israel and its people. If this policy is legitimized by SSMU, it explicitly endorses the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement, as the policy states: "supporting boycotts, divestment, and sanctions writ large as commonplace, non-violent forms of political protest against states is not ostensibly antisemitic." It seemed that the outrage of the McGill Jewish community had paid off when the "Policy Against Antisemitism" was rejected by the legislative council on November 21, 2024. However, as antisemitism always finds a way, the policy was ultimately adopted through legislative misconduct, in complete violation of SSMU guidelines. Refusing to turn a blind eye to such misconduct, the talented Michael Hollander and Neil Oberman obtained a provisional injunction against SSMU and its "Policy Against Antisemitism" from the Quebec Superior Court. As the Jewish community has learned while navigating these tumultuous times, after every victory, another battle remains. If there is anything to be learned from the SSMU "Policy Against Antisemitism," it is that antisemitism can hide in an innocent email, cloaked in legislation that should be protecting students rather than putting them in danger.

“This "Policy Against Antisemitism" essentially gives a blank check to the keffiyeh-clad, anti-Israel crowds to continue perpetuating their violence and blatant antisemitism”

History of Zionism

Dylan Ifrah

Staff Writer

The most basic expression of Zionism is the idea that the Jewish people should have a sovereign state in their historic homeland, the Land of Israel. Today, Zionism is the essential ideology that underpins the modern state of Israel as well as being a defining part of the identities of most Jews around the world. However, anti-Israel activists often slander Zionism and accuse Zionists of being racist supporters of a violent “apartheid state”. Ignoring their blatantly false claims about Israel, these people, who often make use of so-called anti-zionist Jews to bolster their claims, create a wide variety of proposals that usually discount any kind of Jewish self-determination in favour of a future Palestinian state. To understand these proposals, it is essential to understand what Zionism is as well as what its history is.

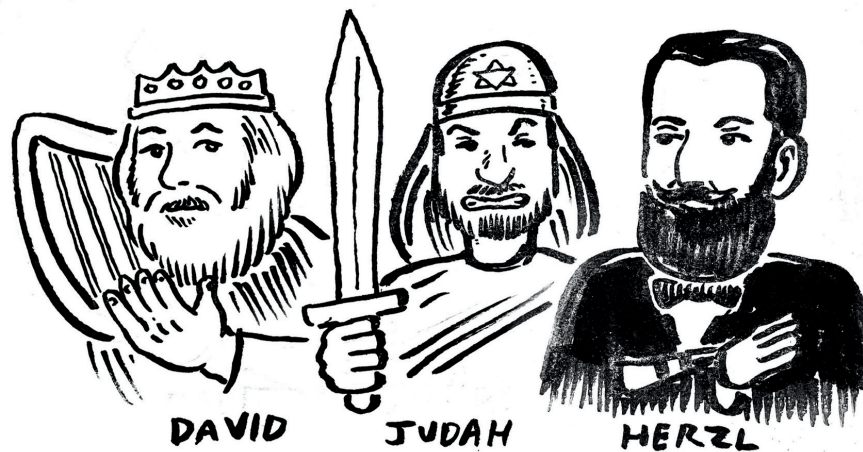
To begin, it is necessary to establish the basic fact that Jews have had a continuous presence in the land of Israel for upwards of four thousand years. Through the years, various Jewish political entities have existed in the land. In the Kingdom of Israel in what is known as the United Monarchy period (1000 BC) and the separate Kingdoms of Israel and Judah, Jews exercised political self-determination for over five hundred years. Following the downfall of these Jewish Kingdoms and the successive invasions and occupations of the land of Israel by powers such as the Assyrians, Persians, Greeks, and Romans, numerous explicitly Jewish provinces such as the Yehuda Medianta under the Persian Achaemenids were put in place. Following the Maccabean Revolts against the Seleucid Empire in the second century BC, another independent Jewish Kingdom ruled by the Hasmonean Dynasty was

established. Next, under the Herodian Dynasty, Judea became a client state of the Roman Empire, although its various Herodian kings maintained a significant power of local power.

