



Congregation
B'nai Israel
The Orthodox Synagogue for All Jews

the Voice

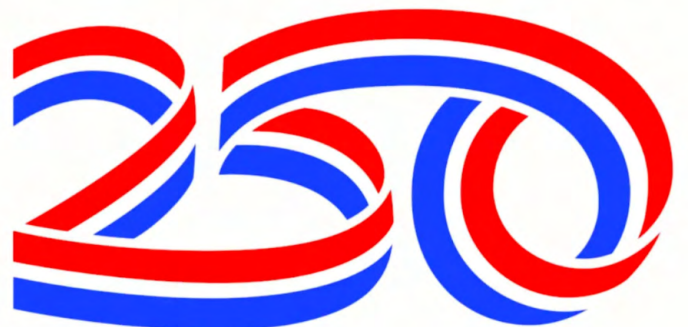
SUMMER EDITION

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AMERICA



A Message from Rabbi Brodkin

July 2026

Tammuz 5786

Dear Friends,

As we head into the summer months, I want to wish you and your family a wonderful summer with plenty of time for joy and relaxation! This season is also a special moment in our nation's history as we approach the 250th anniversary of American independence.

Here in Manalapan, we live at a crossroads of the Revolution that gave birth to our country. Just a few miles from our synagogue, George Washington fought at Monmouth after surviving the difficult winter at Valley Forge. The story of America surrounds us.

A couple of generations later, another chapter of that story unfolded. In 1844, Samuel Morse sent the first official telegraph message from Washington to Baltimore. The words he chose were simple but profound: "What hath God wrought."

Morse understood that the telegraph was more than a technological achievement. It was a reminder that human accomplishment itself is part of a larger story.

The phrase Morse sent comes from Bilaam's blessing of the Jewish people in the Book of Numbers. Looking at Israel, Bilaam declares that people will one day stand in amazement and declare, "What has God accomplished!"

The message is that history is not merely the product of power, chance, and human ingenuity. Sometimes we step back from the events around us and recognize the hand of God at work. It is a message of the Hebrew Bible that Morse clearly understood.

In many ways, the story of America inspires that same feeling. A small and fragile nation emerged, endured, and grew into a remarkable bastion of freedom and prosperity.

As Jews, we have particular reason to celebrate this milestone. The freedoms of the United States have enabled generations of Jews to build communities, establish shuls, Jewish day schools and live openly as Jews.

The vibrant Jewish life we enjoy today is one of the great blessings of living in a free country. And we can see that blessing right here in our own community.

A few years ago, seeing dozens of children running through the halls of this synagogue was an aspiration. Today—from our Purim Bash to Family Shabbat to our Lag B'Omer BBQ—the sound and energy of Jewish children filling our Shul is unmistakable.

When I look around the social hall after services and see families lingering over Kiddush, reluctant to leave because they enjoy being together, I am reminded that the sense of Jewish community here at the synagogue has become tangible. Something beautiful is taking shape before our eyes!



A Night of Comedy & Connection
with Eli Lebowicz

When we pause to appreciate what we have built together at B'nai Israel, we can borrow Morse's words and Bilaam's blessing and say:

"What God hath wrought."

As you enjoy this special color edition of *The Voice* honoring our nation's 250th anniversary, may we celebrate the blessings around us and continue the sacred work of building Jewish community in this blessed country.

Warmly,

Rabbi Ken Brodtkin

P.S. Mark your calendar for our **End of Summer Picnic** on **Sunday, August 23**. We look forward to seeing you there and hearing about your summer!



A Message from our President: Shari Tepper

As I close my initial term as President of Congregation B'nai Israel, I do so with deep gratitude, humility, and a full heart. Serving this community has been one of the great honors of my life. In a year when our nation begins to reflect on the meaning of America 250, I find myself thinking about the values that have long defined both this country at its best and our shul at its strongest: faith, resilience, volunteerism, and the belief that communities are built not only by tradition, but by people who care enough to show up, contribute, and invest in a shared future.



