



Congregation  
**B'nai Israel**  
The Orthodox Synagogue for All Jews

# *the Voice*

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# *A Message from Rabbi Brodkin*

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December, 2025

Kislev, 5786

Dear Friends,

Over the past couple of years, a new tradition has emerged organically in our community. Each Chanukah, families share photos on our WhatsApp group — pictures of families gathered around the menorah, tables glowing.

Through these pictures, we get a window into one another's Jewish homes. It's hard to imagine a warmer image of Jewish life than these moments around the menorah.

As we experience the short days of Kislev and prepare to light our own candles, these images remind us of the light we bring into the world — even at a challenging time for our people.

Across the world, we hear a growing refrain of anti-Zionism, an idea that has gained traction in diverse corners of society. This leads us to an important question: is anti-Zionism simply a modern form of antisemitism? To understand this, we need to take a step back into our story.

From the dawn of our history, the Jewish people have been bound to the Land of Israel. When God called to Avram, "Lech Lecha — go forth to the land that I will show you," our national journey began.

For thousands of years, wherever Jews have lived, we have turned toward Eretz Yisrael in prayer. This gesture has linked us across continents and centuries, reminding us that Zion is a core dimension of Judaism — woven into our prayers, our past, and our future as a people.

Chanukah brings this connection into sharp focus. The Maccabees fought not only for Torah and mitzvos but also for the dignity of living as Jews in our own land. The letters on the dreidel hint at a miracle that unfolded not in an abstract setting but in a very specific place — the Land of Israel.

That is why Zionism is not a political slogan but a moral principle — the belief that the Jewish people have the same basic right as every other nation: to live freely in their ancestral home.

To oppose the Jewish connection to Zion is to deny a core part of who we are as a people. When someone attacks that bond, they're not engaging in abstract debate — they're rejecting the very identity of the people of Zion. And that, at its root, is the essence of antisemitism.

But Chanukah reminds us that light has a way of growing even in difficult moments. It's a time when serving God and feeling proud to be Jewish naturally come together.

Chanukah may be a minor holiday, but it expresses a major principle. Each night as we light the menorah, we're making a profound statement: we are connected to HaShem, to the Jewish people, and to the Land of Israel at the heart of our



Rabbi Brodkin recently met with New Jersey NCSY leadership to plan stronger Jewish teen programming here in Manalapan.



story.

Here at B'nai Israel, we strive to be a place of Jewish pride, warmth, mitzvos, and belonging all year long. Coming up, I hope you'll join us for **"Light Up the Night"** on **Tuesday, December 16** — a Chanukah celebration for people of all ages to come together and celebrate the enduring flame of our people.

At B'nai Israel, we are building a haven for the Jewish people — a place of light, strength, and connection. In this holy effort, it is your presence and spirit that fill our community with warmth and meaning.

Wishing you & yours a bright Chanukah,

Rabbi Ken Brodtkin

## *A Message from our President: Shari Tepper*

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### **Building Our Jewish Future: Capital Campaign Launch & Donor Match**

Congregation B'nai Israel ("CBI") is more than just a building: it's a home filled with family, friends, and the vibrant life of our community. Over the past three years, we have worked hard to upgrade this home. Our children now have their own room to play, learn, and grow. Our lobby is brighter and more welcoming. Our building is more secure, our machzors are new, and the Bloom Shabbos House provides a warm place for visiting families. Even our new roof — simple as it may sound — reminds us that a home must be safe and secure.



But what truly makes CBI feel like home is not just what has been built — it's the life that fills it. And for me, that comes alive most clearly through my own family.

Each Shabbat, I watch my daughter Maya play in the kids' room with her friends and then proudly join them on the bimah to lead Adon Olam and Hatikva. I see the joy and confidence this community gives her, and I know she is growing up rooted in Jewish life.

I see my husband Scott, energized by his first trip to Israel, practicing his Hebrew reading with Rabbi Brodtkin. I feel the pride he carries when he is called to the Torah as a Levi.

I think of my son Ari, who at twenty-one lives with the challenges of autism and bipolar disorder, and yet is welcomed each week with open arms. The love and patience he receives from our community is a gift beyond measure — a reminder that every person has a place in our Jewish home.



And lastly, I think of myself. After a long week, I come to CBI on Shabbos and find something rare and precious: a reprieve. A moment to breathe. A chance to reflect on how blessed I am to be part of such a warm and loving community.

This is what our Synagogue means. This is what makes a place feel like home.

And it's not just my family — it's all of us. We see it in the twenty-plus new families who have joined us in the past three years. We feel it at bar mitzvahs, auf rufs, and baby namings. We feel it in the leadership of Rabbi and Aviel Brodtkin, who have brought creativity, outreach, and fresh vision to our community. Friends, we are building momentum. We are building a Jewish future here in Manalapan. And we are building it together.