This oversimplified overview of Jewish political entities in the land of Israel, most of which existed before the common era, provides a clear backdrop for Jewish governance of the land. Notably, even during these periods, numerous Jewish diaspora came into existence. Of particular interest is the first Jewish exile of the Babylonian Empire, under which a significant portion of the Jews living in the land of Israel were forced into exile in what is modern-day Iraq. In their exile, these Jews composed dozens of poems, songs, and hymns about their longing for the Holy Land. One of these, is Psalm 137, in which the exiles famously say “By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion.” and proceed to ask “How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?” continues to be read by Jews around the world every day.

Following their expulsion from the land of Israel by the Romans after the destruction of the temple in 70 CE and the Bar Kokhba Revolt in 132 CE, Jews established communities around Europe, and the Middle East, as well as in the Levant and Central Asia. Still, as hundreds and eventually thousands of years passed, Jews, no matter where they were continued to read those famous Psalms of Longing and religiously commemorated events such as the destruction of the temple and the death of Governor Gedaliah, whose death ended Jewish autonomy in Israel after the fall of the first temple.

Through the Middle Ages and into the modern and contemporary eras, Jews continued to face overt antisemitism wherever they lived.



In Europe, Jewish communities were confined to Ghettos, subject to frequent expulsions, and were all too often the victims of pogroms. Additionally, contrary to popular narratives, Jews living in Muslim lands were considered “dhimmi”, or a protected religious minority subject to a special tax, called the “Jizya”, which could at times be as exorbitant as 50%. Additionally, these Sephardic Jews often faced the same pogroms and forced conversions as the Ashkenazis in Europe.

In the 1890s, Theodore Herzl, a secular Jewish Austro-Hungarian journalist who covered the Semitic Dreyfus Trial in France came to believe that the solution to antisemitism was for Jews to return to their ancestral homeland and establish a state in which they could rule without fear of prejudice and where Jews would no longer be second class citizens. Herzl's movement quickly became popular with many Jews in Europe, resulting in numerous waves of immigration or ‘Aliyah’s’ to the land of Israel. Coined by Arthur Ruppin, the term ‘Aliyah’ literally means to ‘ascend’ as opposed to simply going. This term captures the essence of the Jewish yearning for a Return to Zion, as promised in the Biblical books of Ezra and Nehemiah. In effect, Zionism is a return to Zion and

“Zionism is a return to Zion and fulfills the millennia-long aspirations of the Jewish people to live in the land that truly is home”

How Jews Can Reshape the Liberal Party

Boaz Shron

Staff Writer

On January 6th, 2025 Justin Trudeau announced his resignation. He also announced that he would be proroguing parliament until March 24th, so that his Liberal Party can hold a full leadership contest.

Trudeau's bombshell comes at a time when his party trails far behind Pierre Poilievre and the Conservatives in the polls, and Trudeau seemed to have lost the confidence of most of his own caucus.

In order to understand what Trudeau's resignation means for Canadian Jews, we must first understand the legacy that he is leaving behind on the issues that matter most to our community.

Pre-October 7th, the Trudeau government largely toed the line drawn by the previous government, led by Stephen Harper: Canada voted against anti-Israel resolutions at the United Nations, and continued to export arms to Israel. It is worth noting that our exports to Israel amounted to only 1.43% of our non-US arms exports in 2023.

After October 7th, with antisemitism skyrocketing at home and abroad, Canada did not step up for the Jewish community. Foreign Minister Mélanie Joly stopped all military exports to Israel. While Israel does not need Canada's help to defend itself, what kind of message were we sending about our values at a time when Israel was fighting an existential war that it did not start nor want?

The federal government's response to the hostile environments on Canadian university campuses was seen by many in the Jewish community as inadequate. When asked about the issue last May, Trudeau resorted to generalities. "We need to make sure that...everyone can feel safe on campus. Whether you're a Jewish student, whether you're Palestinian, whether you have strong feelings on one side or the other," he said. "We

have to trust both universities to manage their campuses and local police of jurisdiction to do their work to make sure that everyone is safe."

