

**Artist Statement**

For the first month of the genocide, I carried Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel's 1973 essay "The Reasons for My Involvement in the Peace Movement" in my pocket to sit-ins and protests, and thought of it as my amulet. Though Jews of various political persuasions claim Heschel as a spiritual and political ancestor, it was clear to me that his writings on the Vietnam War—as well as those on the Holocaust—place him firmly in the lineage of today's Jewish anti-war activists. While the Jewish establishment was insistently defending Israel's razing of Gaza, one of the most venerated rabbis of the 20th century was calling through time, clearly and unequivocally: *Some are guilty, but all are responsible.*

Soon, inspired by the art of Jewish scribal amulets, which have been used since ancient times for protection or spiritual meditation, I began making prints that arranged text from Heschel's anti-war essays as meditative amulets. For some, like the one you'll find enclosed here, I've taken inspiration from the particular tradition of Shiviti amulets, a Kabbalistic form that emerged in the 18th century. Traditionally, these amulets depict the text of Psalm 67 in the shape of a seven-branch menorah, with half of a verse from Psalm 16 on top:

שְׁיִתִּי ה' לְגַדִּי תָמִיד

*I have set the Lord before me always.*

This ornately arrayed text is meant to be transportative: By gazing at its surface during prayer and focusing on the tetragrammaton (the four Hebrew letters of the holy name of God, which is abbreviated above but appears in full on the amulets) and the branches of the menorah (which for Kabbalists represent seven of the sefirot, or aspects of the Divine), we may find ourselves in a holy dimension. As I've arranged and rearranged Heschel's essays around such meditative frameworks, I've seen new meanings emerge. For instance, for this print—drawn from Heschel's 1971 essay "Dissent," which affirms dissent and rebuke as essential characteristics of Jewish moral behavior—I replaced the tetragrammaton with the word "acts," while near the bottom of the image, where some Shiviti amulets include another name of God, Shaddai, I placed "word." This substitution reveals the holiness of words and acts of creative dissent.

In a moment when the vast majority of Jewish institutions have abandoned the path of righteousness while casting out those who object, I hope this amulet offers strength to the dissenters and reminds you that your protest is sacred.

**Liora Ostroff** is a Baltimore-based artist whose work explores Jewishness, queerness, and violence. From 2021 to 2023, she was curator-in-residence at the Jewish Museum of Maryland, where she developed the exhibitions *A Fence Around the Torah: Safety and Unsafety in Jewish Life* and *My Odessa: Paintings by Yefim Ladyzhensky*. She is the founding education director at the New Synagogue Project in Washington, DC.