

CONGREGATION AGUDATH JACOB

JANUARY 2025 TEVET/SHEVAT 5785

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*From the Desk of
Rabbi Ben-Zion Lanxner*

“PROUD TO BE JEWS”

**Like the Maccabees, Jews need to stand firm in the values
Judaism brought to the world.**

Dylan McKay made a bold statement on this popular TV show, Beverly Hills, 90210, “May the bridges I burn, light the way”. The line resonates, not just for the rebellious bad boy who said it, but because it reminds us that standing firm in our values – even at the cost of comfort, relationships, or opportunities – isn’t about destruction. It’s about blazing a trail of truth, following it boldly, and illuminating it for others.

That’s exactly what the Maccabees did.

As the last flames of the Hanukkah flicker tonight, we reflect on an ancient victory that carries profound meaning today.

The Hanukkah story is more than a tale of military triumph; it is a spiritual manifesto recounting the clash of two worldviews: the Hellenistic glorification of power and beauty, and the Jewish ethos of divine purpose and ethical living.

This ancient conflict wasn’t merely about land or resources but about humanity’s purpose.

The Greeks sought to extinguish the light of Torah – the Jewish framework of sanctity, ethical monotheism, and moral responsibility. They banned Shabbat, circumcision, and Torah study, attacking the pillars of Jewish identity, purpose, and continuity.

Their campaign wasn’t just against Jews; it was against the values Judaism brought to the world.

We see this recurring pattern across history. From Pharaoh's enslavement to Haman's plot, the 1492 Inquisition in Spain, the Holocaust, Soviet purges, and today's Islamist terrorism, evil always finds the Jews and seeks to eradicate their values.

Adolf Hitler (may his name be erased) understood this eternal values war with chilling clarity. He despised Judaism not just for its people but for its principles, which he saw as the antithesis of his ideology of might and conquest.

In his book *Mein Kampf*, he wrote: "If Germany frees itself from this embrace [of Jewry], this greatest of all dangers to the peoples can be regarded as crushed for the entire world". He saw Jewish principles of compassion, love, and universal dignity as a direct threat to his vision of dominance and survival of the fittest. This recognition, in his mind, demanded a "final solution."

In a 1941 conversation with the Mufti of Jerusalem, Haj Amin al-Husseini, Hitler explained, "This was the decisive struggle... Ideologically it [the war] was a battle between National Socialism and the Jews". He viewed the war not merely as military but as a clash of opposing worldviews.

Radical Islamists, beginning with the Mufti who spent the war years as Hitler's guest – and ally – in Berlin, and continuing until today, have taken up this mantle in the modern era, seeking to destroy Israel and Jewish influence as part of their war against the West and its ideals rooted in Judeo-Christian ethics.

Antisemitism is not merely economic envy or social tension. It is a rejection of the moral and spiritual message Judaism embodies.

Jew-hatred's persistence, intensity, and universality demand we look beyond conventional explanations that cast Jew-hatred as just a regular bigotry or a need to find a scapegoat.

Jew-hatred reflects a recognition – often subconscious – of the transformative power of Jewish drive and values, which challenge oppressive ideologies and moral complacency.

Hanukkah's timeless lessons teach us not just why Jews are hated, but how to respond. The Maccabees refused to despair or assimilate. They fought to preserve their proud Jewish identity, restoring the Temple and rekindling the Menorah – a symbol of spiritual resilience. Their victory wasn't just military; it was a triumph of light over darkness, of meaning over materialism. (FYI, the details of these events can be found in the Books of Maccabees I & II).

This message feels urgent today. In an era of rising antisemitism, we must respond with moral and spiritual courage. We have to stand proudly as an unapologetic voice for

Jewish values and identity. By doing so, she reminds others of the importance of embracing who we are and living our traditions with pride.

Hanukkah calls on us to recognize that embracing our Jewish identity is not just survival – it is our Mission. This is the deeper meaning of “May the bridges I burn light the way” and of being “a Light unto the Nations.”

The Hanukkah story is about a small group with conviction standing against overwhelming odds. They risked everything to protect values greater than themselves. They burned the bridges of conformity and apathy, knowing what they stood to lose paled next to what they stood to protect.

This understanding shifts the conversation. If antisemitism is a rejection of Jewish values, then our response cannot be limited to physical survival or political advocacy. It must involve a rededication to the very principles that have made Jews targets throughout history.

As we light the Hanukkah, we remember: The battle today between light and darkness is ongoing. The Jewish people have a sacred mission, and every generation – and each of us – must rise to it.

This means seeing today’s war against both Islamists and global double standards as not an isolated incident but as part of the oldest hatred (Don’t look further than the ICC, always attacking and criticizing the State of Israel as the “Bad Guy”).

It means sharing Jewish values in a world starving for moral clarity. Jew-hatred is not a reason to retreat but just the opposite, it is a call to engage more deeply with our faith.

Each of us can be a vessel for light that dispels darkness. And we are not just talking about taking a stand on social media – we are talking about having conversations with friends, neighbors, and colleagues, students (as I personally have some intense arguments with students at Baylor’s World religions Class in the fall every year), even when it is uncomfortable.