As we saw throughout last year, universities could not be trusted to manage their campuses. Local police could not make sure that everyone was safe. Perhaps some moral clarity from the Prime Minister would have incentivized the powers that be to appropriately deal with the hatred festering on our university campuses. The Liberals have made progress in some areas, however. The government adopted the IHRA Working Definition of Antisemitism domestically in 2019. The Liberals voted overwhelmingly in favour of a House of Commons resolution against the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement in 2016. Most recently, the government has said that it would intervene in support of a Supreme Court challenge against Québec's Bill 21, a challenge that will be heard by the Court in the near future. This is of particular importance for the Jewish community here in Montréal, where Bill 21 forces many of us to choose between our religious practices and our jobs in the public sector. Still, for many Canadian Jews, these small victories do not measure up against the tide of antisemitism that this government has not done enough to fight.

All this to say that, in the eyes of many in the Jewish community, Trudeau dropped the ball on keeping us safe. As he's on his way out, we can now turn our attention forward, and evaluate the positions of his possible replacements. Personally, I am relieved that Mélanie Joly is not one of them. One leadership candidate who deserves our attention is Karina Gould, the current Leader of the Government in the House of Commons. Gould is Jewish on her father's side, and she honours her heritage by celebrating Purim, Chanukah and Yom Kippur. Gould's paternal grandparents were Holocaust survivors from Czechoslovakia; her grandfather was deported to Theresienstadt, then on to Dachau and Auschwitz. Like many

in the Jewish community, Gould's first taste of Israel was on Birthright. She stayed after the trip ended to experience the country personally. "Israel is a beautiful country. It's unique in the world. It has difficult challenges," she told the CJN in 2015. While Gould is certainly not the most vocal voice in the Liberal Party on antisemitism, or on Israel, it will be interesting to see how her heritage informs her positions throughout the campaign. She is definitely the candidate to watch for the Jewish community.

Mark Carney is among the frontrunners in this snap leadership race. He has built a successful career in finance, so it is understandable that he does not have a policy record on Israel. However, he did visit the country in 2012 as head of the Bank of Canada, and met with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. When he was Governor of the Bank of England, Carney spoke at the World Jewish Relief business dinner, which took place to raise awareness of the plight of Jewish communities in unstable Eastern European countries. It will be interesting to see how Carney approaches Jewish issues throughout his campaign; especially considering that a large contingent of our community would find his general policies and financial background attractive.

Which brings us to the other clear frontrunner in this race: Chrystia Freeland. The former Deputy Prime Minister, Finance Minister, Foreign Minister, Intergovernmental Affairs Minister, Trade Minister, or as my father liked to call her: "Minister of Everything." As impressive as her experience might be, Freeland's résumé is too tainted by the Trudeau government's missteps in the eyes of many in our community. Anti-Israel protesters disrupted Freeland's leadership campaign launch several times, which is odd because her government has actually done many of the things that the protesters demanded. Stop military exports to Israel? Done. Comply with the ICC arrest warrants against Netanyahu and former Defence Minister Yoav Gallant? We would, if they come here. For Freeland, regaining the trust of the Jewish community will be an uphill battle. It's still early in the Liberal leadership campaign, and the writ won't drop for the next election until

March. The Liberals have a lot of runway to work with to reset their relationship with the Jewish community; a constituency they cannot afford to lose. But what will it take? Every candidate will say that they stand against antisemitism. But what does the next Prime Minister of Canada intend to do to better fight it? We won't get an answer to the question unless we ask it. So write to the leadership candidates with your concerns. Go to town halls and ask them tough questions. Register with the Liberal Party so you can vote in the leadership election. We have an opportunity to influence Liberal Party policy on Jewish issues heading into the next election and beyond. We can't let that chance pass us by.

The White and Blue is committed to impartiality and operates independently, without bias toward any political parties or views. We aim to amplify all Jewish voices.

"All this to say that, in the eyes of many in the Jewish community, Trudeau dropped the ball on keeping us safe"



Art by: Zach Gross

Why Do Jews Go to Florida?

Samuel Levkovsky

Op-Ed Editor

Stop me if you've heard this conversation before:

"Hey, how was your vacation? Did you go anywhere for fun?"

"Yeah, my family and I went to Florida, it was awesome."

Why does it seem that no matter who you ask, Ashkenazi, Mizrahi, or Sephardic, from Bubees to Zedis all across the North American world, the universal vacation spot is: Florida. The beautiful and warm sunshine state, some even call it the holy land V.2. But what exactly makes the southeast United States so appealing to us latka, cholent, and dafina enjoyers?

