



A Letter from the Editor:

Having written for *Iggrot Ha'Ari* twice during my college career, I know that the experience of producing academic quality work about a Jewish topic one cares about can be extremely rewarding. It allows one to engage seriously with the texts and thinkers who have written about the experience of being a Jew. And, to be a Jewish undergraduate at Columbia from 2021-2025, as I was, sometimes required considered thought—not just Tweets, rants, or even *Spectator* op-eds, but academic-level work that plumbed the nature of Jewish religion, history, and identity.

The eight works included in this Spring edition of *Iggrot Ha'Ari* do just that.

Writing for *Iggrot* also showed me that the opportunity to do so existed only due to the dedication of a team of students who contributed their time to providing a platform for others to write. As most of the members of that team, who had reestablished *Iggrot Ha'Ari* in 2020 after a 15 year hiatus, graduated in Spring 2024, they told me *Iggrot* would likely cease to function since the prior Editorial Board had not been able to secure a viable team to succeed it.

I am honored to say that a new team has materialized and that *Iggrot Ha'Ari* lives on. Georgia Fried and Raymond Wu responded almost a year ago to my call for Editorial Board members, and tirelessly contributed their editing talent, Jewish knowledge, and creativity to produce this issue. Thanks to them, as well as to our editing team, which includes Gabriela Orozco, Spencer Davis, Ilana Bramson, and Yoni Semel, to the team at Columbia Libraries, and to our faculty advisors, this issue stands as another link in a long tradition of stellar Jewish Studies work at Columbia.

Inside, you will find eight Jewish students at Columbia hailing from a broad range of religious, political, and social backgrounds weighing in on topics meaningful and interesting to them, from scholarly debates about the essence of the universe—as in Aiden Englander's inspiring work on the theology of Rabbi Kalonymus Kalman Shapira and in Rose Clubok's incisive article on Martin Buber's portrayals of the Baal Shem Tov—to redefinitions of American Jewish cultural study—as in Judy Goldstein's article "Girls Need to Dance," which takes a feminist lens to the experiences of Jewish women in twentieth century dance halls, and in Lonnie Miller's "Bagels and Bongos," a brilliant attempt to bridge the gap in academic study of 1950s *klezmer* music. Our halachic and exegesis enthusiasts are Emma Vorchheimer and Charlie Feuerman; Vorchheimer's sound literary analysis of reciprocal justice in Genesis and Feuerman's groundbreaking article that seeks to understand applications of the halachic category of *ervah* to gender-queer people speak to their devotion to understanding the full breadth of Jewish text and tradition. Finally, readers interested in better grasping how understandings of group identity shape antisemitism, Islamophobia, and anti-Palestinian racism can turn to both Mira Kux's prescient work, which presents a fascinating analysis of Jewish identity as applied to Palestinian Arabs in the 2014 film *A Borrowed Identity*, and to Rose Joffe's insightful article on the long-reaching medieval roots of the blood-libel myth.

I hope you enjoy, learn from, and cherish these incredible pieces of writing, published at a time when the value of academia and the meaning of Jewish identity are up for debate. As we move beyond Passover, may the words and ideas contained in this journal lead us to keep asking questions, searching for answers, and wrestling with Jewish tradition.

Sincerely,
Yoni Kurtz
Iggrot Ha'Ari, 2024-5 Editor-in-Chief