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CONGREGATION
BETH ISRAEL

— 1854-2024 —

DECEMBER 2024 BULLETIN

Vol. 173 | No. 2



Temple member Joan Alexander with pro-Israel activist and author Noa Tishby.
Read more on page 7 • Photo by Ira Rozen

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CLERGY

Senior Rabbi.....	David A. Lyon, D.D.
Senior Associate Rabbi.....	Adrienne P. Scott, M.A.H.L.
Assistant Rabbi.....	Samuel I. Rheins
Cantor.....	Kenneth J. Feibush, M.S.M.

STAFF

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Director of Lifelong Learning & Engagement...David M. Scott, RJE	
Director of Campus Operations.....	Mike Mason
Head of The Shlenker School.....	Dr. Michelle Barton
Controller.....	Wendy Airlie
Cemetery Director.....	Michael Kirstein
Director of Special Events & Catering.....	Marsha Gilbert
Director of Marketing & Communications.....	Hannah Schiff
Director of Facilities & Security.....	Michael Reddick
Director of Center for Spiritual Direction.....	Dr. Tom Cole
Assistant Director of the MBJLC.....	Kerri Zerlin
Membership & Engagement Manager.....	Stephanie Shargal
Librarian.....	Susan Whitman

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Vice Presidents.....	Doug Aron
	Leslie Margolis
	Caren Sweetland
	Ed Wolff
Treasurer.....	Tom Fish
Secretary.....	Jeffrey Gilbert
Immediate Past President.....	Richard Kaplan

WELCOME, NEW MEMBERS!

Alexander Brown
Edward Finger
Judith Forbes
Kathleen Gibson & Seth Leventhal
Nancy & Isaac Hassid
Suzy & Gregory Kopel
James Lerner
Mitchell Loeb
Shelby & Isaac Lupovitch
Leah & Craig Manuel
Zoe Miller
Allison Miller-Mouer & John Mouer
Karis & Geoffrey Morris
Charney Rosinsky
Sarah & Joseph Schick
Lauren Smith
Julia & Adam Stellar
Scott Weiner

Do you know someone interested in becoming part of our community? Are you new to town or looking for Jewish engagement? Contact Stephanie Shargal, Membership & Engagement Manager, at sshargal@beth-israel.org to learn how!

LIVESTREAM

Watch Shabbat Services live
at beth-israel.org

Watch Shabbat Services later at
[YouTube.com/BethIsraelHouston](https://www.youtube.com/BethIsraelHouston)

PAYMENTS & DONATIONS

Please send payments
and donations to:

Congregation Beth Israel
DEPT.
PO Box 4851
Houston, TX 77210-4851

The Power of Miracles



Even in Houston, the winter months can feel long. With our short days and limited sunlight, it is easy to feel a bit displaced and lost. While we aren't eager to return to the intense heat and humidity that seems to fill so much of our year, we do long for lights to fill our days.

Approaching the celebration of Chanukah is a time when we can focus on some brightness and hope. While still a minor holiday according to our ritual calendar, this season of light teaches an important and significant lesson. Based on the Haftarah that is offered during the Shabbat of Chanukah, we learn in Zechariah 4:6, "Not by might and not by power, but by my spirit, says God."

Chanukah marks an important historical time. We celebrate the bravery of Judah Maccabee and his strong followers in standing up to the oppression of Syrian King Antiochus. There was significant concern that the Jews of the day would become fully assimilated and adapt many Greek customs. Without access to their sacred place of worship, Jews would not be able to gather as a community and live as a free people. The revolt led by Judah Maccabee focused on the desire to reconnect with God. It was more than a military battle; its focus was on the spiritual needs of the community. In this way, there was a return to tradition and customs.

The Chanukah story is familiar to each of us. As a liberal Jewish community and within our own families we have all adapted the customs and traditions that allow us to celebrate this miraculous event in our history. The Talmud teaches that the most important way to celebrate is to "advertise the miracle." We do this by lighting our Chanukiot and placing them in our windows. Despite our fear and security concerns, now is the time to continue honoring our tradition. We need to share the light from our menorahs and observe this important moment in our history. In fulfilling this important mitzvah, we stand strong with our people and honor our sacred traditions.

There are many moments when our Jewish identity is tested. Living a Jewish life comes with its challenges. But, more importantly, it allows us to live with intention and meaning. By adding value to our days, we continue to choose life. Our future remains uncertain, and as we acknowledge this tension, we seek opportunities for important spiritual fulfillment. In this season of miracles, let us honor our heritage by observing our rituals and embracing them fully. In so doing, we will continue to add our link to the beautiful chain of tradition. As we look for greater light to guide us along our paths, may we remain true to our tradition by continuing to add to the brightness we wish to see.

L'Shalom,

A handwritten signature in white ink that reads "Rabbi Adrienne P. Scott". The script is elegant and cursive.

Rabbi Adrienne Scott
Senior Associate Rabbi

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CONGREGATION
BETH ISRAEL

— 1854-2024 —

On behalf of Congregation Beth Israel's clergy team and staff, we wish you a

CHAG CHANUKAH SAMEACH Happy Chanukah!

CHANUKAH BLESSING 1

ברוך אתה יי אלהינו מלך
העולם, אשר קדשנו במצוותיו,
וצונו להדליק נר של חנוכה.

*Blessed are You, Adonai our God,
Sovereign of all, who hallows us
with mitzvot, commanding us to
kindle the Chanukah lights.*

CHANUKAH BLESSING 2

ברוך אתה יי אלהינו מלך
העולם, שעשה נסים לאבותינו
ואמותינו בימים ההם בזמן הזה.

*Blessed are You, Adonai our God,
Sovereign of all, who performed
wondrous deeds for our ancestors
in days of old at this season.*

CHANUKAH BLESSING 3

ברוך אתה יי אלהינו,
מלך העולם, שהחיינו
וקיימנו והגיענו לזמן הזה.