Let's explore the history of this magical place and maybe find some answers.

The first Jewish communities were recorded in Key West in the mid to late 1880's. In West Palm Beach, Jews first settled in 1892. Miami? Well, Jews first settled in the Floridian hub in 1896. The first ever recorded brit-milah in Miami County was actually in 1907 for a man named Eddie Cohen. In 1913, B'nai Zion, the first congregation in Miami-Dade County, was founded. Interestingly, in 1953, Abe Aronovitz became the first and only Jewish mayor of Miami.

More specifically, in the Miami Beach area, the first Jewish family to settle was the Weiss family, in 1913. They later opened Joe's Stone Crab Restaurant, a restaurant that's still up and running today! The community built the first synagogue in 1929 (now the Jewish Museum of Florida.) In 1943, the first of 16 Jewish mayors of Miami Beach, Mitchell Wolfson, was elected to office.

There are still tons of other interesting historical facts tying the Jewish people and Florida together.

For example, in 1959, approximately 10,000 Cuban Jews sought refuge in South Florida. As of recently, the Jewish population of South Florida is about 650,000. It has the third-largest concentration of Jews in the country and the single largest concentration of Jews (13 percent of the total population of South Florida) outside of Israel.

I'd like to focus on a specific part of Florida, the hub, heart, and center of southeast Florida: Miami. During the 1930s, the anti-Semitic legal barriers restricting Jewish land ownership began to lift and, as a result, Jews began purchasing tons of properties from indebted families (due to the Great Depression). This phenomenon can be exemplified through the Miami Beach Art Deco buildings of the 1930s and 1940s – many of which were bought, built, and designed by Jewish families. Moreover, the biggest boom came from the 1949 law lifting the final discriminatory real estate and development practices which – coupled with the large European immigration at the time (escaping post-Holocaust Europe) – resulted in the exponential growth of the Miami Jewish community. By the 1970s, almost 80 percent of the population of Miami Beach was Jewish. Nearly all the museums and arts organizations were launched by Jewish artists. Due to the pristine weather, Miami Beach attracted many Jewish families looking for a warm and welcoming place to defrost. As a result, Miami and Miami Beach acquired the nickname 'Shtetl by the Sea'. Most importantly, the presence of numerous kosher restaurants encourages Jewish families to go out and enjoy the beautiful city weather and fosters

economic growth and nightlife presence.

Later on, in the '80s, due to changing economic, social, and religious tides, the Jewish community began expanding and partially relocating to other popular locations like Fort Lauderdale, Hollywood Beach, Hallandale Beach, and Boca Raton.

I also can't forget to mention our amazing Chabad friends providing invaluable work for students, the elderly, and the community at large. This orthodox community, which forms the backbone of Jews worldwide, not to mention helping to establish the Jewish presence in Florida, also began to blossom. South Florida is blessed with hundreds of Orthodox shuls and Chabad centers, dozens of Orthodox schools, and yeshivas. There are over 5000 students in Orthodox schools that benefit from the school voucher system in Florida. Kollels, (advanced Jewish torah centers) are also peppered throughout Florida's orthodox community. In the winter, cities that possess strong orthodox communities such as Montreal, New York, and Chicago, experience winter 'population-transfers' where thousands of Chasidim travel to South Florida for weeks or even months at a time. If there was one individual responsible for the inclusion of the Orthodox community, that individual would be Rabbi Alexander S. Gross, who established the Hebrew Academy of Greater Miami, the first Orthodox Jewish day school south of Baltimore, Maryland. He began the school inside a store with just six 'kinder' in 1947. Rabbi Gross's story is truly inspiring; it is said that he drove all around southern Florida

to help carpool children to his school and ensure they receive a vital Jewish education. He believed that through educating the youth, he would be able to raise the level of religiosity, observance, knowledge, and goodness in the community. Another heartwarming example of Rabbi Gross's generosity is when he learned of a child named Billy, who could no longer afford the tuition at the Greater Hebrew Academy- the Rabbi took it as his personal mission to pay for Billy's tuition. Billy graduated eighth grade as class valedictorian. Afterward, he continued his studies in the Telshe Yeshiva in Cleveland, a world-famous Yeshiva, and became a renowned Torah scholar. He returned to Florida as a rabbi and continued building the North Miami Beach community. Rabbi Zev (Billy) Leff, is today the rabbi of Moshav Matisyahu in Israel. He is also an internationally recognized author and scholar.