Over the course of this term, we have seen meaningful growth in so many ways. We welcomed new families, increased donations and High Holiday revenue, expanded our local eruv, welcomed out-of-towners to the Larry Bloom Shabbos House, and strengthened our building through major security and infrastructure improvements. We deepened our programming with weekly learning, women's learning, family events, concerts, scholars in residence, and social gatherings that brought people together across generations and stages of life. We supported Israel, cared for members during times of illness and loss, celebrated simchas, and created new opportunities for people to feel that this shul is not only a place to daven, but truly a place to belong.

One moment that especially stays with me was our recent *Torah at the Table*. More than 60 women joined me on my birthday for bites, drinks, learning, and community, and I was truly awed and inspired by the beautiful and diverse group who came to celebrate. It was more than a lovely evening; it was a powerful reminder of what makes this shul so special. To look around the room and see women of different ages, backgrounds, and life stages gathered in warmth, friendship, and shared purpose was deeply moving. That evening captured, for me, the kind of community we have been working so hard to build—one that is vibrant, welcoming, and strengthened by the unique contributions of every person who walks through our doors.

I am especially proud that our accomplishments were measured not only in dollars raised, programs

launched, or articles published, but in the stronger sense of belonging we created together. We reintroduced ourselves to the broader community with a renewed mission and identity while remaining grounded in Torah, chesed, and connection. If America 250 invites us to reflect on the legacy we are building as a nation, it also challenges us to consider what kind of Jewish community we are building for the next generation. I believe the answer is one filled with purpose, warmth, courage, and possibility. Thank you for the trust, partnership, and friendship that made all of this possible. I feel privileged to have served this community, proud of how far we have come together, and genuinely excited for all that still lies ahead.

With much thanks,

Shari



New: Torah at the Table Initiative

On June 2nd, Congregation B'nai Israel launched a new initiative, *Torah at the Table*, with a special gathering hosted by Shari Tepper in honor of her birthday. More than 60 women came together for an evening of celebration, connection, and learning. Shari conceived of *Torah at the Table* as a meaningful way to mark life's milestones by bringing people together around Torah.



During the program, Aviel Brodtkin led a discussion on Naomi in the Book of Ruth and her willingness to pursue her life mission despite personal setbacks and the risk of public embarrassment. Participants also reflected on their own growth through a lighthearted quiz, "How Open Are You to Getting Messy?"

We now invite community members to celebrate a birthday, yahrzeit, anniversary, or other meaningful occasion by hosting a *Torah at the Table* gathering. To learn more, please contact Aviel Brodtkin at abrodtkin@bnaiisraelnj.org. **Uplift your next special milestone, birthday, or Yahrzeit by hosting an engaging Torah discussion.**

Upcoming Dates to Note:

Wednesday, July 22, Erev Tisha B'Av: Join us for Maariv & Eicha, 8:45 pm

Tisha B'Av, Thursday, July 23:

- **8:30 AM - Morning Program:** Shacharis & Kinos, Followed by Multi-Media Presentation on the Second Temple's Destruction
- **6:00 PM - Afternoon Program:** Film Plunder & Profit: Pre-war Jewish Property, Post War Looted Wealth with Presentation by Becca Blaier

Men's Club - Yearly Breakfast at CBI on Sunday, August 2

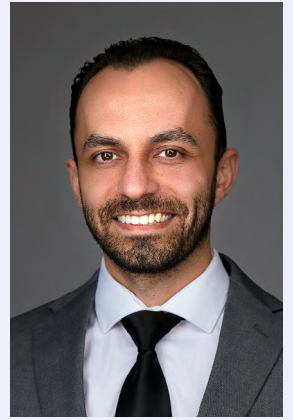
Blood Drive on Thursday, August 20

Sisterhood - Wellness Event with Enid Bush on Tuesday, August 11 at 7:30 pm

From Syria to the USA with Dr. Ivan Alkhwekhi

Can you tell us about your journey to America and what brought you here?

I was born and raised in Damascus, Syria. In 2011, during the Syrian civil war, I was completing my dental training and volunteering in a refugee camp near the Golan Heights. There, I met several members of Alpha Omega International Dental Fraternity, one of the world's largest Jewish dental organizations. Through them, I became involved with the organization.



