



Congregation
B'nai Israel
The Orthodox Synagogue for All Jews

the Voice

WINTER EDITION

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A Message From Rabbi Brodkin

Dear Friends,

Soon we will celebrate the joyous days of Chanukah, adding light to the dark days of winter. What is the basis for this holiday? The Talmud explains that during Second Temple times, occupying Greek forces propagated decrees against Israel. Core parts of our covenant were outlawed, including circumcision, Shabbat and Temple service. The Jewish people faced great peril, and there was a major movement away from Judaism, toward Greek culture.

The Hasmoneans, or "Maccabees," and their followers fought against the Greek infiltrators. Against all odds, Israel defeated its mighty enemy. Every Chanukah, we thank God for the miracle of Israel's victory in battle. The Talmud adds that when we rededicated the Temple, another miracle occurred: a single remaining flask of pure oil lasted for eight days while new oil was procured for the Temple service.

Ostensibly, the first miracle of victory in battle was of greater historic significance than the miracle of the oil. Given this, why is so much emphasis placed on the oil? Why are the eight days of the holiday based on a relatively minor event?

While oil lasting eight days was historically less significant than victory in war, the oil underscores the deeper truth about Chanukah. Why were the Maccabees prepared to sacrifice their lives for this fight?

The answer is that they lived for the sake of the "Avoda," serving and connecting to God. While Greek culture was based on sensual pleasure, Judaism declared that our lives are about connecting with our Creator.

The miracle of the oil reminds us that we can dedicate a place to God in our world, and HaShem will help us as we do so. Today, our synagogue is our Temple where we advance a life of serving God through Mitzvot. Jewish life is fragile, as we face internal and external threats. Yet, here at B'nai we follow in the path of the Maccabees. We are dedicated to assuring that the flame of Torah continues to burn bright.

How does that happen? Through our many programs, services and pastoral care, the Shul touches lives every week, every month and every year. From our weekly classes or family Challah bake to our Sisterhood social groups or our Minyans, B'nai Israel helps Jews of all backgrounds to connect to their heritage.

Everything we do at B'nai Israel is made possible through the efforts of our selfless volunteers and dedicated staff. In that light, it will be special to connect with all of you at our Chanukah Bash coming up on Monday, December 11. I look forward to greeting you!

As a synagogue, we stand out as a community that makes sacrifices to assure the flame of Torah continues to shine. Together, we perpetuate the miracle of Chanukah right here at 33 Gordons Corner Road.

Shalom,

Rabbi Ken Brodkin



A Message From Our President - Jay Fields

I hope everyone had a great High Holiday season. I'd like to thank Rabbi Brodkin and everyone who was involved in making this a joyous and meaningful time. Sadly, there's much going on in the world at the moment. It can be overwhelming. The events that recently took place in Israel are devastating and difficult to watch.

Our Shul community came together on Thursday night, October 12, to recognize the pain that all Jews, worldwide, are feeling. We heard from many speakers who shared some moving and at times, devastating, stories from that infamous attack on Israeli citizens. We continue to watch and are hopeful that all kidnapped hostages are returned safely and that there is a resolution to this conflict that ends with Hamas and its threat to Israeli security demolished.

To that end, we realize that security is not just an Israeli-homeland issue. We, too, are concerned with the increased level of antisemitism in the USA. We have decided to have an on-site armed security guard on Shabbos and at other shul events going forward. For any non-shul events, the sponsor will be required to hire security. It's sad that we have to do this, but these are the times we are living in. I look forward to a day when we can stand down from this heightened level of concern.



Tashlich with B'nai Israel at Holiday Park



Israel solidarity night at the Synagogue

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks on the Parsha. Stay tuned for more details.

On a positive note Rabbi Brodkin has recently announced new classes he will be holding, as well as a variety of other programs. On Sundays, he is offering a weekly study of the laws of Brachos (blessings) over food. Join Rabbi Brodkin on Sunday mornings for 8:30 am Shacharit, followed by coffee, croissants and 15 minutes of learning.

In addition, on Wednesday, November 29, Rabbi Brodkin launched a weekly Parsha study/class. The focus is on sharing an overview of the Parsha, where Rabbi Brodkin will be discussing "Studies in Spirituality," a book of essays from

Please be safe and pray for our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world during this extremely intense time in our lives.