## Capital Campaign Launch

We are excited to announce the launch of a new Capital Campaign, with a goal of raising \$1 million to secure the strength and future of our Synagogue for generations. Funds raised will support essential renovations to our sanctuary and social halls, update signage, repave our parking lot, fix our main and parking lot doors, enhance our building and Shabbos House, and maintain a healthy building reserve. We also plan to invest in initiatives such as stipends for modern orthodox families moving to Manalapan, hiring a youth director, and expanding our staff.

## Donor Match Announcement

To show how deeply Scott and I believe in this future, **we are honored to announce that we will match the first \$500,000 of donations.** Every gift you make will be doubled — every dollar bringing us twice as close to our shared goal.



We are designing a capital campaign donor board to be displayed prominently in the Synagogue, and will include the generous families who participate in our campaign (and the one three years ago). **Please plan to join Scott and I to have your name on that board.**

## Ready To Make a Difference?

In the coming weeks and months, you will likely be contacted by a member of our Capital Campaign Committee. Whether they call you, meet with you, or track you down in Florida, I ask that you take the call, hear them out, and consider joining Scott and I as we raise the funds to secure CBI's next chapter. Can't wait that long? **To donate, please contact Ben Fishbaum, Eli Kramer, Jeff Lejfer, Vic Schioppo, Harry Shlinger, Maurice Zagha, or me for more information. Every contribution, large or small, helps secure our Synagogue's future and strengthens our community.**

Happy Chanukah,

Shari Tepper





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**B'nai Israel**  
The Orthodox Synagogue for All Jews

# Light Up the Night

A Chanukah Celebration for the Whole Family

**TUESDAY, DECEMBER 16**

**6:00 – 8:00 PM**

- Delicious Supper
- Donuts for Dessert
- Bounce House & Chanukah Crafts
- Menorah Lighting, Music & More!

\$12/Child | \$25/Adult | \$75/Family Max  
Sponsorships available — help bring  
the light to our community!

**RSVP AT [BNAIISRAELNJ.ORG/CHANUKAH](https://bnaiisraelnj.org/chanukah)**

Location: 33 Gordons Corner Rd. Manalapan, NJ 07726



# *Standing with Israel:*

## *Stories, Solidarity & Hope*

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Throughout our history, our Congregation has been a steadfast source of support and activism for Israel. Recent months have been no different, as B'nai Israel continues to stand with Israel through tefillah, learning, community gatherings, and acts of solidarity both here and abroad.



**Ron & Florence Gorsky** recently returned from a powerful visit to Israel, where they witnessed firsthand the aftermath of October 7.

Their trip included Hostage Square in Tel Aviv, with its clock marking the days hostages have been held in Gaza, and Kibbutz Nir Oz, where they saw the Bibas home and the devastation left in the wake of the attack.

They also walked through fields of bullet-riddled cars collected from the massacre sites. Guided through Nir Oz and the Nova Festival grounds by survivor Amit Musaei, they heard emotional stories of heroism and loss. At Shuva Junction, they saw volunteers serving over 1,000 soldiers daily. Amid the pain, the Gorskys were inspired by the resilience and determination of

Israelis rebuilding their communities.

Closer to home, members of our Shul joined the Federation-led 10/7 Memorial — a moving gathering that affirmed our unity and shared commitment to Israel. Days later, we witnessed the release of hostages, including Omri Miran. Back in July 2024, our community held a challah bake in his merit while he was still in captivity.

Seeing him return home is especially meaningful in light of our prayers for him and for all the hostages. May our continued tefillot bring strength, healing, and hope to Am Yisrael.





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# *Recent Events at B'nai Israel*

## Challah Bake



## Sukkah Decorating & Chinese Dinner





### NEW SCREEN & PROJECTOR IN MISHAN HALL

This fall, our Synagogue installed a brand-new large screen and projector in Mishan Hall. We are deeply grateful to Scott Tepper, Noah Glyn, and The Men's Club for spearheading this initiative. The high-quality system is wall-mounted with crisp, clear visuals, creating an inviting space for shared experiences and communal gatherings. Already, it's bringing people together — including a recent Saturday-night movie event where families enjoyed *Finding Dory* on the big screen.



### LEARNING AT B'NAI ISRAEL

Jewish learning at B'nai Israel is buzzing with energy this fall. Aviel Brodtkin launched her *Crash Course in Jewish History* on Wednesdays at noon and *Torah Topics Tuesdays*, while Rabbi Shalom Jacoby continues to offer his engaging *Hot Debate: Talmud & Hot Takeout* on Monday nights.

