



Chabad

AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

THE ROHR CENTER FOR JEWISH STUDENT LIFE



What's Inside:

FAITH, FOOTBALL & FORTITUDE

An inspiring journey of a Jewish college quarterback

ANTI-ANTISEMITISM

"I have been met with significant opposition because of my Israel advocacy."

JEWISH IDENTITY IN ACTION,
Chabad's role in my sons college journey:

"I knew we found the right place."



A MESSAGE FROM THE STEINERS

Dear Friend,

Living on campus at the University of Minnesota, we have the unique opportunity to experience life through the eyes of the students. We are right here with them through the ups and the downs, the excitement and the stress. Being a Jewish student at the U has undoubtedly been challenging over the past year, but so many students viewed this adversity as an opportunity to strengthen their relationships - with each other and with their Judaism. We have had the privilege of being a home away from home for hundreds of individuals searching for comfort, connection, and inspiration.

Fifteen years ago, Chavi and I were newly married and looking to make a difference. We moved to campus with a vision of opening the doors of Judaism to all students and faculty at the U. Just a year later, we acquired our building so that we could accommodate all the students who were interested in our programs and Shabbat dinners. When we hosted our very first Shabbat dinner we were joined by just four students. The next week, eight. And now, years later, we're welcoming over 100 Jewish Gophers on an average Friday night.

It is amazing how time flies and things change. We now have five wonderful children of our own who are on this mission with us. Our firstborn, Mendel, is off in High School in Arizona, and our daughter Leah has embarked on her own high school journey in Chicago. And I recently had the joy of celebrating my 40th birthday surrounded by friends, family, students, and alumni.



As our nuclear family has grown, so has our Chabad family. We are reaching more Jews every year. It is nothing short of inspiring to see a diverse group of Jewish university students unite, celebrating their shared heritage and traditions.

During our time here we have made lifelong friends. We have followed our alumni through career advancements, marriage, and parenthood. Our greatest honor and joy is celebrating weddings with our alumni, dancing with the bride and groom on their special day.

As we reflect on the past fifteen years, we are filled with gratitude. We are grateful for the relationships we've built that have shaped who we are today. We are grateful for the continuous support of the greater Minnesota community that fuels our work here on campus. Finally, we are grateful to G-d who gives us strength and fortitude through all of our endeavors.

Please enjoy this publication which we hope will allow you to get a glimpse of the beauty of Jewish life at the University of Minnesota. May we continue to see growth personally and as a community.

Sincerely,

RABBI YITZI AND CHAVI STEINER

DO YOU KNOW?

MYTH

Chabad focuses on educating only Jewish students about antisemitism.

FACT

Chabad is committed to educating the entire campus community on antisemitism. Since October 7th, we've launched an initiative offering free DEI training on antisemitism. Our goal is to bring this 30-minute training to every fraternity, sorority, and registered student group by the end of the next school year.

MYTH

Chabad serves only a small group of Jewish students on campus.

FACT

Chabad proudly serves a wide and diverse community of Jewish students. Each week, over 130 students join us for Shabbat dinner, and just last semester, we recorded 671 unique engagements with Jewish Gophers, reflecting the broad impact of our programs.

MYTH

Chabad is financed by its headquarters in New York.

FACT

Each Chabad center is independently supported by the local community it serves. All funding for our programs is raised locally, and we do not receive financial support from Chabad's central headquarters in New York. Additionally, none of the money raised here is sent to the international headquarters. Every dollar donated stays within our community to support Jewish students at the University of Minnesota.

MYTH

Chabad's goal is to make everyone Orthodox.

FACT

Chabad's mission is to ignite the Jewish spark in every individual, regardless of observance, background, or affiliation. Rather than promoting Orthodoxy, Chabad focuses on fostering each person's connection to Judaism through education, engagement, and open exploration of Jewish tradition. By creating an inclusive and non-judgmental environment, Chabad encourages individuals to deepen their love for Judaism and make their own religious and lifestyle choices. Jewish identity is celebrated as a shared heritage, not defined by specific practices.

MYTH

Chabad is synonymous with Orthodox Judaism.

FACT

While Orthodox Jews often seek environments that strengthen their personal religious observance, Chabad's focus is outward. Chabad's mission is to connect with every Jew, regardless of their level of observance, affiliation, or location, and help ignite their unique Jewish spark. Jewish observance exists on a wide spectrum, and Chabad tailors its efforts to meet each individual where they are. This is why Chabad intentionally steps far outside its own comfort zone—whether to a remote village, a third-world country, or a bustling college campus. Their goal is not to make others Orthodox but to nurture a Jew's innate love for their heritage and identity.

A TRIBUTE TO RABBI ZVI KOGAN, OF BLESSED MEMORY

The tragic murder of Rabbi Zvi Kogan in November shook the global Jewish community. He was targeted, kidnapped, and killed at the young age of 28 for the "crime" of being a Jew.