It means bringing traditions alive in our homes, not just as rituals but as acts that connect us to spirituality, meaning, and our identity. Lighting the Hanukkah is not just festive; it’s a meditation on the living miracle of Jewish survival and the responsibility to keep that flame alive.

The Maccabees didn’t just fight for themselves. They fought for their values, their future, and the light that still burns today. As we honor their legacy, let us stand together, proud and unafraid, burning the bridges that hold us back and illuminating the path forward.

One small light can push back a world of darkness. Today, despite the frequent hypocritical condemnations, Israel is shining a giant spotlight into the world.

Together, as we are about to enter the New Year 2025, let us make that light shine ever brighter, as **One People with One Heart**.

May G-d Bless Us All with a New Year of Peace, Good Health, Happiness, Prosperity and Pride to be Jews, Yehudim, as Yehudah the Maccabee.

Rabbi Ben-Zion Lanxner

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Thank you to all who participated in the “blue tape” walk-through of our synagogue building on Sunday, December 22nd. We had a great turnout and, personally, witnessing the participation and attention to detail and enthusiasm on everyone’s part made this one of the most gratifying experiences that I have had as a member of the *shul* for these pasts almost 15 years. Our to-do list and wish list of maintenance, repair, upgrade, and deep-cleaning items filled several pages of my handwritten notes and, as of this writing, our members have already started in on many of these items. *Yasher koach* to everyone, and thank you so, so much.

Now that 2025 is here, I have a few new year’s resolutions to share. Or perhaps I should say resolutions for the secular new year, as we are already well into our sweet new Jewish year of 5785. As I noted at our annual congregational membership meeting, three resolutions come immediately to mind.

First, we resolve to increase our membership numbers and our donations. We hope to attract new members, to see old members return, and to experience a greater level of giving from all our members. The word “giving” here implies not solely financial contributions, which of course we welcome, but contributions of labor and ideas.

Second, we resolve to reduce our expenses, including through preventive maintenance. We all know the expression that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. I believe that this is literally true, and we have already demonstrated a wonderful commitment to this approach to maintaining our synagogue facilities through our recent efforts. May these continue.

Third, we resolve to continue to pursue ways to gather together with our Jewish friends at Temple Rodef Sholom. This is a worthy aim and, moreover, it will ensure the continuation and thriving of our local Jewish community well into the future.

To this list I wish to add a fourth item: prayer. This might seem like an unusual thing to include in a list of new year's resolutions, but I hardly think that it should seem so unusual. We are a religious congregation, after all. One of the principal identities of any *shul*, including ours, is as a *bet t'filah*, a house of prayer. Specifically, I would like to suggest that each of us resolve to pray for the continued flourishing of our *shul*, for the Jewish community of Central Texas, and for the security of our homeland, Eretz Yisrael.

It is easy to forget sometimes that prayer is more than a ritual that we perform together during services at *shul*. More generally, it is the way that each Jewish *neshamah*, or soul, communicates with the Ribbono Shel Olam, with the Master of the Universe, Who longs to hear us express our concerns and desires and pleas and Who has assured us that He will reward our *bitachon* (trust) and *emunah* (faith). I believe that deep down we all recognize this. But is it something that we affirm, mentally, as an article of faith, but not really through our daily actions? Or is it something that we take to heart and put into action on a regular basis? Accordingly, I challenge us, as a religious community, to make prayer a regular part of who we are and what we do. I am hardly qualified as a prophet, but if we resolve to ask G-d to bless us, I see great things for the future of our congregation in the coming year.

We are many things here at CAJ—whose name means, literally, the union or association of the spiritual descendants of Jacob/Israel. One of these many things is a union of faith, of people of faith. I would like to ask that for this new year each of us take some time, as often as we are moved to do so, to pray for CAJ and for all of the Jews of Central Texas and for the people of Israel. Rabbi Abraham Heschel, z"l, once said, "One cannot pray unless he has faith in his own ability to accost the infinite, merciful, eternal G-d." Rabbi Heschel also reminded us that G-d desires our prayers. Joining these two observations together suggests that G-d truly believes that we have the capability of reaching out and connecting with Him—that it is within our grasp. This ability to connect with Hashem is not just a metaphor; it is real. He believes in us, and He wants us to reach out to Him, and he has given us prayer as a way to do this. His gift of prayer is a mighty untapped power within each of us.

May this new year be a time in which we tap into this spiritual wellspring and reach out, together, to ask G-d's blessings to rain down upon us.