To sum it up, Florida truly is a special place, not only for the beautiful weather and fine sand beaches but also for the thriving multicultural mosaic that is cemented there. These conditions have fostered interesting inter and intra-cultural exchanges that are rare or simply unique to this warm corner of the world. Because of this, Florida has become a safe and humid haven for Jewish families, religious or secular, Orthodox or Conservative, a refuge against the deep cold of the north or the blizzards of antisemitism that have ebbed and flowed from time immemorial.

Finding Common Ground: A Hindu Student's Journey Through Israel

Abhinav Deshwar
Contributor



As a Hindu student and advocate for Israel, my recent journey to the Holy Land with Allied Voices for Israel (for the Common Ground program) was a profoundly moving experience. Over 10 days, I discovered not only the beauty and resilience of Israel but also a shared connection between Hindus and Jews that dates back centuries.

For over two millennia, India has been a land of refuge and acceptance for Jewish communities. The Bnei Israel, who trace their roots to the time of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, found sanctuary in Maharashtra. The Cochin Jews, who settled in Kerala, contributed immensely to trade and culture, even establishing India's first synagogues. The Baghdadi Jews, arriving in the 18th century, flourished as merchants and educators in cities like Kolkata and Mumbai. Meanwhile, the Bnei Menashe of northeastern India trace their ancestry to one of the Lost Tribes of Israel.

What makes this history so remarkable is India's ethos of

acceptance. Unlike many other lands, India has never known antisemitism by the native population. Instead, Hindu values of coexistence have allowed Jewish communities to thrive and contribute to the country's rich heritage. This connection is not just historical; it is living and dynamic. From Lieutenant General J.F.R. Jacob, a Jewish hero of India's 1971 war, to the friendship between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Israeli counterpart, Benjamin Netanyahu, the bond between our people is one of mutual respect, cultural exchange, and shared values of resilience and innovation. Cultural icons like Zubin Mehta, the Indian conductor who led the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra for decades, further symbolize this relationship. His music, blending global influence with Indian artistry, resonates deeply with the shared spirit of collaboration between our nations.

During my recent trip to Israel with Allied Voices for Israel, our journey took us through Jerusalem, a city that embodies the

very soul of the country. At the Western Wall, I experienced one of the most profound spiritual moments of my life; I was struck by the sacred energy of the place where prayers have risen for centuries. As I touched the ancient stones and whispered my prayers, I felt a deep connection to the unwavering faith that has defined the Jewish people throughout history. It was not just a place of prayer, but a testament to the strength of identity and the sanctity of preserving one's heritage.

In Rahat, a predominantly Bedouin city, I saw the thriving Arab-Israeli community in action. Meeting Bedouins who proudly serve in Israel's army and contribute to its economy was eye-opening. It challenged the divisive narratives I'd heard on campuses about so-called segregation in Israel. These communities are proof of how Israel embraces diversity while respecting the cultural identities of its citizens.

Ramle, a city bustling with life, left a lasting impression. Walking through the Ramle Shuk, I saw people from all walks of life—Jews, Muslims, and Christians—sharing spaces and stories. The vibrant market symbolized the coexistence that is so often overlooked in discussions about Israel. It taught me how misleading narratives can overshadow the reality of unity that thrives here.

Visiting the ANU Museum of the Jewish People in Tel Aviv was also transformative. The artifacts, including the Torah case and crown from the Paradesi Synagogue in Cochin, India, connected me to the shared heritage of Hindus and Jews. These pieces, with their intricate craftsmanship and history, spoke of resilience and faith. They reminded me how Jewish communities, even in foreign lands, preserved their identity while contributing to their host societies. This lesson is crucial for advocacy—to emphasize how Israel and Jewish people have always valued coexistence and enriched the places they've been part of.