*Blessed are You, Adonai our
God, Sovereign of all, who has
kept us alive, sustained us, and
brought us to this season.*

Shabbat Evening Chanukah Service

Friday, December 27 · 6:30 PM

We invite you to celebrate Chanukah at our annual Festival of Lights celebration! Bring your menorahs to light with us, enjoy special prayers and music, and indulge in delicious latkes, jelly donuts, and more. We'll illuminate Wolff-Toomim Hall with the lighting of the Maltz Menorah and welcome the spirit of Chanukah, together.

Register at beth-israel.shulcloud.com/calendar



CONGREGATION BETH ISRAEL WELCOMES NEW EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, CASEY COLE



Casey Cole

We are pleased to share that we have engaged Casey Cole as the new Executive Director of Congregation Beth Israel, effective December 3, 2024, following an extensive six-month national search.

Casey comes to us from Austin's Congregation Agudas Achim, which resides on the Dell Jewish Community Campus—the heart of Austin's Jewish community. Casey has the financial, managerial, and operational experience we need to manage our large and growing congregational community and campus. Casey is an adopted Houstonian, having made her home here a short time ago while working for a Texas non-profit education agency as its Chief Financial Officer.

Please join us in welcoming Casey to Congregation Beth Israel. We know you'll enjoy meeting her at Shabbat services, Temple programs, and whenever you're on campus for a visit. We look forward to sharing our future, together, with Casey's added leadership.

MIKE MASON STEPS INTO NEW ROLE AS DIRECTOR OF CAMPUS OPERATIONS



Mike Mason

On behalf of Congregation Beth Israel and The Shlenker School, we extend our gratitude to Mike Mason, who recently stepped into a new and expanded role as Director of Campus Operations.

Mike's strong work ethic and personable nature made him a clear choice for the role of Director of Campus Operations. His new responsibilities include overseeing the daily operations, maintenance, and security of our campus, ensuring a safe, welcoming, and efficient environment for all. He will continue his work as Director of Young Jewish Life, participating in Family and Tot Shabbats, supporting our B'nei Mitzvah, leading Kabbalat Shabbat and Torah services with The Shlenker School, and bringing his music and cheer to the MBJLC.

Please join us in congratulating Mike Mason and thanking him for his dedicated service to our Temple and school community!

2024 CONGREGATION BETH ISRAEL EMPLOYEE OF THE YEAR: FLOR DELGADO

Mazel Tov to Flor Delgado, who was voted "2024 Employee of the Year" by her fellow Congregation Beth Israel staff and clergy team. Flor has worked at the Temple for over 18 years as a devoted member of the kitchen staff. Thank you, Flor, for all that you do!



Flor Delgado with Rabbi David Lyon

HOUSTON JEWISH COMMUNITY REMEMBERS OCTOBER 7, 2023 ONE YEAR LATER



Rabbi Lyon leading the prayer, "We Remember Them"



Remembering the cities and kibbutzim that were ravaged on October 7, 2023

Remembrance. Unity. Hope. These were the themes of the Jewish Federation of Greater Houston's community-wide vigil that took place on Monday, October 7, exactly one year after Hamas' brutal attack on Israel. Nearly 50 Jewish organizations, including Congregation Beth Israel, partnered to gather hundreds of Houston Jews for an evening of prayer, song, poetry, and remarks by community leaders.

Forty members of the clergy from all across Houston were present, sitting side-by-side on the bimah—a true vision of unity and leadership. The program commenced with the blowing of the shofar and a full slate of speakers. Together, our community honored the lives that have been taken, prayed for the return of the hostages, stood (literally and figuratively) in solidarity for our Jewish State, and hoped for peace in Israel and for Jews around the world.

If you were unable to attend the October 7 commemoration, or if you would like to experience it for a second time, visit www.houstonjewish.org/commemoration to watch the video recording.

Am Yisrael Chai. · Photos by Hagit Bibi Photography

NEXT YEAR IN JERUSALEM WITH RABBI DAVID LYON

Join Rabbi David Lyon on a life-changing Journey to Israel with Congregation Beth Israel from June 7-17, 2025, in partnership with Frosch Travels. Mark your calendars and stay tuned for more details!

RABBI DAVID A. LYON ON THE RADIO

Rabbi Lyon can be heard on Sunday mornings at 6:45 AM on KODA, Sunny 99.1 FM radio. Each segment will be available as a podcast, "Heart to Heart with Rabbi David Lyon." Go to www.bethisrael.org/radorabbi, www.sunny99.com ("Blogs & Podcasts"), or download the iHeartRadio app.

CONGREGATION BETH ISRAEL HOSTS OPENING NIGHT OF ERJCC'S BOOK FESTIVAL FEATURING NOA TISHBY



Noa Tishby with moderator Stuart Dow



Opening night welcomed an audience of nearly 1,600

On Sunday, November 3, Congregation Beth Israel hosted nearly 1,600 congregants and guests from the Greater Houston Jewish community for opening night of the Evelyn Rubenstein Jewish Community Center's Jewish Book & Arts Festival featuring Noa Tishby. A Tel Aviv native, Tishby has been a leader in pro-Israel activism for over a decade, co-founding and initiating several organizations and projects, including Act for Israel, Reality Israel, and Eighteen, an institute that combats antisemitism and inspires Jewish pride. In addition, Tishby is a well-known actress, best-selling author, and Israel's former Special Envoy for Combating Antisemitism and Delegitimization.

The event focused on Tishby's latest book, *Uncomfortable Conversations with a Jew*, which she co-authored with sports analyst and former Texas Longhorns and NFL player, Emmanuel Acho. Acho, frustrated by the rise in antisemitism in the Black community and beyond, approached Tishby about writing a book that would not only advocate for the Jewish people, but spark meaningful dialogue around topics often seen as uncomfortable and controversial. Tishby confessed that the most uncomfortable conversation she and Emmanuel Acho had was about Zionism—its true meaning versus the skewed and misguided meaning that is being pushed by social and mainstream media.