L'shalom,
Jeff Levin

January Service Schedule

	Kabbalat Shabbat	6:00 pm	
	Candle Lighting	5:09 pm	
<u>Friday, January 3</u>		<u>Saturday, January 11</u>	
Kabbalat Shabbat	6:00 pm	Shacharit	10:00 am
Candle Lighting	5:07 pm	Shabbat Ends	6:07 pm
<u>Saturday, January 4</u>			
Shacharit	10:00 am		
Shabbat Ends	6:05 pm		
<u>Friday, January 10</u>			

Kabbalat Shabbat 6:00 pm
Candle Lighting 5:15 pm

Friday, January 17

Kabbalat Shabbat 6:00 pm
Candle Lighting 5:12 pm

Saturday, January 18

Shacharit 10:00 am
Shabbat Ends 6:10 pm

Friday, January 24

Saturday, January 25

Shacharit 10:00 am
Shabbat Ends 6:14 pm

Friday, January 31

Kabbalat Shabbat 6:00 pm
Candle Lighting 5:15 pm



January 10

Javis Howeth

January 12

Mike Stupak

January 16

Felicity Jortner

HAPPY ANNIVERSARY

January 19

**David & Lesley
Rosen**



ANNOUNCEMENTS

NO announcements at this time. Please look for weekly announcements.

THANK YOU for your donations in December!

Shabbat

Javis Howeth

Judy Hersh

Henry Hacker
Susan Raphael
Jeff Levin

Susan Lanxner
Michael Pesses

In Memory Of

Margarety Harelík

Harry Harelík

Evelyn Burchman

Barbara

Dankenbring

Sydney Jacobson

Esther Lipinsky

Ida Wolkoff Harris

Martha Greenberg

MB Farmer

Paul & Paula

Farmer

Gandler, Beerman,

and Chodorow

families

Michaele Brown

Carol Mitchell

Jeff Levin and

Rabbi

Hanukkah Donations

Florence Hersh

Dr & Hope Hacker

Richard and Karen
Alpert

Yahrzeits

The following names of dearly departed will be read aloud by the Rabbi preceding the Mourner's Kaddish on Shabbat morning. It is fitting and customary that the nearest of kin be present in the synagogue for the recitation of this special prayer in their memory. Attendance not only honors the departed but also enhances and guarantees that a Minyan is present to recite the Kaddish.

Kaddish will be read on January 3

Tevet 2

Beatrice Klein

Sobel Baby

Tevet 3

Barnet Brown*

Mrs Isidor Ellis*

Freda Jortner

Becky Levin

Loius I Rosenberg

Tevet 4 Mendel Beerman
Mrs L Bodenheim
Arnold Keen*
Itzak Lavi
Ira L Solovey

Tevet 5 Mrs Aaron Levy
Norman Stein

Tevet 6 S H Gardner
Louis Stein

Tevet 7 Katie Kirschner

Tevet 8 Ivan Esserman
Rose Gerson
Ida Kaplan
Isaac Loewenstein
Leon Meinstein
Bessie Cohen Sachs

Kaddish will be read on January 10

Tevet 9 Benjamin Adelman*
Morris Louis Gardner*
Nathan Wood

Tevet 10 Benjamin Adams
Tillie H Miller*

Tevet 11 Nate Chodorow*
Marie Genecov Adams
Jacob Hayman

Tevet 12 Alphonse Podrizki, MD*

Tevet 14 Sarah Adams
Ida Farbstein*
Ruben Gandler*
Mrs Sam Genecov*
Hattie Lansky

Tevet 15 Mrs Hermine Block
J M Freeman
Eli Frankfort
Charlotte Gleber
H Rosendberg
Fannie Harris Wolf*

Kaddish will be read on January 17

Tevet 16 Bert Altman*
Mrs B R Goldberg
Elias Greenfield*
Hilda Hoffman*
Herman Levi*
Mrs L Ringold*
Arthur N Rubel*

Tevet 17 Jacob Arnold Fischman
Rachel Levy*

Tevet 18 Taube Jacobsen Cohen
M B Farmer
Frances Jacobson*
Nathaniel Louis Kaplan*
Pauline Kolom*
Ben Levin*
Dr H Irwin Mendelson
Frances Novy*
Madeleine Richings

Tevet 19 Hanina Pinto
Tevet 20 Samuel B Epstein
Isadore Fred*
E Hoffman*

Louis Shanin
Barnet Silevitch*
Tevet 21 Sarah Adelman*

Robert Bloch
Harry Jornitzky

Tevet 22 Mae Rubel Altman*
Mrs Sam (Minnie) Aronson*
Asher Lowich*

Kaddish will be read on January 24

Tevet 23 Sam Adelman
Julius Jacobson*
David Levy

Tevet 25 Anna Gurkoff
Abe Hayman*
Gussie T Hayman*
Leo Ringold
Pearl Rubenstein*

Tevet 26 Harold Fink
Cal Goldberg

Tevet 27 Mr Jake Lynn*

Tevet 28 Ella Bettis
Mrs H Novich*

Tevet 29 David Brickman
Morris Fred*
Mrs Max (Fannie) Reed*
Abe Rosenberg*
J Rubin*
Mary Ruttenberg

Kaddish will be read on January 31

Shevat 2 Harry Fetter*
Mark Papernov

Shevat 3 Rebecca Borschow
Lynn Gurkoff
Annie Hoffman*

Shevat 5 Aaron Levy
Leonard Parven
B Tobolowsky*

Shevat 6 Henry Naphtali Heyman*
Elizabeth Israel
Mary Ann Schiller Akers

Shevat 7 Morris Hoffman*
Diane Koss

Shevat 8 Florine Zeo Campbell
Dave Lebowitz*