

## **Rabbinical and Cantorial Students Appeal to the Heart of the Jewish Community**

Blood is flowing in the streets of the Holy Land. Fires are burning on the hills of Jerusalem and buildings are smoldering in Gaza. Violence is spilling onto the streets of Lod and Haifa. With each refresh of the news and each rocket that falls, new images of terror sear themselves into our minds. We find ourselves in tears.

The tears that flow are different for each of us. For some of us, they are familiar tears - we've been moved by similar scenes that have played out for years and years in Jerusalem and beyond. For others, they are newer - coming to terms with the reality on the ground is a journey we all have come to differently. For many, we experience heartbreak over and over again with each new injustice.

For these things [we] weep. (Lamentations 1:16)

This year, American Jews have been part of a racial reckoning in our community. Our institutions have been reflecting and asking, "How are we complicit with racial violence?" Jewish communities, large and small, have had teach-ins and workshops, held vigils, and commissioned studies.

And yet, so many of those same institutions are silent when abuse of power and racist violence erupts in Israel and Palestine. So many of us ignore the day-to-day indignity that the Israeli military and police forces enact on Palestinians, and sit idly by as Israel upholds two separate legal systems for the same region. And, in the same breath, we are shocked by escalations of violence, as though these things are not a part of the same dehumanizing status quo.

The current reality, in the streets of a land our tradition deems holy, necessitates a spiritual crisis. A spiritual crisis requires more than prayer. It requires heartbreak, which demands reflection, which then demands action.

*Rabbi Elazar said, "From the time of the destruction of the Temple, the gates of prayer were locked, but even though the gates of prayer were locked, the gates of tears were not locked. as it is stated: "Hear my prayer, G-d, and give ear to my pleading, keep not silence at my tears" (Psalms 39:13)" [Bava Metzia 59a]*

We can only make change when we replace our watered-down prayers for peace with tears of heartbreak. We can only build – and rebuild – when we start from our tears. For those of us for whom Israel has represented hope and justice we need to give ourselves permission to watch, to acknowledge what we see, to mourn, and to cry. And then, to change our behavior and demand better.

As American Jews, our institutions tell stories of Israel rooted in hope for what could be, but oblivious to what is. Our tzedakah money funds a story we wish were true, but perpetuates a

reality that is untenable and dangerous. Our political advocacy too often puts forth a narrative of victimization, but supports violent suppression of human rights and enables apartheid in the Palestinian territories, and the threat of annexation.

It's far past time that we confront this head on. We can no longer shy away or claim ignorance.

**What will it take for us to see that our Israel has the military and controls the borders? How many Palestinians must lose their homes, their schools, their lives, for us to understand that today, in 2021, Israel's choices come from a place of power and that Israel's actions constitute an intentional removal of Palestinians?**

How much say do we, American Jews, have? We are here, not there. What can we do?

When we teach about Israel, we can endeavor to tell the messy truth of a persecuted people searching for safety, going to a land full of meaning for the Jewish people, full of meaning for so many other peoples, and also full of human beings who didn't ask for new neighbors.

When we vote, we can vote for leaders who won't continue paying lip service to peace while funding violence. We can use our position as citizens of Israel's biggest benefactor to push to regulate and redirect funds in equitable ways that promote a peaceful and just future.

When we pool our philanthropy and direct our giving, we can pay attention: Is our tzedakah supporting those who build peace or those who sow hate and violence disguised in the name of justice and Jewish continuity? Is it supporting those who plant trees with their neighbors or those who are planting over their neighbors' homes?

**We are future leaders of the Jewish community. We are training to teach the Torah and lead the rituals that will hold our joy and our sorrow. And we are full of tears. We implore you, our community – our students, teachers, congregations, employers, funders – to find your tears, too. Tap into the empathy that you need to feel and experience the reality on the ground in this place so that we can work to change it.**

The temple has long been destroyed, but the spiritual and ethical soul of the Jewish people still stands. We have the capacity for redemption and call out these abuses of power now. We have the ability 'to act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with our G-d.' (Micah 6:8). We have the chance to do it, right now, and to keep making that choice each day. When the temple mount is burning, when the alleyways are home to violence, when children lose their parents and parents lose their children, Rabbi Elazar tells us that weak condemnations of violence are not enough; we need something bigger, deeper, rawer, more transformative than that. We need to look at the realities we've been denying, allow ourselves to feel that hurt, and build from there. Because while the gates of prayer may be closed, the gates of tears remain open.