As Chabad shluchim (emissaries) to the UAE since 2020, Rabbi Kogan and his wife served the Jewish community that has grown there since the signing of the Abraham accords, as well as the many Jewish tourists who come through every year.

He is remembered as being a generous and humble soul, who brought joy to everyone he encountered.

Rabbi Kogan dedicated his life to spreading the light of Judaism in the far corners of the world. While his mission was cut short in a brutal act of antisemitism, his legacy lives on: Thousands of Chabad emissaries around the world carry his torch. His passing reminds us of how dark the world can be, and how every person has a responsibility to make it a brighter place.

RESPONSES FROM AROUND THE WORLD

Rabbi Kogan's story is a powerful testament to the extraordinary sacrifices made by Chabad emissaries around the world. His passing has sparked an outpouring of reactions from across the globe.



Seeing what happened with Rabbi Zvi Kogan, and doing some reflection, and seeing what others have said, I just wanted to truly say thank you Yitzi and Chavi. You guys do amazing work and the sacrifices you both make to make the lives of students and Jews a priority is extremely honorable. Thank you both, especially for the impact you have made in my life and the space you have provided for me to grow both as a Jew and as a person.

Michael Dickson

My children have found their second homes with Chabad rabbis, and the warm and welcoming environment they create for Jews and non-Jews of all kinds at their respective colleges. We deeply cherish the kindness, care, and values they bring to our lives. Today, we honor Rabbi Zvi Kogan, who was tragically murdered for being a Jew. His life, his impact, and his legacy will forever remain a blessing.

Member of MACA (Mothers Against College Antisemitism)





ANTI-ANTISEMITISM

A student's courageous advocacy against hate on campus
by Tagore Pathak

Israel is very close to my heart and is a part of my identity. While I am not Jewish myself, I went to a Jewish preschool and have remained connected to my local Jewish community ever since. Additionally, Israel is the sole democracy in the Middle East, and I feel obligated as a proud American citizen to stand up for other countries that share American values. I am also a proud Zionist who believes Jewish people have the right to live in their indigenous homeland without the threats of war and terrorism.

I choose to stand up for Israel on campus because there is a lot of anti-Israel and antisemitic misinformation in the campus discourse. We have witnessed firsthand what happens when these narratives go unchallenged, and I care about the well-being of my Jewish friends and peers on campus. At an anti-Israel protest, I feel it's important for someone to show up with an Israeli flag to ensure that students who support Israel don't feel isolated or silenced, and to remind them that their perspectives are valid and shared by others. I joined Students Supporting Israel (SSI) because of its strong track record in grassroots advocacy, making a significant impact on campuses, and effectively countering hateful ideas.

Unfortunately, I have been met with significant opposition because of my Israel advocacy. On November 14, 2024, as I was heading back to my dorm, two individuals who looked to be students approached me. One said he was going to kill me that evening because I "held the occupiers flag" and that I should watch my back because he was going to shoot me.

I have been burned with hot liquid, physically assaulted, threatened with violence, and had my property stolen simply for peacefully displaying the Israeli flag.

My advice to students who want to support Israel but feel afraid or intimidated is not to back down. There are many ways to get involved without risking confrontation. Above all, remember that you have allies on campus, a strong community to rely on, and you're not alone. Even when it's difficult, you're doing the right thing. We no longer have the luxury of silence, and we can't let hate drive us off our campuses.



JEWISH IDENTITY IN ACTION

Chabad's role in my son's college journey
by Steve Leventhal

When we were looking at schools, I knew I wanted Noah ('28) to have not just a Jewish experience but a religious experience as well. I wanted Noah to stay connected to his Judaism while he was away at college. **When Noah shared at Thanksgiving dinner that he was grateful for his Jewish community on campus, I knew we found the right place.**

Noah found Chabad during his first week on campus and it has been a "home away from home" for him ever since. It is a place where he always feels welcome, and, as a parent, it is so comforting to know that he is taken care of. It really meant a lot when Rabbi Steiner reached out and told me, "Noah always has a home to come to."

Chabad has enhanced Noah's college experience in so many ways.



It is not just the Friday night dinners - which he loves - but the classes and services that Chabad offers are helping shape him as a Jewish young adult. I've also seen that he's become very proud of his Judaism. **I was impressed when I saw him wearing a necklace with a Jewish star and Goldy Gopher that he got from Chabad on the outside of his clothing.**

It is so important that students continue to embrace their Jewish heritage, especially through these difficult times on campuses.

Chabad on campus cultivates a sense of Jewish community. These connections give the students confidence to be publicly proud of their Judaism, which is something they can carry with them when they go into the workforce and society.