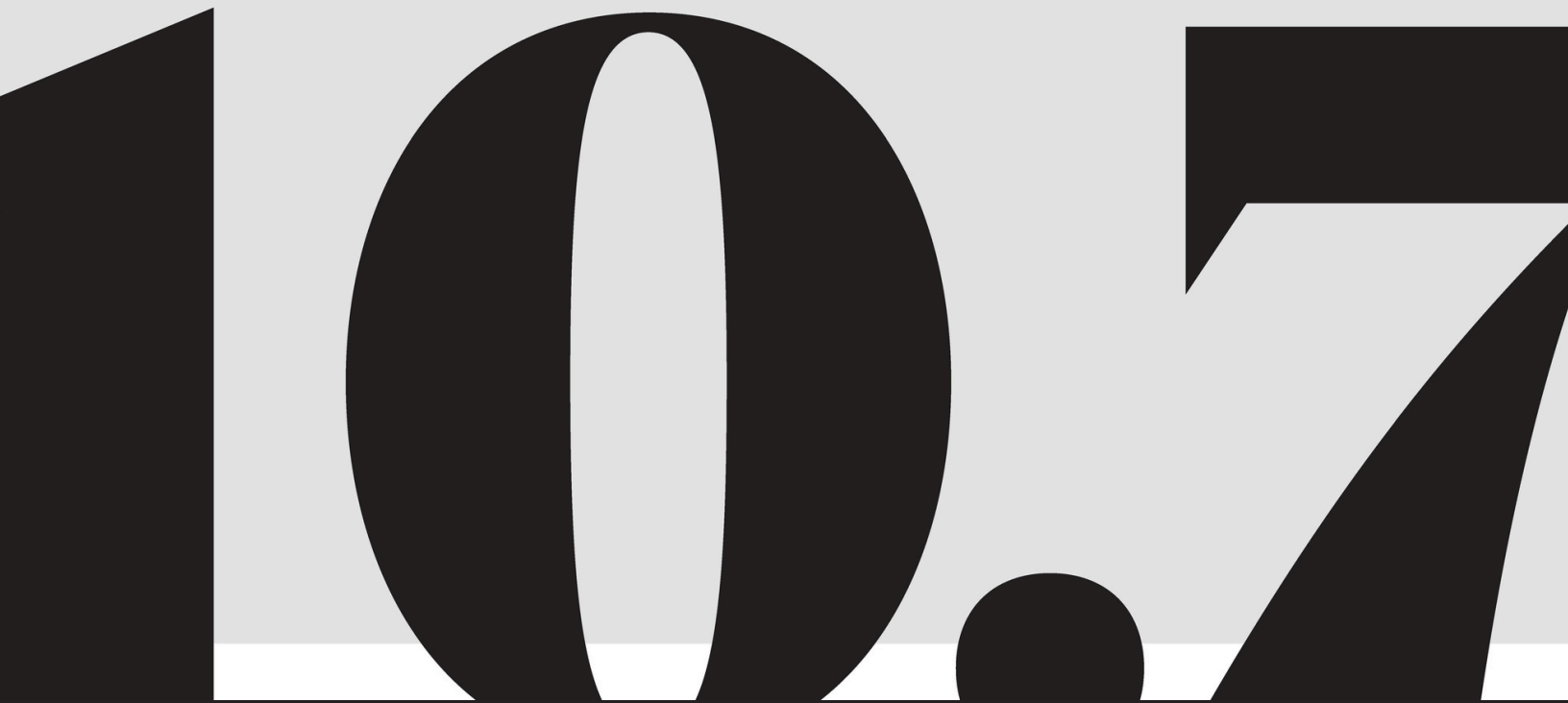
Tishby answered questions prompted by moderator Stuart Dow, Head of School, Emery Weiner School, with a blend of honesty, emotional resonance, and humor. Her hope is that the book, in addition to her daily advocacy, provides a guide for both Jews and non-Jews to approach these weighty discussions with courage and curiosity.

This event was funded in part by a generous grant from the Alexander Family Israel Programming Fund. Special thanks to our community partners, ERJCC, Jewish Federation of Greater Houston, and Congregations Beth Yeshurun and Emanu El, whose collaboration made this event so successful.

Photos by Ira Rozen



OCTOBER SEVENTH



COMING TO THE MARGOLIS GALLERY

Opening Exhibit & Reception

Thursday, January 30 at 6:30 PM

SINCE 7MO WE CANT BREATHE - HELP US!



MORE THAN 200 ISRAELI CIVILIANS KIDNAPPED
MORE THAN 1400 ISRAELI'S SLAUGHTER | BY HAMAS

EVENT SPOTLIGHT

BRET STEPHENS OFFERS HONEST PERSPECTIVE ON THE RISE OF ANTISEMITISM & HOW JEWS IN AMERICA CAN RECLAIM RESPECT



Presentation on Jews in today's world



Q&A discussion with Rabbi David Lyon

On Tuesday, October 22, Congregation Beth Israel members and guests gathered for the 2024 Wolff-Toomim Distinguished Lecture Series featuring Pulitzer Prize-winning author and columnist, Bret Stephens.

Bret began with an overview of the United States and the world. He called out specific dates in history that seemed to have no obvious connection to one another at the time, but seen in retrospect all contributed to the beginning of World War II. “If you’re looking for an era that sounds uncannily like the 1930s,” he said, “look to events in our own day.”

This was the perfect segue to Bret’s second discussion topic: Where do we, as Jews, find ourselves within today’s world? He urged us to look at how closely Jewish culture and American culture have been intertwined since the 1990s. “We were completely at home in this society,” he said. But now, we are experiencing a societal transformation where longstanding tenants of American culture and beliefs have changed in ways that are “antisemitic adjacent.” Bret shared his theory that the war on unorthodox thinking, the rise of identity politics and conspiracy theories, and the notion that Jews are “privileged” rather than successful, have all contributed to the Jew-hatred we’re seeing today.