Shalom,

Jay Fields, Shul President

Recent Events at B'nai Israel



Ever since we first came, everyone at the Shul was very welcoming, warm, and friendly, which meant a lot and helped me get through a very difficult time. Going to Shul on Shabbos is like seeing family. It's a wonderful community of caring people who embrace you, regardless of your background or age.

- Arthur and Andrea Friedman





With the challenges we are all now facing in our support for our Homeland, Israel, as well as our fellow Jews here in America and worldwide, Congregation B'nai Israel is our home. We need to turn more than ever to the Shul as we reinforce our Jewish beliefs, heritage, and traditions."

- Jay and Jan Lillianthal



The best thing about B'nai israel is the people. I look forward to seeing more people at Shul events as we show our Jewish unity.

- Dorothy Jablonka



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A Message from Faina Smekhov

Dear Congregants,

Shalom! It has been wonderful meeting and talking to many of you since I began my position as **Synagogue Administrator** in September.

Since that time, we had some wonderful events, including Sukkah Decorating and Pizza in the Hut, where I had a pleasure combining business with pleasure by bringing my family to join in the celebrations. My daughters still talk about the yummy pizza, fries, Simcha Torah flag making and having fun in the bounce house!



I also share in the pain and heartache of the difficult events taking place in Israel. However, despite my sadness, I am overjoyed to see all the unity that our beautiful Jewish nation has shown in response to this darkness. As Rabbi Brodtkin has mentioned, we need to add light to the dark days, and we have some wonderful opportunities for you here at B'nai Israel to be part of that.

As Synagogue Administrator, I am engaged in overseeing the office and helping to manage operations and programs. If there is any way that I can be of support, please reach out to me. You can feel free to call the office or email me at fsmekhov@bnaiisraelnj.org.

I look forward to seeing you at our upcoming exciting events that I am working on, including our Chanukah Bash. We are in need of volunteers for various aspects of these events. Please reach out to help.

Be well and enjoy the holiday and family time.

Shalom,

Faina Smekhov
Synagogue Administrator

Daughters of Israel will sponsor the Shabbat kiddush for Purim on March 23.

Daughters of Israel and Men's Club are happy to announce that we will be honoring Sharon and Vic Schioppo as our Woman of Valor and Man of the Year, on Sunday, May 19, 2024. Please mark your calendars and plan on participating. We will send out invitations in the coming months.

A circular portrait of a woman with long brown hair, wearing a blue top, smiling. The background of the advertisement is a dark, textured landscape.

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My Journey to Help Israel — Steve Litwok

I am 69 years old, and I am too old to enlist in the Israeli army. But I can volunteer to help on an Israeli army base, as I have done numerous times in the past. The main difference was that I had never volunteered during a time of war.

On October 7th I was riveted watching the news from Israel. It was so devastating that I could not sleep at night. It was then that I decided I had to go to Israel and help in any way that I could.

I contacted Volunteers for Israel and learned that I could join the 1-week program beginning on October 22. In the week leading up to my trip, we went to prayer meetings, to information meetings, and we donated money. But I knew that I needed to do more.

On Thursday, October 19th, my mission began. Why does someone leave the comforts of home for a war zone? Why go from a desk job as a financial advisor to long hours of working on a medical supply base? To me the answer was simple. The work on the supply base is critical and someone must do it. Why not me: a child of Holocaust survivors, who cannot just sit and watch TV?



Prayer & solidarity gathering at B'nai Israel

I have always believed that if there is a strong Israeli army, there would never be a Holocaust. Unfortunately, even this belief is on shaky grounds as antisemitism around the world has reached unprecedented levels lately. So, I left with Tefilat Haderech, the Travelers Prayer, in my pocket and a Red Bendl on my wrist. I said goodbye to my loving family. Lehitraot.



Sign in support of Israel outside the Synagogue

I arrived in Israel on Friday and spent time with my cousins on Shabbat. I also experienced my first Red Alert as the sirens went off in Tel Aviv. We had 90 seconds to go down 4 flights of stairs to get to a bomb shelter. Then, while waiting for the 'all clear,' I heard a very loud boom as the Iron Dome hit and destroyed a missile from Gaza. This exercise raises your normal anxiety level to a new height.