As I built those connections, I learned about the possibility of becoming a dentist in the United States. I began studying for the American Dental Board exams while still in Syria, and I immigrated to America in 2013. It has been more than ten years now, but it still feels like yesterday.

What opportunities have you found in America that have been especially meaningful to you?

The greatest opportunity has been being treated as an equal, regardless of where I came from. Every immigrant faces challenges, but I found that America gives people the chance to create the future they want through

hard work and determination.

One of the biggest influences in my life has been Alpha Omega. The organization provided mentorship, helped guide my education, and ultimately supported my journey to Rutgers University. While at Rutgers, I had the privilege of giving back by helping provide free dental care to Holocaust survivors through partnerships with Jewish organizations and charitable donors. You can read more about the program in the Times of Israel.

What does being an American mean to you?

To sum it up in three words, being an American means freedom, independence, and opportunity.

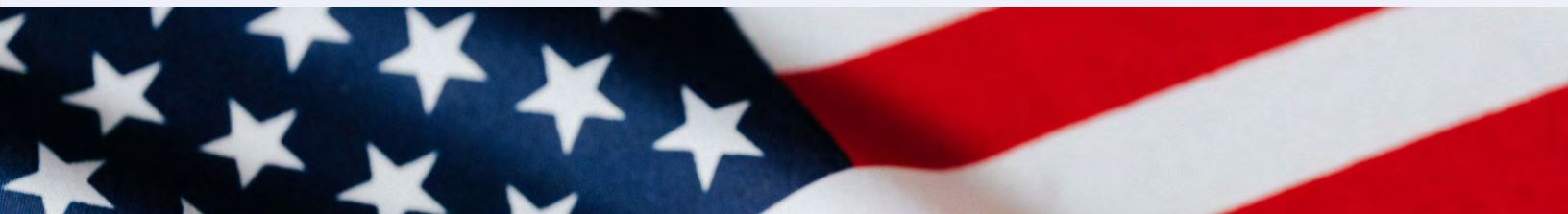
Are there particular freedoms, values, or traditions in America that you appreciate most?

What I appreciate most is having the freedom to shape my own future. After growing up under an oppressive regime, I deeply value the independence that America offers. Here, people have the opportunity to grow, to succeed, and to create a better life for themselves and their families.



As we celebrate America 250, what message would you like to share about the American experience?

This land feels like my forever home. I cannot imagine building my life anywhere else, except perhaps Israel. To me, the American experience is the opportunity to turn dreams into reality.



Minyan at B'nai Israel

B'nai Israel has been holding daily Minyan every morning since before Pesach. Our weekday Shacharit takes place at 8:30 am on Sundays and 7:00 am Monday through Friday, with breakfast following the Monday Minyan.

We have been remarkably consistent in reaching a Minyan, and it has become a real heartbeat of Jewish life at the synagogue each day as community members come together in prayer and Mitzvot. We look forward to strengthening this feature of our shul in the coming weeks and months.



Can you give one morning a week to help sustain our morning Minyans? We'd love to see you there!

Welcome, Rebecca Blaier!

Please join us in welcoming Rebecca Blaier as the new **Director of Operations** at Congregation B'nai Israel.



Rebecca brings a strong background in non-profit program administration and community-focused service. She currently lives in Marlboro, New Jersey, and is pursuing her master's degree at Kean University in Holocaust and Genocide Studies. Her professional experience and passion for community engagement have helped shape her commitment to creating meaningful connections and supporting organizational growth.

One of Rebecca's favorite quotes, inspired by the teachings of Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, is: "The most important form of leadership comes with the willingness to work with others to achieve what we cannot do alone." Rebecca shares, "I'm excited to see what B'nai Israel will achieve together as a community".

In her new role at B'nai Israel, Rebecca looks forward to supporting the day-to-day needs of the congregation while creating a warm, welcoming, and organized environment for members, visitors, leadership, and staff alike.

Rebecca is mainly available Monday through Thursday and can best be reached by email at bblaier@bnaiisraelnj.org, by calling the office, or in person during those days. She is happy to assist with questions, scheduling, congregational needs, and general office support.

