

Beth Israel Congregation

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November 2018

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Words of Torah from Rabbi Isaacs

At the end of the day, I come back to one satisfying response time and time again: be a loud and proud Jew.

I know that many of our friends, and many of us, are at a loss about how to respond to the shooting at Pittsburgh. I have been distressed by the quickness that this tragedy has been used by people across the political spectrum to mobilize their base on a variety of issues, and in the process, intentionally or unintentionally, obscuring the motive and the effect of this attack. This murderer killed Jews in synagogue because they were Jews. And though I have opinions, as many of us do, on gun control, the importance of voting, our current president, and American support for Israel, I plead for a little bit of honesty.

Antisemites target Jews before and after elections, and when political leaders of all parties are president or prime minister. When antisemites want to kill us, they will use whatever means are available to them. We have been killed in gas chambers, fires, labor camps, bombings, and through economic boycotts. US policy toward Israel has no impact on the safety of our American synagogues, and moving our embassy to Jerusalem has no relationship to the ever-shrinking American budget for monitoring and stopping the domestic white nationalist militias and individuals who are armed and ready to inflict mass carnage on our community and other minorities in our nation. Our president has ignored and obscured the danger of white nationalists in Charlottesville, used antisemitic imagery in campaign advertisements, and has stoked conspiracy theories about George Soros that are clear dog whistles to antisemites. *And* the increase in antisemitism in the US long predates our current president, and the place where most young Jews learn about antisemitism, and experience it in profoundly insidious and damaging ways, is on liberal college campuses.

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Want to commemorate a special occasion? Consider engraving a leaf for our synagogue's Etz Chayim -- Tree of Life! Leaves are \$200. Please contact Mel Weiss at melanieaweiss@gmail.com for more information.

MEMORIAL PLAQUES

To purchase a Yahrzeit plaque please contact Rabbi Isaacs or Tiffany Lopes \$200 members/\$400 non-members

CALL FOR YAHRZEITS

If you wish to have your loved ones' Yahrzeit observed during services, please e-mail Rabbi Isaacs.

Simchas and Updates

Have a simcha you'd like to see printed in the Beth Israel monthly newsletter? Email melanieaweiss@gmail.com by November 21.

Mazal Tov to Sam Shapiro

for receiving the President's Special Recognition Award at the National Association of State Treasurers conference!

We are kvelling.

To read the full newspaper article, follow Beth Israel on Facebook or go to <https://tinyurl.com/y7cqarub>



The president of the association that gave the prize described Sam as "what every public official should aspire to be."

WE REMEMBER

The Yahrzeits for the month of November 2018 (23 Cheshvan - 22 Kislev):

Louis Wolman
Eva Gurewitz
John Williams
Gordon Wolman
Samuel Levine
Samuel Wolman
Nelson Levine
Rose Alford
Harold Alford
Esther Elkin
Edward Saperstein
Isaac Arthur Russakoff
Lillian Brisk Kusnitt
Annie Cook
Edith Plavin
Sophie Aronie
Frederick James Sterns
Harry Elkin
Iola Elizabeth (Plowman) Ferguson

May Their Memories Be For a Blessing

Mazal Tov to Judi and Mark Silver on the birth of their newest grandchild, Jack Elliot, this past September.

MAZAL TOV!

Upcoming Services & Synagogue Events

Open Shabbat Potluck and Services:

Friday, November 2, 5-7pm at Beth Israel. We invite our community, and our friends and neighbors eager to support us, to welcome in Shabbat together.

Home Hospitality Shabbat: Friday, November 9, 6pm at Beth Israel. Services together, meals at home! It's going to a wonderful time to bring the Beth Israel and Hillel communities together.

Tot Shabbat/Young Families Shabbat Pajama Havdala: Saturday, November 10, 4pm at 9 Messalonskee Avenue. A song, a story, a snack -- and havdala together! Get to know other young families in a relaxed atmosphere, and celebrate the end of Shabbat.

Kabbalat Shabbat services: Friday, November 30, 6pm at Beth Israel. Welcome in Shabbat with our Beth Israel community!

Community Conversations

Sunday, November 11, 6:30 - 8:30pm

What must we give—and give up—to be American?

The event will take place in the new Chace Forum—a communal events space on the first floor of the Bill & Joan Alfond Main Street Commons
Thought leaders: Bethashley Cajuste and Rabbi Erica Asch

Details: colby.edu/jewishlife

Classes and Volunteering at Beth Israel

Hebrew school: Thursdays, November 1, 8, 15 and 29, 3-5pm. We are excited to be in our new space at Beth Israel! The Mitchell school bus is now functional.