On Sunday morning, I met all the other volunteers at the airport. From there a bus took us to the Medical Supply Base near Ramat Gan. We settled into our rooms, got fitted for IDF work clothes, ate lunch, and started working in the afternoon. Five of us were assigned to one of the warehouses. The five included a retired doctor from VA; a retired judge from PA; a retired Dentist from NJ; a mechanical engineer from Norway; and yours truly – a financial advisor from NJ.

All of us were busy sorting, counting, checking expiration dates, sealing, packing, and shipping medical supplies. We settled into our daily schedule. Breakfast was at 7am. Flag-raising was at 8am. Work began at 8:15 until noon. Lunch break was an hour. And then we went back to work until 5:30 or so. Dinner was at 6, followed by an evening activity at 7, and free time after that.

Tuesday was different. At 8pm we received an emergency request for volunteers to assemble the ceramic body armor into soldiers' bullet-proof vests. A large group of Israeli volunteers was coming to work all night. Until they came, there was a need for help. So, we walked nearly a mile to the second warehouse and assembled vests. It was a warm night, and I was sweating profusely. We worked until 10:30pm. It was an exhausting day.

On Wednesday, around 35 Yeshiva boys studying in Jerusalem joined us at work. They were from all over the US. At the end of the day, they asked all the volunteers to join them in a friendship circle. Their two young Rabbis spoke words of inspiration. The Yeshiva boys danced and sang with us, and it was very emotional.

The work week ended on Thursday and by Thursday evening I was in the airport. There, too, I experienced a Red Alert and the terminal emptied out.

I returned home with mixed feelings. I knew that the work we did in the Medical Supply base would save lives. And while working on the bullet-proof vests, I could not help but think that this work may save a soldier's life. This saving of lives gave me a sense of satisfaction.

On the other hand, like the Israelis I met, I am mentally, emotionally, and physically exhausted. I wake up each morning in a fog. My mind is in another place.

I look forward to the day when the fog will pass. I look forward to the day when Israel will be at peace – not war. Let's all hope and pray for the best. Am Yisrael Chai.

Steve Litwok
President, Volunteers for Israel

Yasher Koach to Stephen Litwok for his recent volunteer work in Israel supporting the Israel Defense Force. We welcome him home and are grateful for his safe return. Steve was stationed on an army base via Volunteers For Israel. VFI is the only American organization that creates opportunities for civilian volunteers to serve on IDF bases. Currently, Steve serves as the President of Volunteers for Israel, and has been instrumental in bringing volunteers to Israeli army bases from all over the United States for many years.



Card written for an IDF soldier at our "Bake for Blue" Family Challah Bake event

Community members attend Israel rally in Washington DC on November 14





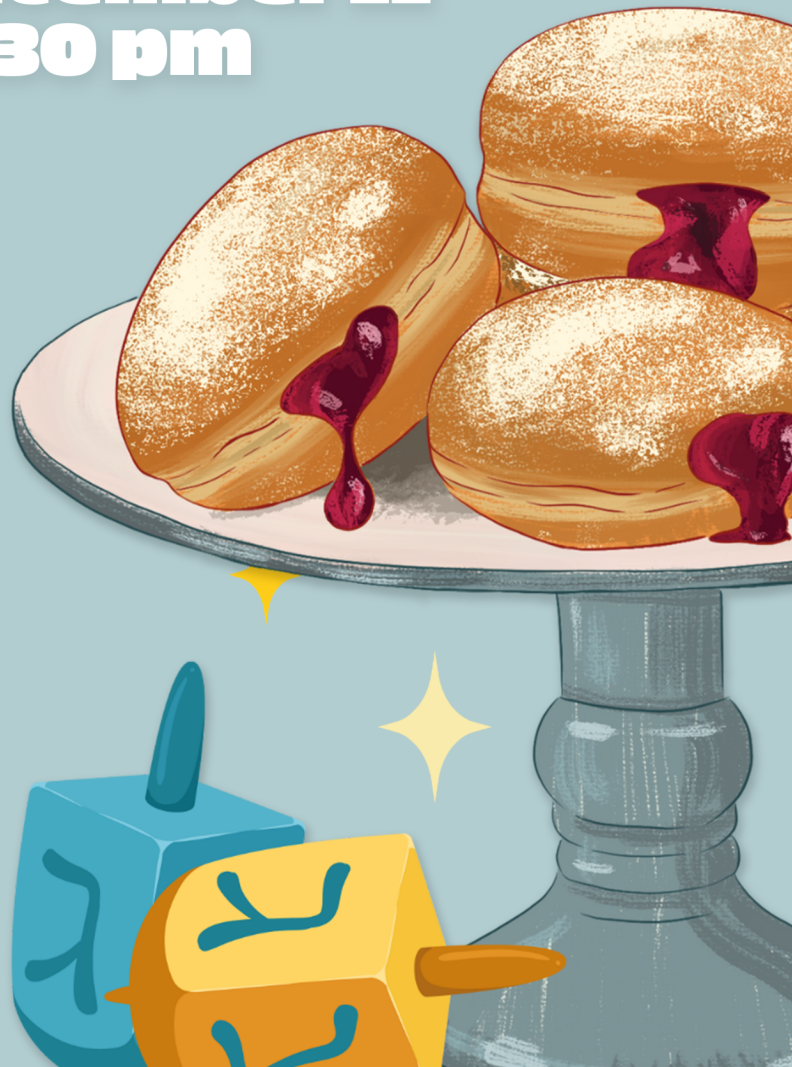
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Member Spotlight: Joe & Aileen Minchello