Bret didn’t conclude without offering a set of solutions. How do we move forward? Of course, we can invest in community philanthropy and physical infrastructure. But more importantly, Bret challenged us to “become 10% jew-ier”; to find, in our own ways, that expression of Jewish pride, courage, and purpose that will restore our respect in the world once again.

On behalf of Congregation Beth Israel, we thank Bret Stephens for his time and insight, and we extend our gratitude to the Wolff-Toomim Education Fund for generously underwriting this special program.

EVENT SPOTLIGHT

BLUEGRASS BAND NEFESH MOUNTAIN SERENADES MEMBERS OF ALL AGES WITH SONGS OF LOVE & UNITY



Nefesh Mountain at Shabbat Evening Service



Eric Lindberg & Doni Zasloff singing with MBJLC students

Excerpts from the Jewish Herald-Voice by Temple member Steve Wisch | November 14, 2024

The joyful music of Nefesh Mountain, a dynamic Jewish bluegrass band, melted the stress of [the] presidential election into a respite of joy and ecstasy.

Doni Zasloff and Eric Lindberg, a husband-wife team from Montclair, N.J., lead the innovative band. They dazzle audiences with their blend of bluegrass, folk and rock music that evokes Judaism's most beautiful tenets. The band also features Jackson Earles on fiddle, Andrew Ryan on bass and Dylan McCarthy on mandolin. The band's name, Nefesh Mountain, represents one of Judaism's loftiest ideals. Nefesh is the Hebrew word for soul. And Torah is replete with the importance of mountains as places of spiritual and historical import. "From the mount of the Lord there is vision" resonates with deep symbolism in Torah . . . And so, Nefesh Mountain's spirit evokes love and healing, as well as powerful Jewish themes in the band's uplifting tunes.

At the conclusion of a soul-stirring Shabbat performance [on Friday, November 8th], a moving version of "Lecha Dodi" brought the congregation to its feet . . . Zasloff's melodious voice accompanied by Lindberg's sonorous banjo was sheer poetry.

On Sunday morning [November 10th], Zasloff and Lindberg performed for Beth Israel's Miriam Browning Jewish Learning Center students. Zasloff told the students that Judaism's paramount value of passing traditions from generation to generation—*l'dor v'dor*—is central to the band's mission.

Zasloff explained that she and Lindberg were moved by last year's massacre in Israel on Oct. 7 to launch a multi-city tour, bringing the power of their music to congregations across America to affirm Judaism and fight antisemitism. "What we need in the world is more love," she said. "It's about all of us—the strength we have in our hearts and souls—this Jewish love that lasts forever."

KIDS' MEALS



**FEBRUARY
9TH, 2025**

**9:30 AM-
12:00 PM**

Congregation Beth Israel
5600 North Braeswood Blvd.
Houston, TX 77096

We invite you to our largest Kids' Meals lunch packing event to-date! Help us pack 10,000 sack meals for Houston's hungriest preschool-aged children. Together, we can make a difference and support Kids' Meals, Inc.'s mission to end childhood hunger.

REGISTER AT

beth-israel.shulcloud.com/calendar

**PROVIDING FREE, HEALTHY
MEALS TO CHILDREN IN NEED**

Every month, members of Congregation Beth Israel gather to pack 1,000 sack lunches in partnership with Kids' Meals, Inc. All are welcome!

Wednesday, December 18, 2024 · 9:30 AM
Wednesday, January 15, 2025 · 9:30 AM

Questions? Contact Marsha Gilbert,
Director of Special Events & Catering, at
mgilbert@beth-israel.org or 713-771-6221.

MAZEL TOV TO THE 2024 CONSECRATION CLASS OF CONGREGATION BETH ISRAEL!



Pictured, left to right · Photo by Alan Ross

- Row 1:** Emma Wermuth, Olivia Brokhin, Mila Mazvinsky, Benjamin Rafaeli,
(front) Ryan Valdez, Jonah Katz, Benjamin Becker
- Row 2:** Amelia Saghian, Maya Hyatt, Avery David, Hope Freedman,
Jackelyn Katz, Diana Rubenstein, Jameson Valvaneda, Ori Dagan
- Row 3:** Sierra Little, Caden Lidell, Chloe Raffle, Carter Goodman, Maya Dagan,
Sunday Hochstein, Katherine Lincoln, Bailey Wiener, Anne Diskin
- Row 4:** Lucy Burke, Debbie Edwardson, Parker Stern, Brooks Goodman, Ellie Kappa,
Isla Gordon, Fred Roosth, Sari Roseman
- Row 5:** Anna Wizel, Ben Litofsky, Kerri Zerlin, Merav Sternthal
- Row 6:** Abby Lestin, Rabbi Samuel Rheins, Rabbi Adrienne Scott, Rabbi David Lyon,
(back) Cantor Kenneth Feibush, Dr. Michelle Barton, David Scott, Stacy Parke

MIRIAM BROWNING JEWISH LEARNING CENTER

Providing fun, stimulating learning and social activities for students & families



5th Grade Mitzvah Mavens at Beth Israel Memorial Garden



MBJLC students celebrate Simchat Torah with Rabbi Sam Rheins

It's been a busy start to the MBJLC school year! Every week our students are engaged in meaningful Jewish learning, creative projects, field trips, and volunteer opportunities.

In October, our fifth graders visited Beth Israel Memorial Garden on Antoine Drive and had the pleasure of learning from Ronnie Ladin, who served as co-chair of the Cemetery Committee for 17 years. On November 3, our third grade students, led by Rabbi Sam Rheins and David Scott, RJE, Director of Lifelong Learning & Engagement, embarked on a trip to the Houston Zoo to learn about Noah's Ark! And, on November 10, our third graders received their formal Hebrew names from Rabbi Adrienne Scott at our annual Naming Ceremony, which was followed by a reception and family-friendly arts and crafts project.

Other highlights include: a shofar workshop in preparation for the High Holy Days, lots of time in the MBJLC-decorated Sukkah, music with Mike Mason, Director of Campus Operations & Young Jewish Life, and Chanukah card-making for Jewish soldiers!