I'm really grateful that Chabad has given Noah a strong Jewish community and a place where he feels welcome and supported. It's great knowing he has somewhere to go for religious, cultural, and social connection. Chabad has helped him stay connected to his Jewish identity and build confidence in it, which I think will stick with him long after college.





FAITH, FOOTBALL & FORTITUDE

The inspiring story of a
Jewish college quarterback

Jeremiah Finaly ('28), a native of Seal Beach, California, has forged an inspiring path as both a college quarterback and a proud member of the Jewish community. Now studying at the University of Minnesota, he skillfully balances the rigorous demands of athletics with a deep commitment to his faith.

Jeremiah's decision to attend the University of Minnesota was driven by his passion for football, but his connection to the campus extended beyond the field. During a high school visit, he discovered the local Chabad House, an experience that left a lasting impression. "I knew immediately that if I came to the U of M, I would get involved with Chabad," he recalls. The warm, inclusive environment resonated with him, especially seeing people from diverse religious backgrounds unite. "The atmosphere is so accepting and loving," he adds.

For Jeremiah, Chabad has become an essential part of his college journey, providing both a sense of community and spiritual grounding. Weekly Shabbat dinners are a particular highlight for him. "Attending Chabad on campus helps me stay connected to my Jewish identity and religious observance," he explains.

His relationship with Chabad began at home in Seal Beach, where he attended a Chabad synagogue that played a significant role in shaping his faith.



At college, Rabbi Yitzi has become a trusted mentor. "Rabbi Yitzi is approachable and always there to help when I have religious questions or face challenges," Jeremiah says. This guidance has been invaluable as he navigates the challenges of balancing his athletic commitments with his religious practices.

"Being a quarterback and maintaining my Jewish identity can be challenging," Jeremiah admits. Early morning practices require meticulous time management. "I have to rush home after practice to put on tefillin before class because it's too early when I wake up to do so." While demanding, this discipline has strengthened both his faith and his performance on the field. "It's helped me grow in both areas. I've become more mindful of the daily habits needed to excel as a football player and as a Jew."

Game days present unique challenges, especially when they coincide with Shabbat. While Jeremiah often misses services to play, he seizes every opportunity to attend prayers and lunch at Chabad on free Saturdays.

His commitment has earned him the admiration of his teammates and coaches. "There aren't many Jewish football players, so people are curious about Jewish practices and values. I enjoy sharing my culture with them, and I'm grateful for their respect and openness," he says.

Jeremiah Finaly's journey is a testament to resilience, discipline, and faith. His ability to harmonize the demands of college athletics with the observance of his religion serves as an inspiration to many. As he continues to grow, he remains a proud representative of his faith, his heritage, and his team.



nourishing BODY & SOUL

A student's kosher journey



For a Jewish student who keeps kosher, managing a busy schedule can be a challenge. Unlike his friends, who can easily grab a quick meal at a fast-food chain, Asher Shertok ('27) has to carefully plan when and what he will eat. "I often have to structure my day around when I can take a break from studying to cook and plan meals," he explains. "It's all about finding time so I don't miss out on social opportunities with friends."

Despite these challenges, keeping kosher is deeply meaningful to him.

"IT'S NOT JUST A DIETARY RESTRICTION —IT'S A WAY FOR ME TO CONNECT WITH G-D THROUGH THE SIMPLE PLEASURES OF EATING,"



Asher says.

"It also reinforces the value of commitment. I truly believe that embracing challenges helps us grow into more disciplined and productive people."

Fortunately, the presence of Chabad on campus has made this commitment much more manageable.

"WITH WEEKLY EVENTS, SHABBAT MEALS, AND HOLY GUACAMOLE, THE ONLY KOSHER RESTAURANT ON CAMPUS, I DON'T FEEL LIKE I HAVE TO COMPROMISE ON MY OBSERVANCE."



Asher is deeply grateful for the incredible work Chabad does and their continued support for kosher-observant students like himself.

L'Chaim **TO LIFE!**

Mazal Tov! Check out some of the recent life-cycle events of our extended Chabad family.

Births:

Bentzion, born to Daniel ('19) and Ayelet Ternyak

Rfoel Baruch Yonasan, born to Moishe ('11) and Miriam Glikin

Hallel Yaakov Yisrael ("Kobi"), born to Danny ('18) and Rochel Kladnitsky

Nechama Raizel, born to Chava ('20) and Yoni Stebbins

Eitan Avraham, born to Misha ('15) and Nechama Wahlstrom

Engagements:

Ryan Wolfson ('17) to Tracey Warsett ('19)

Justin Boschwitz ('17) to Megan Orbach

Jacob Ungerman to ('19) Ashley Gerstenblatt

Ian Aizman ('13) to Maddie Braverman

Shmuel Dukes ('16) to Sheina Shimonowitz

Wedding:

Evana Kvasnik ('15) to Billy Hershkowitz



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