We celebrated a joyous Siyum on Pirkei Avos with Rabbi Brodtkin over Simchas



Torah, and welcomed Rabbi Mordechai Blau for a thought-provoking Shabbat talk on a Jewish approach to American holidays. There's so much happening — and even more on the way. Stay tuned to our emails and website for upcoming learning opportunities!



LAUGH, RELAX, AND ENJOY A NIGHT OUT WITH THE B'NAI ISRAEL COMMUNITY

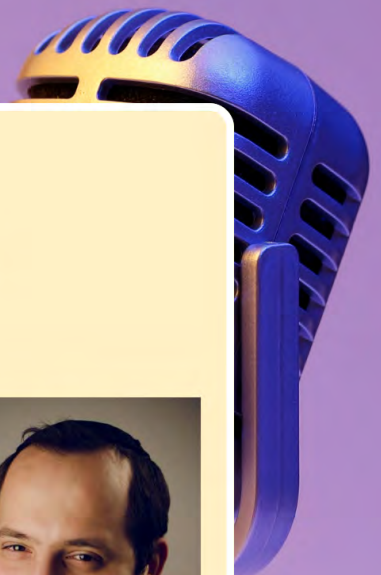
**SAVE THE  
DATE!**

Get ready for  
**A Night of Comedy & Connection**

**SUNDAY, MAY 3**

Featuring  
**Eli Lebowicz**  
*Very Jewish Comedian*

**6:00 PM • At B'nai Israel**



# *New Member Profile: Justin Elkreif, Tami Hagoel and Family*

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## **Where are you each originally from?**

I am from Tenafly, NJ. Justin is from Los Angeles. He grew up in Encino.

## **What attracted you to Manalapan?**

We moved to Marlboro, NJ originally because of our jobs. But we knew we wanted to stay in NJ so we could be close to my family who still lives in North Jersey.

## **What made you decide to join B'nai Israel?**

We knew we wanted to join a synagogue for a while. B'nai Israel felt just right for what we were looking for. The warm and welcoming community really drew us in – we felt at home and so welcomed with a sense of belonging. We wanted a place our kids felt safe and excited to go to on Shabbat and celebrate their Judaism with their friends – it has provided that and more.

## **What can you tell us about your experience at B'nai so far? What have your children's experiences been like at the Synagogue so far?**

We have been enjoying our experience at B'nai Israel so far. Rabbi Brodtkin and Aviel welcomed us from day one and really made us feel at home. Our kids get excited when we say "we are going to synagogue". The kids love going to the tot shabbats and love seeing their friends. We have really enjoyed that the Synagogue is more than just a place of worship but a community center, full of fun activities, sisterhood and brotherhood. The kids know that B'nai is a place where they can play with friends, embrace their Judaism, sing hatikva on the top of their lungs and bake challah. These experiences are laying a foundation of love, tradition and joy in Judaism that we want for our kids. Also, Justin and I really enjoy meeting all the members and new people every week. We are often the last ones there chatting away with people!

## **What was the highlight of your family's recent Bris here?**

It was a rainy, windy and cold day yet all our friends from the community showed up to celebrate in our simcha. The staff went above and beyond to help facilitate the Bris and prepare the space on short notice. We felt very grateful and blessed. It felt deeply meaningful to share our simcha with the community we have grown to love and trust.

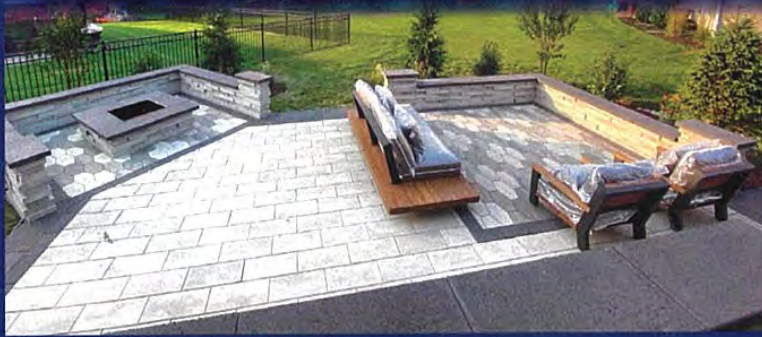
## **What are your hopes for the future of the community?**

To build a vibrant Jewish community that continues to grow and welcomes in new and young families wherever they are in their spiritual journey. I am hoping for a future that builds lifelong connections for my children and a place of belonging. I am hoping for a place that provides a center for spiritual growth, offering meaningful prayer experiences, robust education programs and a deep love of Israel through cultural programming and experiences. That future generations feel a strong connection to their heritage, history, and traditions, fostered through accessible and engaging educational opportunities and social engagement that ensure the continuity of Jewish identity.





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