These programs and experiences were made possible by a generous grant from the MBJLC Community Engagement Fund. To learn more about our youth programming, contact Kerri Zerlin, Assistant Director of the MBJLC, at kzerlin@beth-israel.org.

TOT SHABBAT & HAVDALAH with Mike Mason



Saturday, February 22 at 10 AM
Saturday, May 10 at 5 PM

Families with young children are invited to Tot Shabbat! We'll share stories, prayers, songs, and blessings for our families. For more information, contact Kerri Zerlin at kzerlin@beth-israel.org.

KEHILLAH HIGH

An innovative, supplemental education program for Jewish students in grades 8-12 to enrich their Jewish identities through learning, community engagement, and connection to Israel

KEHILLAH HIGH IS GOING TO ISRAEL!

Get ready for the trip of a lifetime! Kehillah High is excited to offer its third trip to Israel since Kehillah High's 2015 inception, and first trip under the umbrella of the Jewish Federation of Greater Houston. The trip, scheduled for **June 11-July 2, 2025**, is open to all students in 10th and 11th grades (as of September 2024). Participating teens will have the opportunity to build personal connections to Israel; to interact with Israel's people, food, rich history and culture, and natural beauty.

We understand that traveling to Israel this summer may feel challenging given the current climate, but please know that the safety of our teens remains Kehillah High's top priority as we plan for the 2025 Houston Teen Israel Experience in June.

Now, more than ever, it's essential for our teens to experience the Jewish community and deepen their relationship with Israel. We are encouraging early registration to ensure a robust and impactful pre-trip program.

Please reach out to Danielle Alexander at dalexander@houstonjewish.org or 832-295-6186 for more information and visit this link to register:

<https://www.kehillahhouston.org/israel-trip-2025.html>

This year's Houston Teen Israel Experience is generously supported by the Jewish Federation of Greater Houston, dedicated donors, and participating congregations.



CONGREGATION BETH ISRAEL PRESENTS

FAMILY SHABBAT



Friday, January 31



Friday, February 28



Friday, March 21

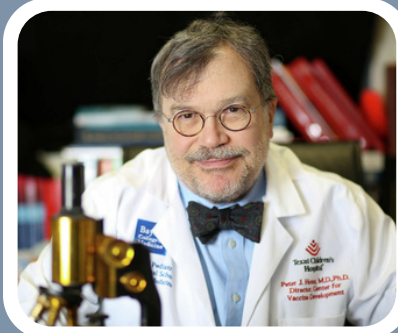


Friday, April 25

All families with children and teens are invited to celebrate Shabbat! We'll share familiar prayers, blessings for our children, and joyful music. All events start at 6 PM. Questions? Contact Kerri Zerlin at kzerlin@beth-israel.org.

UPCOMING EVENTS

PRESENTED BY THE ADULT EDUCATION COMMITTEE



Thursday, 7:00 PM

Anti-Science and Antisemitism

With Peter Jay Hotez, MD, PhD, Director of the Center for Vaccine Development at Texas Children's Hospital and Dean for the National School of Tropical Medicine, Baylor College of Medicine

January

09
2025



Friday & Saturday

Scholar-in-Residence Shabbat

With Rabbi Jonathan Cohen, former Senior Rabbi of The Temple-Tifereth Israel in Beachwood and Dean of HUC-JIR in Cincinnati, Ohio. Rabbi Cohen offers insights of a traveler, immigrant, and scholar of Jewish values and human potential.

January

10&11
2025



Tuesday, 7:00 PM

Conquering Learning Disabilities

With Bryan Mark Rigg, back by popular demand! Rigg is an award-winning author and World War II historian who served in the IDF and the U.S. Marine Corps. He will share his personal experience in turning his learning disabilities into advantages in honor of Disabilities Awareness Month.

February

04
2025



Friday & Saturday

Celebrating 50 Years of Women in the Cantorate

With Cantor Jill Ambramson, Director of the Debbie Friedman School of Sacred Music, and Cantor Barbara Ostfeld, the first woman in Jewish history to be ordained a cantor.

February

7&8
2025

LUNCH *and* LEARN

WITH YOUR BETH ISRAEL
CLERGY TEAM



THE JEWISH PERSPECTIVE ON RESCUING HOSTAGES

with
Rabbi David Lyon

January 23, 2025
Thursday, 12:15 PM



EXPRESSING LOVE THROUGH TORAH

with
Rabbi Adrienne Scott

February 13, 2025
Thursday, 12:15 PM



PURIM AND SHABBAT ZACHOR

with
Rabbi Samuel Rheins

March 6, 2025
Thursday, 12:15 PM

*Programs with Cantor Kenneth Feibush and
David Scott, RJE will be offered in Spring 2025.*

Learn more and register at
beth-israel.shulcloud.com/calendar

Presented by the Adult Education Committee

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CONGREGATION
BETH ISRAEL
1854-2024

ADULT EDUCATION
COMMITTEE



SOCIAL JUSTICE
COMMITTEE

CLIMATE JUSTICE: A MORAL IMPERATIVE



TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 11, 2025 · 7:00 PM
5600 N. BRAESWOOD BLVD.

As we prepare for Tu B'Shevat, the holiday that celebrates trees and nature, we will welcome environmental experts from Rice University, the University of Houston, and Texas Southern University, along with our very own Rabbi David Lyon, for a symposium on climate justice. Together, these panelists will address how climate justice policies impact different communities, as well as ways in which we can respond to environmental change.

LEARN MORE + REGISTER AT
BETH-ISRAEL.SHULCLOUD.COM/CALENDAR

SOCIAL JUSTICE COMMITTEE

Organizes volunteer projects, food and clothing drives, and educational programs to give back to the community

YOU'RE INVITED!



Sunday, December 22



12:00-2:00 PM



Raindrop Turkish House
9301 W. Bellfort Avenue
Houston, TX 77031

Congregation Beth Israel is a proud partner of the Minaret Foundation's 2024 Muslim-Jewish Christmas. For over a decade, this special event has brought together Muslims and Jews in Houston to share meals, conversations, and moments of connection. This year, we will explore the shared value of honoring our parents in Muslim and Jewish traditions.