Signed:

Josh Nelson	Reconstructionist Rabbinical College
Nora Chernov	Reconstructionist Rabbinical College
Amalia Mark	Hebrew College
Lawrence Dreyfuss	Hebrew College
Hannah Bender	Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion
Kelly Whitehead	Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion
Rachel Weston	Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion
Rafi Ellenson	Hebrew College
Risa Dunbar	Hebrew College Rabbinical School
Emily Holtzman	Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies
Giulia Fleishman	Hebrew College
Willemina Davidson	Hebrew College
Gabriel Lehrman	Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion
Jenna Shaw	Hebrew College
Talia Laster	Hebrew College
Yael Werber	Hebrew College
Emma R Maier	Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion
Genevieve Greinetz	Hebrew College
Heather Renetzky	Hebrew College
Arielle Stein	Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion
Max Antman	Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion
Jamie Weisbach	Hadar Advanced Kollel
Ryan Leszner	Hebrew College
Jordan Goldstein	HUC-JIR Debbie Friedman School of Sacred Music
Micah Friedman	Hebrew College
Max Buchdahl	Jewish Theological Seminary
Rebecca Hornstein	Reconstructionist Rabbinical College
Arielle Stein	Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion

Rachel Davidson	Reconstructionist Rabbinical College
Caleb Bromberg	Jewish Theological Seminary
Talia Kaplan	Jewish Theological Seminary
Amelia Wolf	Jewish Theological Seminary
Leah Carnow	Hebrew College
Katja Vehlow	Jewish Theological Seminary
Sass Orol	Jewish Theological Seminary
Jonathon Adler	The Jewish Theological Seminary
Madeline Budman	Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion
Aaron Torop	Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion
Sarah Brammer-Shlay	Reconstructionist Rabbinical College
Lorin Troderman	Hebrew College
Alex Hamilton	Jewish Theological Seminary
Donna Sisselman Cephas	Reconstructionist Rabbinical College
Adam Gillman	Jewish Theological Seminary
Julia Spiegel	Hebrew College
Noah Rubin-Blöse	Reconstructionist Rabbinical College
Yaakov Ginsberg-Schreck	Hebrew College
Molly Paul	Reconstructionist Rabbinical College
Sarah Rovin	Hebrew College
Aron Wander	Hebrew College
Neil Hirsch	Hebrew College
Adam Strater	Reconstructionist Rabbinical College
Rachel Weston	HUC-JIR Debbie Friedman School of Sacred Music
Michaela Brown	Hebrew College
Evan Traylor	Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion
Madeleine Fortney	Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion
Beth Reinstein	Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion

Benjamin Luks-Morgan	Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion
Lizzie Horne	Reconstructionist Rabbinical College
Emily Pripas	Hebrew College
Adam Graubart	Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion
Stephanie Breitsman	Reconstructionist Rabbinical College
Sierra Fox	HUC-JIR Debbie Friedman School of Sacred Music
Chloe Zelkha	Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion
Aaron Rotenberg	ALEPH
Jayce Koester	Hebrew College
Yael Farber	Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion
Aliza Schwartz	Reconstructionist Rabbinical College
Ezra Leventhal	Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion
Jack Sherratt	Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion
Justin Callis	HUC-JIR Debbie Friedman School of Sacred Music
Frankie Salzman	Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion
Frankie Sandmel	Hebrew College
Jade Goldstein-Abronsen	Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion
Jacob Weiss	Hebrew College
Michael Fraade	Hebrew College
Eden Glaser	Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion
Simcha Halpert Hanson	Hebrew College
Cat Zavis	ALEPH
Leah Nussbaum	Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion
Melissa Hoffman	AJRCA
Joshua Greenberg	Hebrew College
Rami Avraham Eyal	ALEPH
Eliana Mastrangelo	Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies
Avigayil Halpern	Hadar Advanced Kollel
Anna Wolfe	Jewish Theological Seminary
Chelse mandell	AJRCA

Jessica Jacobs	Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion
Sarina Elenbogen-Siegel	HUC-JIR Debbie Friedman School of Sacred Music
Vincent Calabrese	Hadar Advanced Kollel
Sienna Lotenberg	Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion
Solomon Hoffman	Reconstructionist Rabbinical College
Ilana Sumka	ALEPH
David Elitzer	Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion
Sam Tygiel	Hebrew College
Sarah Tziporah Moser	AJRCA
Joey Glick	Hebrew College
Rachel Goldberg	ALEPH