Hebrew high: Thursdays, November 1, 8, 15 and 29, 5:30 - 6:30pm. Dinner provided!

Bagel Brunch: Identity, Authenticity, and Biology: Sunday, November 4, 10am at Beth Israel. Given the furor over Senator Elizabeth Warren's recent DNA test, we'll examine the role of biological data in the creation -- and affirmation -- of Jewish identity.

Torah on Tap: Great Sermons in Jewish History: Wednesday, November 7, 6pm at Mainely Brews. Come join this third class in a series of three about wonderful sermons, and enjoy local brews and food!

Intro to Judaism: Wednesdays -- launch date to be announced soon, 2:30 - 3:30pm, online. We'll be running another Intro to Judaism class online. If you're interested or know someone who might be, please email Mel Weiss (melanieaweiss@gmail.com) for more information.

Torah on Tap: The Problems of Egalitarianism: Monday, November 19, 6pm at Mainely Brews. A look at the changing roles men and women have played -- and are currently playing -- in the American Jewish landscape, and some effects of feminism on that.

Register for Project Zug! Online Partnership Learning in Maine

The official launch is coming this November from the Center for Small Town Jewish Life. The important takeaway? This opportunity will let you engage in fascinating Jewish learning in the traditional style (text-based and with a study-buddy) from the comfort of your own home! Interested? Follow the Center on Facebook, and stay tuned to the Beth Israel weekly emails! Questions or concerns? Contact Mel Weiss at maweiss@colby.edu.

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Pointing out these realities isn't "whataboutism" -- it is the complicated truth about a sophisticated and malleable ideology. Antisemitism is a complex and unique hatred, and we cannot address it properly unless we are willing to see it in all of its diversity and contradiction.

To quote a woman whose writings are more relevant now than ever, Hannah Arendt, "When you are attacked as a Jew, you respond as a Jew." Antisemitism is not new, it is not partisan, and it has been a deadly force in human affairs, in the United States and abroad, for thousands of years. The words of Alana Newhouse are intellectually honest and instructive:

Anti-Semitism is not the exclusive province of either Donald Trump's supporters on the alt-right, or of his most fervent opponents on the left. It transcends partisan alignments. It appeals to defiant bigots and proud justice-seeking universalists alike.

Anti-Semitism, whether expressed as hatred of Jews because of their religion, or their politics, or the actions of their nation-state, provides its believers with a single, all-encompassing explanation of reality, which turns on the unique evil of the Jewish people, or the Jewish race, or the Jewish religion, or the Jewish nation-state. It is at once the black mass of reactionary thought, and the great perversion of all reactionaries, the primal howl of idiots in their basements and the most sophisticated frontier of right-thinking academics and the way the half-lettered of every ideological leaning impress their peers with the depth of their insight into the inner workings of large events: *It Was. The Jews.*

Our American Jewish community has been blessed by historically unprecedented safety due to the leadership of individuals like George Washington, our first President, who wanted to create a country that was not infected with the disease of antisemitism like the nations of Europe. When General Ulysses S. Grant expelled the Jews of Tennessee, Mississippi, and Kentucky for being untrustworthy citizens, President Lincoln made him reverse his despicable order. The famous lynching of American Jew, Leo Frank, is noteworthy precisely because it was rare. However, our world lacks leaders of Washington and Lincoln's quality and integrity, and the mostly reliable veil of safety we have enjoyed previously has been pierced by an unprecedented increase in antisemitic hate crimes over the past two decades.

When you are attacked as Jew, respond as Jew. And respond by being open, proud, and joyful in your Judaism. Come to shul, learn about your history and faith, so that you can build a resilient Jewish identity that is not shaped primarily by the hatred of others, but rather by the beauty of what our people has built over two millennia. Your God and your community are waiting for you. Most of your neighbors love you and want to support you now and always. Cultivate that love through relationship building with them, meaningful allyship, and by bringing them into your Jewish lives. Invite them to come to our services, parties, and homes. Speak lovingly and proudly of what your heritage and your people have given you, and make sure your kids and grandkids are listening.

I wish that heinous hate crimes against our community were not the most effective and public wakeup calls about what it means to be a Jew, the threats we face, and the importance of holding fast to our faith, traditions, and people. We cannot bring back the dead, but we can make their legacies last forever through our actions and commitments. Because at the end of the day, when these eleven beautiful souls thought about the holiest and most meaningful way to live their lives and spend their Saturday morning, it was celebrating their relationship to God and the Jewish community at synagogue. This week, come to shul for them. Next week, come for yourself, your people, and our future. May their memories be for a blessing, and may their lives be bound up in the bonds of life. Zichronam L'vracha.

Rabbi Isaacs