Please stop by the office or reach out to introduce yourself and welcome Rebecca to the B'nai Israel family!



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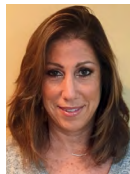
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Recent Events at B'nai Israel



Cholent Cook-Off Contestants



Congregants celebrate at the Chanukah photo booth



Mishloach Manot



Learning at B'nai



Pre-Pesach Ladies Clay Art Event



60 people shared Second Seder at B'nai Israel this Pesach!



Purim Celebrations at B'nai



Lag B'Omer BBQ, Bonfire, & Community Event at the Brodtkin Home

B'NAI ISRAEL'S END-OF-SUMMER PICNIC

Join us for an afternoon of food, friendship, and family fun as we celebrate the close of summer and look ahead to a new season.

SUNDAY, AUGUST 23 | 4 - 6 PM
MANALAPAN REC CENTER | KUSCHICK PAVILION

DINNER FROM **MIKE'S CHICKEN** | KIDS' ACTIVITIES
& FUN FOR THE WHOLE FAMILY

VISIT [BNAIISRAELNJ.ORG/PICNIC](https://bnaiisraelnj.org/picnic) TO REGISTER

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Congregation
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Family Feature - Amir, Leigh, Emily, and Ava Ahimor

Where are you originally from?

Leigh grew up in Ardsley, NY, which is close to White Plains, NY. Amir is originally from Israel. Leigh & Amir lived in White Plains, NY for 12 years before they moved to Manalapan.

What attracted you to Manalapan?

We were drawn to Manalapan because of its family-friendly atmosphere, strong Jewish community, and beautiful natural scenery.

What made you decide to join B'nai Israel?

We first learned about B'nai Israel through another member whose children are the same ages as ours. They spoke so highly of the congregation and how welcoming it is. We were looking for a genuine sense of community, and B'nai Israel felt like the right fit.



What can you tell us about your experience at B'nai Israel so far?

Growing up, my synagogue experience felt more transactional, and I did not maintain much of a connection afterward. At B'nai Israel, however, there is a real effort to foster lasting relationships and a true sense of belonging. Our experience has been wonderful—truly wonderful. We have been very impressed with the leadership's commitment to building community. We try to attend regularly because there is so much value in the relationships being formed. It feels like much more than a transactional synagogue experience; it is a growing and engaged community. One aspect I especially appreciate is the opportunity to disconnect from our phones and be fully present. It encourages people to engage more meaningfully with one another. The leadership is also very open to feedback and genuinely wants members to feel included and heard. It is a very welcoming and nonjudgmental environment. Another highlight has been Aviel's Hebrew reading course, which has been a wonderful resource.

What have your children's experiences been like at the synagogue so far?

Our family loves the playroom and the playground. Through the synagogue, we have connected with families who share similar values and parenting experiences. Building those friendships and having a network of families navigating parenthood together has been incredibly meaningful for us.

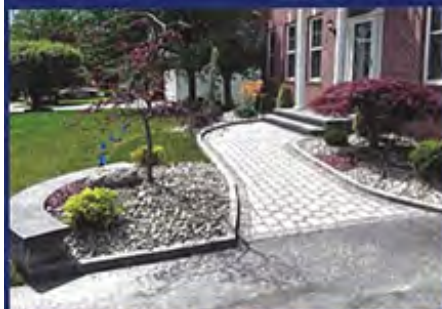
What has been a personal highlight of volunteering at the synagogue?

One of my favorite experiences has been helping organize family movie nights during the colder months. We select a family-friendly movie, provide popcorn and dinner, and create an opportunity for families to come together and connect. Community-building through children's programming is something I am passionate about.

What are your hopes for the future of the community?

I hope the community continues to grow and thrive, bringing more people into its beautiful mission. I would also love to see additional educational opportunities for children, such as short weekly Hebrew lessons or fun Jewish learning segments. Even a brief 10-minute lesson each week could help strengthen Hebrew reading skills while making Jewish learning engaging and accessible for kids.

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