Learn more & register:

<https://minaretfoundation.com>

This fall, the Social Justice Committee **hosted two donation drives to support local charities.** We are so grateful to the members of Congregation Beth Israel who donated \$4,295 worth of new and gently used winter clothing to Interfaith Ministries for Greater Houston, and those who donated non-perishable food items to The Minaret Foundation's "Competing in Goodness" Food Drive. **Your contributions will help those in need throughout the Greater Houston community.** We extend our deepest appreciation to committee member Jennifer Claridge and her family for coordinating both collection drives!

Our voting promotion team, led by committee member Warren Rich, **brought a variety of voting resources to our congregation** and other Jewish community organizations leading up to the November 5th election. We partnered with Houston Faith Votes to encourage Houston residents to vote and prepare them for a smooth process at the polls.

Our committee members continued to **volunteer at Temenos' monthly residential events for formerly homeless Houstonians**, where participants explore creativity and community bonding in a stress-free environment.

The Social Justice Committee offers humanitarian, thought-provoking, and relevant projects and programs throughout the year. To get involved with upcoming programs and volunteer work, contact the committee's co-chairs, Lisa Stone and Dena Marks at lestone@aya.yale.edu and denasokolow@gmail.com.

BINGE YOUR WAY THROUGH WINTER

Beth Israel New Group Engagements



Sunday Pickleball BINGE group



Friday Torah 101 BINGE group

Our BINGE groups (Beth Israel New Group Engagements) are fun affinity groups that promote new friendships and engaging discussions between Beth Israel members with similar interests. We encourage you to get involved with one of our thriving BINGE groups, or reach out to us with an idea for a new group. No prior experience is necessary to participate!

WEEKLY BINGE GROUPS

TORAH 101

Fridays · 11:30 AM

Led by David Scott, RJE

SHARING SUPPORT IN TROUBLED TIMES

Thursdays · 7 PM

Led by Drs. Tom Cole & Sharon Romm

WRITERS' CIRCLE

First & Third Thursdays · 1 PM

Led by Miriam Kalman Friedman

PICKLEBALL

Sundays · 9 AM

Led by Linda Caplan

SWIMMING IN THE SEA OF TALMUD

Wednesdays · 2 PM

Led by David Scott, RJE

JEWISH MEDITATION

Tuesdays · 7:30 PM

Led by Jay Tarnow & David Scott, RJE

MONTHLY BINGE GROUPS

WHAT ARE YOU WATCHING?

First Monday of each month · 7 PM

Led by Sheila Horn

MUSSAR LEARNING

One Sunday each month · 10 AM

*Led by Heather Westendarp
& Naomi Wittlin*

WHAT'S HAPPENING NOW?

One Sunday each month · 10 AM

Led by Steve & Laurie Tamber

Visit our website for updates, as our BINGE groups are constantly adding fun, innovative programs to the calendar. If you have questions related to our BINGE groups, contact Stephanie Shargal, Membership & Engagement Manager, at sshargal@beth-israel.org or 713-771-6221.

WOMEN OF BETH ISRAEL

A group for women who want to strengthen their own Judaism, support the congregation and Houston community, and offer opportunities for socialization

The Women of Beth Israel 2024-2025 Annual Membership Drive is underway! Join or renew your annual membership online by scanning the QR code or visiting beth-israel.shulcloud.com/form/sisterhood. Your membership helps support initiatives for women, provides a gift to each Congregation Beth Israel B'nei Mitzvah, and helps cover expenses associated with the Gift Shop.



UPCOMING WOMEN OF BETH ISRAEL ACTIVITIES

MITZVAH PROJECT

January 1-30

Throughout the month of January, the Women of Beth Israel, in collaboration with the Social Justice Committee, will be collecting personal and home hygiene projects (i.e., shampoo, toothpaste, feminine pads, new underwear, cleaning supplies, etc.) to support Interfaith Ministries of Greater Houston and Undies for Everyone.

MAHJONG-A-THON

Sunday, February 2

Join us for the inaugural Lyn Fleishman Schmulen Mahjong-a-Thon! Register your team of four for mahjong, or spend time with friends playing a variety of other games. Light snacks and sweet treats will be provided, plus fabulous raffle items. Learn more on the following page and register online at beth-israel.org.

HAMANTASCHEN BAKE SALE

March 2-16

The Women of Beth Israel Hamantaschen Bake Sale is back by popular demand! Hand-crafted and baked from scratch, these tasty treats will be available for pre-order starting in January 2025. Stay tuned for more details –there may be a few new flavors to choose from this year!

SHOP NOW FOR CHANUKAH!

The Gift Shop has a huge selection of unique menorahs, candles, dreidels, children's toys, games, gelt, and more!

Your Judaica Shop is stocked and ready for all your personal gift-giving needs—and gift wrapping is always free!

Shop Hours: 10 AM-4 PM • Tuesday-Friday

For more information, contact Anita Seline, Gift Shop Manager, at 713-777-4315.



THE LYN FLEISHMAN SCHMULEN



MAHJONG -a- THON



Presented by The Women of Beth Israel

Got game? Round up your friends for an epic afternoon of mahjong! Fuel up with snacks and sweet treats, enter the raffle, and test your luck at a variety of other games.



**SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 2, 2025
1:00 PM - WOLFF-TOOMIM HALL**

\$144 · Team of Four

\$36 · Individual (online RSVP)

\$54 · Individual (at the door)

Register at beth-israel.shulcloud.com/calendar

**Questions? Contact Susan Bass at
susanseabass@gmail.com.**



THE SCHACHTEL LIBRARY & ARCHIVE

Your resource for Jewish literature & history in Houston

VISIT OUR COLLECTION & ARCHIVE

The Schachtel Library continues to add new books on Jewish thought and experiences to its collection, including books that were recently featured in the ERJCC's 2024 Jewish Book & Arts Festival.

