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1. 2015

1.1 October

The controversy of Kaparot (2015-10-12 12:36)

In preparation of Yom Kippur, the ceremony of Kaparot takes place. The ceremony is most commonly practiced by Orthodox Jews. In this ceremony, a chicken is passed over one's head three times and appropriate text is recited. Following this, the chicken is slaughtered. The main purpose of this ceremony is to transfer your sins to the bird and traditionally the birds are gifted to the poor after the slaughter.

Recently, animal rights groups have been protesting this ceremony due to it's cruelty towards the birds being used. It is claimed that they are kept in poor conditions prior to the ceremony and it is "an unnecessary cruelty" towards the animals. Many protests leaned more towards violence and police were called in to protect the people performing the ceremony. As the times have changed, chickens can now be substituted for fish or even money. Some say that this ceremony goes against *tsa'ar ba'alei chayim*, or the Jewish ethic, saying that you are supposed to treat animals with compassion, not cruelty.

I feel very split on this topic, as I am a strong advocate for animal rights, yet I still believe that people should freely practice their religion. What are your thoughts on this?

1.2 November

The Starbucks Cup (2015-11-29 16:52)

With the holiday season kicking into full gear, what is this time of year without some heated arguments over arbitrary things? Exhibit A, the Starbucks holiday cup.

This has been a heated debate in the Christian community (although I have seen more people upset about people being upset than anything). The Cup is an opaque red with the simple Starbucks logo proudly displayed on the front. Throughout it's history, the Cup has never been Christmas specific. It has rather been more of a winter-theme, displaying snowflakes and other seasonal decorations. Apparently since it is lacking in the ostentatious decor, people have come to believe that Starbucks as a company is anti-Christmas and, therefore, anti-Christian.

In response to these outrageous claims made by some radical thinkers, some of the Jewish community has fired back with the argument: "why do the cups have to be Christmas specific?" and "why can't there be Hanukkah themed cups if people are demanding Christmas themed ones?". These arguments bring up valid points. Why can't there be a more inclusive theme to paper coffee cups that contain overly priced liquids?? Oh, wait.

In my personal opinion, I believe the cups are fine how they are and it would be completely wrong to make the cups Christmas themed when millions of the world's population does not celebrate Christmas. Also, arguing about how a cup looks is quite arbitrary when there are countless numbers of more important things to worry about.

So go ahead, tell the barista your name is "Merry Christmas". It won't change the fact that the world is making strides to be a more equal place for people to practice whatever they believe in and you are an ignorant jerk.

NYC Private Schools (2015-11-29 17:32)

As of recently, the world has been becoming a more and more violent place. Religious intolerance is skyrocketing and becoming a major area of concern. In New York City, Democratic City Councilman David Greenfield made \$19.8 million available to private schools to increase security. The money is coming from taxpayers and will strictly fund non-public schools.

With everything that has been happening lately with religious intolerance and violence, I think that this is a step in a good direction. The world is a dangerous place and it is unknown as to what will happen in the future. Increasing security in private Jewish schools would be a smart move, as many attacks lately have been fueled by religious intolerances.

I feel as though some more conservative taxpayers in New York will not go for this, as some may say that it is not their concern to protect people of different religious groups. I think that is a terrible counterargument. People are people and just because they fall in a different religious group than you does not mean they don't deserve protection. It is obvious that certain minority groups are being targeted and they deserve protection.

Hostility in the Middle East (2015-11-30 13:37)

Since the creation of the Jewish state of Israel on May 14, 1948, tensions in the Middle East have been on the rise. Many of the hostilities lie between the people of Israel and Palestine. Over the years, there have been several acts of terror performed by people of each of these countries.

As of recently, two teenagers from Israel were found guilty of murdering another teenager from Palestine. The incident occurred back in 2014 but the court system just got around to trying them. The two took 16 year old Mohammed Abu Khdeir from his home and set him on fire. A third attacker, Yosef Haim Ben-David, was pardoned due to claiming mental instability. The death of Khdeir set afire protests and riots which carried on for several weeks.

I think that hostility between these groups of people is inevitable, due strictly to historical struggles which fueled the initial disagreements. I am totally for the creation of the Jewish state, but I think it is simply a fact that people will be against this and there will be a struggle between opposing groups for several more years. It is difficult to think of a solution to end this fighting, as there are so many complicated factors that go into the struggle. Hostility towards Jewish people, especially more conservative Jews, has been embedded into society since the death of Jesus (as many blamed the Jews for this) and harsh feelings simply do not get better when these feelings have been going on for this long.

1.3 December

Anti-Semitism in the Modern Era (2015-12-01 13:05)

Hostility towards people of the Jewish faith has been an ongoing issue since the death of Jesus. Prior to World War II, a feeling of hatred toward Jews was termed as "anti-Judaism". This intense hatred started to pick up following World War I and the crash of the German economy. Jews were blamed for any and all ill-fated things that happened. Although the malicious attacks has subsided, especially in the Western world, there is still an ongoing struggle for power and much-deserved respect in a large majority of the Eastern world.

Throughout many developed countries, strides are being made to protect people of minorities and allow for a more equal field for people to express their beliefs. The benefits from this equality movement are not limited to just the United States; countries like Australia are experiencing a decrease in anti-semitic violence. There was a 39 % drop

in anti-semitic incidents, which includes mostly non-violent acts. Although this statistic provides some hope for the future, it is said that acts of violence with underlying anti-semitic themes are on the rise. It is extremely problematic that in the 21st century we are still having issues with inequality and not allowing people to practice their faith freely. Although this is just an isolated statistic from Australia, anti-semitism is still alive throughout the world. It may not be on the scale of the Holocaust for example but that does not give any sort of justification for the actions of the people committing these crimes.

People not being allowed to express their religion freely is damaging to Judaism as a whole because when people are attacked for their religion, it makes it less popular. I am not suggesting that Judaism will cease to exist in the near future, but when a group is marginalized and attacked for their belief, it'll make that religion/ group lose popularity. This current issue is something that needs to be addressed and change needs to be brought about to ensure the safety of the people.

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