What was it like growing up in Sons of Israel?

The Shul was very small and Heimesh. It had a very vibrant and homey atmosphere. As the new (current) building took shape, we had an active youth group. There was lots of noise with lots of kids. Sons of Israel was a wonderful place to grow up with lots of friends.

Aileen, what was your parents' connection with the Shul?

My father was on the board and he was the president when we moved into the new location so he had worked with the architect. My father worked very hard to keep the legacy of the Shul going.

What do you like about Manalapan?

There is lots of space to move around. It is open and airy. It has been a wonderful place to raise children in the peace and quiet.

Joe, what's your favorite thing about the Shul? What attracted you to the synagogue?

I started coming to Sons of Israel when I started dating Aileen. I was not Jewish at that point but whenever I went to Sons, it was a pleasant place that was comforting and a comfortable place.

What do you hope to see happen at B'nai Israel?

We hope the Congregation continues to grow and thrive, and want to see lots of children playing and having fun. We hope others can see the Shul as a second home like we do, and it's a safe place to be and enjoy with good friends to grow with. We want to see the next generation continue.

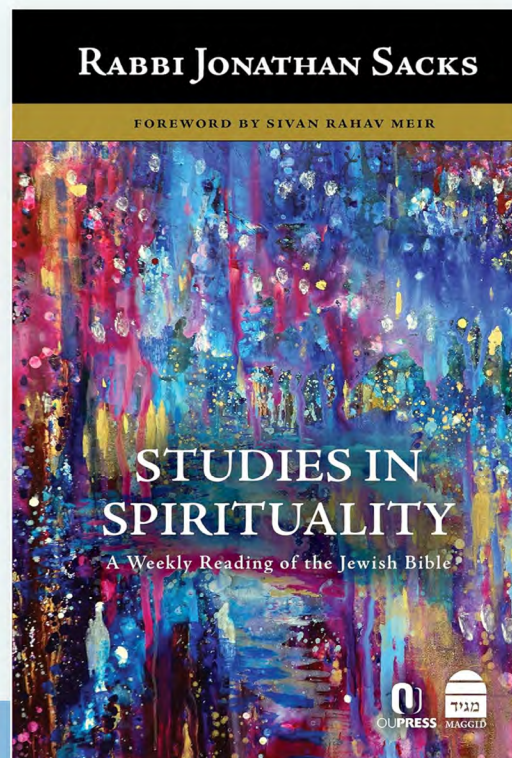


Studies in Spirituality

Join us for a dynamic group study of the Parsha. Rabbi Brodtkin will offer an overview of the Parsha.

Plus, we will discuss Rabbi Jonathan Sacks' "Studies in Spirituality" for contemporary insights.

WEDNESDAYS AT 8:00 PM



ZOOM MEETING ID: 965 4721 7973 · PASSWORD: Parsha

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