To view our full catalog and information on the Congregation Beth Israel Archive, visit beth-israel.org/lifelong-learning/library. Our librarian, Susan Whitman, is available Mondays-Thursdays from 9 AM-2 PM. Additionally, you can call 713-820-6410 or email her at swhitman@beth-israel.org to inquire about or reserve books.

SCHACHTEL LIBRARY READERS' GROUP

The Readers' Group invites congregants and friends to read and discuss books of various genres. The group frequently welcomes members of the Congregation Beth Israel clergy team and visiting authors to facilitate thought-provoking discussions and answer questions. All are welcome to participate! The group meets on Wednesdays at 1 PM, both in person in the Finger Board Room and online via Zoom. On January 15, the group will discuss *We Share the Same Sky* by Rachael Cerrotti. Contact Susan Whitman to be added to the Readers' Group mailing list, and stay tuned for the upcoming spring schedule.

BINGE WITH THE WRITERS' CIRCLE!

The Writers' Circle is a BINGE group led by Congregation Beth Israel member and author, Miriam Friedman. The group meets twice a month on Thursdays at 1 PM to discuss creative writing and share personal work. Writers of all levels, published or not, are welcome. To join, contact Stephanie Shargal, Membership & Engagement Manager, at 713-771-6221 or sshargal@beth-israel.org.

VOICES OF BETH ISRAEL: PRESERVING OUR STORIES WITH STJA

The Schachtel Library is partnering with the Joan and Stanford Alexander South Texas Jewish Archives (STJA) to collect oral histories from Congregation Beth Israel members of their experiences over the years. On Thursday, December 12, Susan Whitman and STJA curator Melissa Cohen-Nickels introduced the project and provided information on how members can sign up to record their oral histories at STJA's Rice University recording studio.

If you missed the December 12 event but are interested in participating in the project, contact Susan Whitman at 713-820-6410 or swhitman@beth-israel.org.

Securing Our Community

CONSTRUCTION UPDATE

\$2.5 MILLION —



\$2.15 MILLION —

\$2 MILLION —

Congregation Beth Israel launched its Securing Our Community campaign to address concerns around the unfortunate rise in antisemitism and violence targeting Jewish communities. This initiative, which includes the newly constructed perimeter fence, access control system, surveillance equipment, and additional lighting, prioritizes the safety and peace-of-mind of members, clergy, staff, and guests who enter our community spaces, as well as the students and faculty at The Shlenker School and The Miriam Browning Jewish Learning Center.

\$1.5 MILLION —

We are pleased to announce the completion of our entry and exit gates, which are now automated and undergoing final tests. The last stage of our initiative—the construction of a guardhouse at the main entrance on Mullins Drive—is currently in progress, and we look forward to sharing more details with you soon.

HOW YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

We are deeply grateful for the support we have received thus far from members, family, and friends, totaling \$2.15 million to-date.

But we need your help to achieve our fundraising goal of \$2.5 million.

Your engagement as a Congregation Beth Israel member is, and has always been, instrumental to our Temple's success and survival. We ask you to consider making a contribution to this important campaign. Your generosity will go directly towards protecting our community—our family—for generations to come.

To donate, contact Casey Cole, Executive Director, at ccole@beth-israel.org.

REFLECTING ON 170 YEARS WITH “DECADES OF CONFIRMATION” REUNION



Confirmation Class of 1968

As part of our 170th anniversary celebration, Congregation Beth Israel is delighted to host a reunion for the Confirmation Classes of 1968-1989—the first classes that were confirmed at our North Braeswood campus—on Friday, February 21, 2025.

This reunion will include a special blessing on the bimah by Rabbi David Lyon during our Shabbat Evening Service, followed by a delicious Shabbat dinner in Wolff-Toomim Hall—an opportunity to reconnect, reminisce, and rejoice.

Invitations will be sent out in January 2025.

Contact Marsha Gilbert, Director of Special Events & Catering, at mgilbert@beth-israel.org or 713-771-6221 to help us complete the Confirmands' guest list or to assist with planning the reunion!

MAZEL TOV TO OUR ADULT B'NOT MITZVAH, UNITING FROM NEAR AND FAR



B'not Mitzvah of Nicole Womble, Jewel Lincoln, and Sharon Romm · Photo by Ed Fastow

On Thursday, November 7, Temple members Jewel Lincoln, Sharon Romm, and Nicole Womble celebrated their adult B'not Mitzvah with family and friends in the Gordon Chapel.

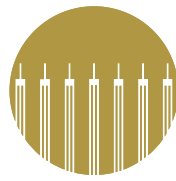
After months of preparation and study—on their own and together via Zoom—Jewel, Sharon, and Nicole traveled from Indiana, Seattle, and right here in Houston to meet in person for the very first time and take their places in the Jewish community. The service was led by Rabbi Adrienne Scott and Cantor Kenneth Feibush.

Please join us in extending a Mazel Tov to Jewel, Sharon, and Nicole on reaching this hard-earned milestone!

SPONSOR AN ONEG SHABBAT!

Oneg Shabbats at Congregation Beth Israel provide our community with an opportunity to have a social connection on Shabbat—a chance to renew friendships, welcome newcomers, and make new friends. Sponsoring an Oneg is a wonderful way to honor, remember, or celebrate a loved one, event, or milestone. Or simply, just because. To learn more, contact Marsha Gilbert at mgilbert@beth-israel.org.





Center for
Spiritual Direction
of Congregation Beth Israel

“WHERE IS YOUR SOUL?”

by Dr. Tom Cole, Director of Center for Spiritual Direction

Many of us are so busy with work and family that the idea of our individual spiritual life may seem irrelevant. Even if we attend services and observe the Jewish holidays, we can still feel disconnected to God, the Holy One, the Source of All Being, or what German theologian and philosopher Rudolf Otto called the *Mysterium Tremendum*.