One of the most powerful

takeaways from this trip was how it dismantled the myths perpetuated on campuses, particularly in the West. Israel is painted as an apartheid state by many, but the reality couldn't be further from this falsehood. From the shared spaces of Ramle to the Arab doctors, judges, and parliamentarians I learned about, the truth is evident: Israel is a thriving democracy that embraces diversity and empowers its minorities.

I also learned that effective advocacy isn't just about countering misinformation—it's about sharing stories. Stories of coexistence, like the Bedouin women in Rahat gaining independence through vocational training, or the Arab and Jewish communities of Ramle living and working together, are far more impactful than arguments alone.

Overall, this trip didn't just strengthen my understanding of Israel; it deepened my love and respect for it. As a Hindu, I found a reflection of my own people's resilience and commitment to preserving their identity. Israel's story is one of survival, perseverance, and thriving against all odds—a story that deeply resonates with the Hindu experience.

What moved me most was Israel's spirit of hope and humanity. Despite being surrounded by hostility, Israel continues to innovate, reach out, and extend a hand of peace. For me, this trip reinforced the conviction that supporting Israel isn't just about defending a nation—it's about standing for truth, coexistence, and justice.

Every step of this journey strengthened my resolve as a Hindu Zionist. I left Israel not just inspired, but determined to share its story with the world—the story of a nation that defies misconceptions and thrives in unity. This wasn't just a trip; it was a call to action to advocate for Israel, with a voice that speaks of truth and compassion.

Abhinav Deshwar is a master's student at Concordia University. He travelled to Israel in Dec 2024 as part of the student delegation, sponsored by AVI

Tu Bishvat: Discovering the True Roots of Freedom

Emmanuel Sorek
Dvar Torah Editor

Tu Bishvat is right around the corner, and no one really knows what we're celebrating! Now, if you're about to tell me that I'm wrong because we're celebrating the birthday of the fruit trees, well, happy birthday to them! Now what? What is this holiday really about?

Let's see what Rashi has to say. Rashi explains that farmers in Israel must give a tenth of their produce of choice to the Levite(s) (the descendants of Yaacov's son Levi) as a gift. Tu Bishvat is the cut-off date for this produce, meaning that any tree that has reached the stage of budding before the 15th of Shvat belongs to the previous year, and any tree that buds afterward belongs to the following year's produce. The question is: so what? What are we celebrating? We don't celebrate the deadline for income taxes (a date most people probably dread). Why would farmers look forward to such a day?

Rav Moshe Feinstein provides a brilliant perspective that helps us answer this thought-provoking question. He asks: "Do the farmers who have to give 10% of their produce to the Levites view it as a gift, or as an obligation to a fellow Jew?" He suggests that most farmers probably view it as a gift because they have the freedom to choose which Levite to give the produce to. As a result, the farmer may delay giving, perhaps thinking the produce isn't great this year, or the quantity isn't as substantial as in other years. Whatever the reason, since the farmer sees this 10% as a gift, he may procrastinate and put it off.

However, Tu Bishvat arrives and takes that possibility away. As mentioned earlier, the 15th of Shvat is the deadline for new fruits, so the produce that buds that year must be given before the next. But even with this explanation, is that a reason to celebrate? A deadline to give away 10% of the produce? I think the

answer lies within the Torah portions we're currently reading—the story of the Exodus from Egypt. If there is one phrase that encapsulates the Exodus and ultimately the theme of Passover, it's the statement that Hashem took us from "Avdut to Cherut"—from slavery to freedom.

In modern times, we think of freedom as the ability to live without constraints—the ability to do whatever we want, whenever we want, without anything standing in our way. But that wasn't the purpose of our Exodus from Egypt. God brought the Jewish people out for the sole purpose of serving Him and following the Torah. But how is that freedom?

“What is this holiday really about?”

Humans, and especially the Jewish people, are built on the foundation of wanting to do good in this world. Yes, there are evil individuals rooted in discriminatory and hateful values, but in a general sense, people with a steady upbringing based on respect and kindness have an innate desire to do good. That said, consistency is hard. Life is filled with distractions constantly bombarding us, leading us to waste time or at least poorly manage it.

