

2022 Year in Review from a Jewish Perspective
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What is it that we remember about 2022 years or decades from now?

We should remember that 2022 was a year in which we saw a significant rise of antisemitism, not only elsewhere in the world, but here at home.

We will we remember the terrible tweets from celebrities, some praising Hitler and Nazism, others promoting movies blaming our people for every evil including the American enslavement of Africans.

We will we remember a former President inviting a known anti-Semite to his club for dinner.

Closer to home, we will remember the incidents of antisemitic graffiti or incidents in local schools.

We will also remember that the ADL reported that antisemitic incidents had risen 34% since 2020.

We will remember these things because we need to remember them.

However, this year, we should also remember this as a year of fighting back.

In early January of 2022, the eyes and hearts of our nation were on a Temple in Colleyville and the antisemitic hostage situation there. Thank God that our colleague, that my new friend Rabbi Charlie Cytron-Walker, was able to do what was necessary to keep the captor from acting out everyone's worst nightmare. Who could ever forget how he and his congregants escaped with their lives?

Heroism?

Of course. But they took it a step further. They talked about what they had lived through. Their story was the first story featured in CNN's hour-long expose on antisemitism.

Why?

Because it was not about neo-Nazis, swastikas, and Hitler salutes. It was about how deeply-held myths about Jewish people can lead anyone, from any part of the world, from any political background, to do the unthinkable to us.

They said: "Take these incidents seriously!"

We did with many from Temple participating in online training sessions and with many more steps to tighten our already-high security standards.

We will also remember how, just in these past few weeks, voices from within and beyond the Jewish community have spoken out against antisemitism and Holocaust denial.

I am so proud that on our outdoor Hanukkah menorah, shining brightly into the Greensboro proud night, we posted supportive words from faith communities around our area.

The work to counter bigotry and antisemitism seemingly never ends. But when I think of 2022, I will never forget those who were not bystanders, but instead were upstanders.

When I think of 2022, I will think of Ukraine. I will think of how Volodymyr Zelenskyy is now, without a doubt, the most famous Jewish person in the world – for all the right reasons.

Zelenskyy recently spoke to the US Congress. When he did so, he did not mention Hanukkah or the Macabees. But it is hard to speak about Ukraine without seeing the parallels to our ancient battle for freedom.

While 2022 did bring us heart-breaking stories from Ukraine, it has also been a year highlighted by heroism in the face of terrible odds. It is also a year in which Jewish communities throughout the world stepped up to help.

Locally, within days of the first attacks, Temple Emanuel held a concert here, raising \$9000 to send to relief efforts. In the days before Passover, I was able to go to the border of Poland and Ukraine. When we put out a call to send a few dollars to Temple so that supplies such as diapers and medicine could be brought to the JCC in Krakow, we thought that we might get \$500, maybe \$750. Well over \$20,000 came in. We gave all of it to relief efforts.

When 2022 started, Ukraine was not the discussion. As it ends, it is impossible to overlook it.

Will this year be remembered because it was the year that the wars of the past few centuries – the ones where strong countries do whatever they want to their neighbors – finally came to an end? Or will we have to learn the same lesson again and again until such bullying ends?

For the sake of Ukraine – for the sake of our world – I hope for the former.

We end this year with many questions.

As Jews, we might also have deep questions about Israel? I know that I do. Which is why I am glad that there has been an Arab-Israeli conflict class that I have been teaching all fall. It is why I am really looking forward to the Temple trip to Israel that will be going in late February of next year. It is why I have worked so hard to get Temple 11th and 12th Graders to be part of the March of the Living this year so that they can be in Israel as it marks 75 years of Independence.

Now more than at any time I can remember – is the time to engage with Israel.

The writer Yossi Klein Halevi – whose book “Letters to My Palestinian Neighbor” will be discussed at a congregation-wide program in late March - said it best when he noted that American Jews, as the world’s second largest Jewish community, needs to get to know Israel’s center much better than it does now.

We are at a time when looking at the extremes, and responding to their grandstanding, does no one any good. This is not the time to walk away from Israel. That is just not what we do.

Nor is it what Jews around the world, especially those in need, have been doing.

Perhaps one of the least-talked-about stories from Israel in 2022 is how it continues to serve as a haven for our people when we need it most.

Some 70,000 people made ‘aliyah’ over the past year, mostly from formerly Soviet countries, over double 2021’s total, according to Jewish Agency figures 70,000 people who immigrated to Israel in the past year, more than three-quarters came from countries involved in the Russia-Ukraine war, with 37,364 arriving from Russia, 14,680 from Ukraine and 1,993 from Belarus.

In addition, some 1,500 people immigrated to Israel from Ethiopia in the past year as part of Operation Tzur Israel, a government-backed program to bring thousands of Ethiopians eligible for citizenship to Israel.”

These are just a few of the things, from my Jewish perspective, that I wanted to record as this year ends.

The bottom line is that this difficult year illustrates that while there are challenges in our world, there is also goodness.

May 2023 bring to us all, more goodness and less evil, more of the sweet and less of the bitter, more peace than strife!