Paradoxically, deep feelings of spirituality often come in moments of trauma, grief, pain, or a near death experience. I have a friend named Michael who told me about one such moment:

“When I was eight, I was walking to school one day and a drunk 16-year-old driver slammed into me. I was flipped into the air and ended up in a bed of rocks. Ambulance attendants considered me dead. While I was on the other side, I was filled with a pure love energy, unconditional love, infinite love, God’s love.”

When Michael woke up in the hospital, his body was so mutilated that it took years to repair. But he knew that a loving God was real.

Similarly, after the home of our own beloved Rabbi Samuel E. Karff—may he rest in peace—was struck by lightning and burned to the ground, he wrote:

“I did feel God’s presence that night and during the days to come in our survival, in the strength we received to carry on, in the love of those who embraced and nurtured us, and in my faith that God would empower us to derive a blessing even from this ordeal. In retrospect, this reminder of our vulnerability and neediness was unnerving but, strange as it may seem, also spiritually deepening.”

Such moments are known as spiritual openings or awakenings. They are both a curse and a blessing. They are terrible, yet they reveal a glorious dimension, an ultimate reality we might otherwise never have known. Fortunately, we may also experience spiritual openings in wonderful moments such as the birth of a child, the glory of a sunset, or the death of a loved one ready to return to God.

But deepening our spiritual life requires more than spontaneous moments of awakening. It requires a disciplined journey of spiritual practices without expecting a quick payoff, such as attending services, engaging in Torah study, meditating, advocating for social justice, initiating daily acts of kindness, etc.

Consider prioritizing your spiritual life. Here is one suggestion: the Hebrew words for breath (“Neshima”) and for soul (“Neshama”) are virtually the same. A divine soul is already inside you, in every breath you take. Both are gifts from God, who breathed life into Adam, creating the first human being. Try scheduling time to slow down and pay attention, perhaps in meditation or walking in the neighborhood. When we inhale, we are filled with soul/breath; when we exhale, we return soul/breath to their Source, the Holy One.

Every single breath is a gift from God. Another opportunity to remember and feel the holiness that lives within.



Share the Load

Alone, I can do little. Together, we can do anything.

Simply select a Congregation Beth Israel service that is most important to you.



Since 1854, Congregation Beth Israel has been a sacred community in the lives of its congregants. Each year, in order to provide for the special services, programs, and events, the Temple relies on the financial support of its member families.

Your family's annual commitment provides 80% of the Temple's operating budget.

Additional funding is needed to offset expenses. For the 2024-2025 fiscal year, the Temple's total operating expenses are \$5.2 million.

We need your help!

The Share the Load program helps underwrite the remaining expenses. Every family is asked to choose the Temple program or operational service that feels important to them. Your gift will help close the gap in the Beth Israel budget.

Please do your part in Sharing the Beth Israel Load. Your generous gift will ensure the continuity of Beth Israel's quality of service to our community.

Julie Gilbert | Development Committee Chair

Casey Cole | Executive Director

Congregation Beth Israel

Support Opportunities

OPERATIONAL

Campus Security

Safety and security first.

Help support \$200,000 annual cost

Live-streaming

Making the at-home experience as joyful as the in-person experience, on Shabbat and beyond.

Help support \$100,000 annual cost

Campus Beautification

Maintain landscaping, exterior building, parking lots, and exterior lighting.

Help support \$40,000 annual cost

Cemetery Upkeep & Beautification

Respect and maintain our departed loved ones' resting place.

Help support \$150,000 annual cost

Critical Infrastructure

Electricity, HVAC, cybersecurity, and communications systems.

Help support \$350,000 annual cost

Temple Unrestricted

Funds for the organization to use at its discretion, typically to support general operations, cover day-to-day expenses, invest in new initiatives, or address unforeseen needs.

HOLIDAY PROGRAMS

High Holy Days (services, programs, music); Chanukah Service; Purim programming; Sukkot programming; Second Night Seder; and more

Help support \$42,000 annual cost

MEMBER & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

BINGE Group Programming

BINGE Groups (Beth Israel New Group Engagements) are fun affinity groups that promote new friendships and engaging discussions between Beth Israel members with similar interests.

Help support \$5,000 annual cost

Kids' Meals Programming

Pack over 15,000 brown bag lunches per year for children facing food insecurity, in partnership with Kids' Meals, Inc.

Help support \$15,000 annual cost

Oneg Shabbat

Help support \$15,000 annual cost

YOUTH/TEENS/YOUNG ADULTS

Family & Tot Shabbat

Shabbat fun and food for the whole family.

Help support \$8,000 annual cost

Jeremy Tucker Fund for Jewish Special Education

Our unique Aliyah program allows children with special needs to stay connected and involved with Jewish education, and ultimately, become Bar, Bat, or B'rit Mitzvah themselves.

Help support \$8,500 annual cost

MBJLC Scholarships

Provide a Jewish education for children without the barrier of tuition.

Help support \$1,000 annual cost per child

MBJLC Unrestricted

Funds for the MBJLC to use at its discretion.

DONATE

No donation amount is too little.
All giving levels are welcome.

All checks should be mailed to:

Congregation Beth Israel

DEPT.

PO Box 4851

Houston, TX 77210-4851

To donate online, visit:
tinyurl.com/share-the-load



Ignite the spark that will last a lifetime



Contact Tara Gassett, Director of Admissions, at tgassett@shlenker.org or 713.270.6127 for more information.

The Shlenker School
5600 N. Braeswood Blvd. Houston, TX 77096
713.270.6127 | www.shlenker.org



Happy Chanukah

Chag Sameach



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713-771-6221

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relevant. modern. joyful

YOU'RE INVITED

FRIDAY,
JANUARY
17

MLK SHABBAT

FRIDAY,
MARCH
07

NEW MEMBER SHABBAT

Presented by the Membership Engagement Committee

Join us for two special Shabbat Evening Services on Friday, January 17 and Friday, March 7. Both services will begin at 6:30 PM in the Sanctuary, followed by celebratory Onegs in Wolff-Toomim Hall.

Visit beth-israel.shulcloud.com/calendar to learn more and register.



@bethisraelhouston



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