The Torah, which literally means "instructions," provides a step-by-step manual telling us exactly what to do within certain boundaries, and Tu Bishvat is the perfect example. The farmer wants to give his produce as a gift. He wants to fulfill the will of God. But as we know, it's hard. So, the Torah sets the boundary, the deadline of Tu Bishvat, to help him achieve what he anyways wants to do in the first place. Simply put, the farmer is given the freedom to act on his desire to do good.

True freedom isn't about doing whatever you want. It's about being empowered to do what you're meant to do—what you're called to do. The structure of the Torah, and the boundaries it sets, aren't restrictions. They're the framework that liberates us to achieve our highest potential.

Hashem should help us not see rules and freedom as conflicting ideas, but as a partnership that allows us to live our best life and reach our full potential. Enjoy the fruits.

Tu Bishvat Sameach!
Inspired by the teachings of Rabbi Larry Rothwachs.

Living in war

Sara Hamaoui
In-the-Aretz Correspondant

As a new olah who made aliyah to Jerusalem, I fortunately have been mostly unaffected by the war. There aren't many sirens here, and because I'm not Israeli, I don't know many people who have been lost or hurt. This has led to me getting into the habit of telling people that "you don't even feel the war" and "it's not as prevalent as the news makes it seem" etc. While this may feel true in my case, it paints an inaccurate picture of the country and its situation.

The first siren that I ever experienced post-aliyah was during the second Iran attack. It was the day before Rosh Hashana and suddenly I got an influx of phone calls from family and friends telling me to stay home and near a shelter because Iran is plotting to send a barrage of missiles. Fortunately, I had



Art by: Zach Gross

been planning to stay in that night anyway, so when the siren did go off, my roommates and I just ran downstairs into the shelter. We were, of course, freaking out. My first siren being caused by hundreds of ballistic missiles from a global terrorist superpower can cause a girl to be a little nervous. But looking around me at all the families with small children who were with me in the shelter, everyone was very calm. They even made a game out of counting the booms that they heard from above us. Their relaxed state helped us calm down and realize that everything would be okay.

Because of that experience, the next time that I heard a siren, I was a bit calmer. This next one was from the Yemenite Houthis, and it came at 4:00 am. Granted, I was too tired to be scared, but I genuinely felt that everything would be fine. I was a little nervous and shaken, but once again seeing the happy families managed to help.

The most recent attack I was affected by was last week during Shabbat. I was at my family's house, and when the siren went off we all rushed to the shelter. Interestingly enough, this time I didn't feel scared at all. In fact, I forgot that it happened as soon as it was over. The same was true of my 9-year-old and 5-year-old cousins, they were the calmest of us all.

I didn't think much of this after it happened. This is Israel, we're in a war, there are sirens, everything always turns out fine, whatever. But then I really started to think about what had happened. A giant terror organization just fired missiles aimed to kill above my head, and my 5-year-old cousin didn't even blink.

That's when it all came together for me. The children of Israel are traumatized. The people of Israel are

numb. When I was asked to write this article I didn't know what I would write. "It's not a big deal," I thought, "I haven't been affected at all, what am I going to write about". But the more I thought, the more I realized that the very fact that I didn't consider this to be a big deal IS the problem.

Half of my coworkers have left to join their reserve units, and nobody even talks about it. One of my best friend's brothers hasn't been home in a month because he's doing operations on the border, and she speaks about it like it's just a regular thing. Some of my closest friends have friends who have been killed or horribly injured and they rarely acknowledge it.

Of course I've been affected by the war, of course we all have. We have been so deeply affected that it doesn't even show anymore. It manifests as a nonchalant and brave attitude, but really, we are all terrified. Everyone may put on a brave face, but there is not a single person here who won't jump at the smallest noise in the distance. We need to stop acting like everything is okay and that Israelis are "used to it". This is not something that should be a normalized part of Israeli life.

Repairing the World, One Jewish

Bucket of Water at a Time

Allan Hoffman

Staff Writer

Fire has always been the main symbol of human ingenuity and civilization: both as a tool to warm our food, illuminate the night sky, and transform our world to our liking, but also as a deadly weapon that destroys homes, memories, and the natural beauty of this world.

The scenes that first appeared on social and traditional media regarding the fires in California since January 7th, 2025, were truly astonishing and horrifying: what once was a land filled with natural reserves, farmlands, and picturesque scenery now lay barren, a land of ash and dust.

Seeing such scenes made most of us question what worldly communities have done to help the citizens of California in these trying times, and in this instance, it is the Jewish and Israeli response that is worthwhile for us.

Israel's Fire and Rescue Authority sent a delegation of six individuals for a week-long visit to provide professional expertise to the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection. Knowing that the latter could not spare any expenses to entertain a foreign delegation, Israel's Fire and Rescue Authority paid the entire cost themselves.

When the delegation arrived in California, they were welcomed with open arms by the Jewish community in Los Angeles, the second largest in the United States. Not only were the six Israelis invited to dinner, but they met and spoke with dozens of Jewish people who had lost their homes and one of their synagogues, The Pasadena Jewish Temple and Center.

While the destruction of such a historic synagogue is terrible, the fire did not win: in fact, a symbolic surprise awaited the congregants.

Beneath the brick-and-mortar that held the synagogue firm for over 100 years was a mural of mysterious origins. Unbeknownst to the Rabbis and congregants, this mural, depicting men and women walking the desert in Biblical times and playing with their instruments around a lone palm tree, was hiding in plain sight, waiting to be released back into the world. While the rest of the walls crumbled, this mural remained strong, serving as a reminder that the Jewish identity and sense of community will not stop because of a fire: even through the test of time. One day, the members of the Pasadena Jewish Temple and Center will recover from the flames and dance the night away, like those men and women in the mural.

Considering just how much was destroyed, the question arises of whether or not the Torahs were saved. Torah scrolls, handcrafted after years of hard work, hold immense importance in both Judaism and Jewish history. Thankfully, after evacuating their community members, Rabbis from both the Pasadena Jewish Temple and Center and the Chabad of Topanga went back to their establishments to save the 13 Torahs and the 2 Torahs (one of which was brought back from Europe after the Holocaust).

In the face of so much destruction, the community held firm and continued to support each other. We must put a spotlight on one specific individual who has, ironically, given hope to many emergency workers and traumatized families through the use of food and fire: Chef Bae.

Chef Bae, a celebrity chef whose real name is Brooke Baevsky, has completely transformed her usual social media presence of cooking for private clients into cooking massive quantities of food for all individuals

affected by the fires. This immense task that she willingly placed on her shoulders proves just how important food is to the Jewish people, but also to firefighters and displaced families who deserve to have hot and fresh meals after so much devastation. Reminiscent of the large amounts of food one prepares before Shabbat dinner, Chef Bae's sacrifice highlights not just an action to help others, but a cultural response of epic proportions that must not be downplayed.

However, while food cures the soul, it does not ease the worry of tomorrow: nearly 4 weeks after the start of the LA fires, those same families are left wondering how they will rebuild their homes with no funds, with insurance premiums through the roof, and with little to no hope?

With so little to hold onto, the Jewish community of Los Angeles has lit a gentle flame of courage and generosity: since the fires began, donation pages, relief funds, interest-free loans, and helpful contacts have been spread around the state by The Jewish Federation of Los Angeles, the Chabad of Pasadena, the Jewish Free Loan Association, and so much more. While this does not solve every issue, it does help families find their journey back to their homes.

These amazing stories of kindness within the community point to a key Jewish idea: Tikkun Olam (Repairing the World). Without a moment's hesitation, hundreds upon hundreds of community members, influencers, foreign delegations, firefighters, and business people from all walks of life have sent any kind of resources they can spare to help fight these fires. Just as in the past, the human response has been filled with compassion, admiration for those on the front lines, and hope that there is a brighter future ahead: yet, without the chutzpah to work towards achieving that future, it all falls short, until we apply "Tikkun Olam" to the recipe.

This pillar of Jewish tradition, steeped in the hearts of Jewish youth since private Jewish day school, motivates not just ourselves to do everything we can to help others, but encourages those around us to join this challenging endeavor. At the end of the day, the Jewish community is only as strong as its weakest member, and by helping everyone back onto their feet, we accomplish Tikkun Olam, one step at a time.

A beneficiary of
Federation Combined
Jewish Appeal

