



## CONGREGATION AGUDATH JACOB

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From the Desk of  
Rabbi Ben-Zion Lanxner



## PROUD TO BE JEWISH!

(Especially during these times where Antisemitism/Antizionism is showing its ugly head again)

### Things to Love and be Thankful about Being Jewish

How about being Thankful and grateful during this time of Thanksgiving celebration, to appreciate this most precious opportunity that Hashem has Chosen us to be His Treasured People? **Asher Bachar Banu Mikol Ha'amim, veNatan Lanu Et Torato!** אשר בחר בנו מכל העמים ונתן לנו את תורתו

A while ago, I started questioning Jewish people, students in my Conversion Classes and some lay people of various Jewish Congregations, kind of an informal survey, asking them what they love/ or are Grateful about being Jewish? And this is what emerged from their numerous responses in no particular order.

## 1. The Jewish people is one big family

Wherever we go around the world, we feel that instant connection when we **bagel each other** (a Jewish expression meaning we “open up” to each other). And being part of a big global family means each of us has an international network of people who genuinely care and will help each other.

“All Jews are responsible for one another (**Kol Israel Areivim Zeh la-Zeh**)” (Talmud Tractate Sanhedrin 27b). The Midrash tells the story of a passenger on a boat who takes out a drill and begins drilling a hole under his seat. The passenger next to him sees what he’s doing and says, “What on earth are you doing?!” The man with the drill replies, “It’s none of your business. I’m only drilling under my own seat.” We are all in the same boat. Every Jew is my responsibility; we are different parts to an organic whole.

## 2. Learning Torah

The Jewish people received G-d’s instruction manual for living, the blueprint to the universe whose wisdom and values have changed the world. We have the privilege to plumb its endless depths and refine ourselves by wrapping our heads around the source of Truth, G-d and His precious Torah, that transcends this world.

## 3. Shabbat

One day a week we unplug from the incessant noise and hard work of ‘doing’ to refocus on just ‘being’. **Shabbat** brings an inner peace within oneself, and provides a weekly opportunity to connect and relate to family, friends, community and G-d.

## 4. Being Jewish means you’re a revolutionary

Starting with our Avraham Avinu, Abraham our Patriarch, who went against the entire polytheistic civilization and brought monotheism to the world, Jews are part of a revolutionary movement charged to change the world. With the national mission to be a light unto nations, every Jew can lead by example and deed. We are partners with G-d in **Tikun Olam**, fixing the world.

## 5. Part of a chain of history that defies all odds

The Jews are one of the oldest nations in the world, and by natural law we should have ceased to exist. We have survived despite being exiled from our land – twice! – scattered across the globe and persecuted with a vengeance. This tiny nation miraculously returned to their homeland, revived their language and is making a mark on the world that far surpasses its numbers. Just by counting the numerous Nobel prizes bestowed on Jewish people in all various fields of research, no other ethnicity has gifted the world with so many of their inventions.

**As Mark Twain wrote in 1899:**

### **“Concerning the Jews”: The Essay**

*"If the statistics are right, the Jews constitute but one percent of the human race. It suggests a nebulous dim puff of star dust lost in the blaze of the Milky Way. Properly*

*the Jew ought hardly to be heard of, but he is heard of, has always been heard of. He is as prominent on the planet as any other people, and his commercial importance is extravagantly out of proportion to the smallness of his bulk. His contributions to the world's list of great names in literature, science, art, music, finance, medicine, and abstruse learning are also away out of proportion to the weakness of his numbers. He has made a marvelous fight in the world, in all the ages; and has done it with his hands tied behind him. He could be vain of himself and be excused for it. The Egyptian, the Babylonian, and the Persian rose, filled the planet with sound and splendor, then faded to dream-stuff and passed away; the Greek and the Roman followed, and made a vast noise, and they are gone; other peoples have sprung up and held their torch high for a time, but it burned out, and they sit in twilight now, or have vanished. The Jew saw them all, beat them all, and is now what he always was, exhibiting no decadence, no infirmities of age, no weakening of his parts, no slowing of his energies, no dulling of his alert and aggressive mind. All things are mortal but the Jew; all other forces pass, but he remains. What is the secret of his immortality?"*

### **As Leo Nikolaivitch Tolstoy wrote in 1908:**

*"The Jew is the emblem of eternity. He who neither slaughter nor torture of thousands of years could destroy, he who neither fire, nor sword, nor Inquisition was able to wipe off the face of the earth. He who was the first to produce the Oracles of God. He who has been for so long the Guardian of Prophecy and has transmitted it to the rest of the world. Such a nation cannot be destroyed. The Jew is as everlasting as Eternity itself".*

Each Jew is part of this eternal chain that includes such luminaries as Abraham, Moses, Rabbi Akiva, Maimonides, Rashi, the Vilna Gaon... We are the current link in the chain, with the late Rebbe Schneerson, Eben Steinsaltz, and the late Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sachs; we are writing our chapter of the continuing Jewish story.

## **6. Revolutionary views on women**

When ancient civilization degraded women, viewing them essentially as chattel, the Torah gave women full protection of their rights in marriage, obligating the husband to honor and cherish his wife. The respect for women's internal strengths – deep insight, spirituality and intellectual prowess, steadfast commitment to Judaism's moral vision – is obvious from many biblical accounts of Jewish women. What's more it's been taught in our Talmud Tractate Sotah 11b: **"In the merit of righteous women, the Jewish people were redeemed from Egypt"**.

## **7. The Jewish family**

The heroes of the Jewish people are the generations of committed mothers and fathers who embraced the sacred task to create a vibrant, loving home and instill Jewish values in their children. In Judaism it is the home, not the Synagogue, that plays the most central role. Jewish life is built around the family coming together – to eat, to learn, to celebrate, to mourn, and most importantly to transmit the torch of our shared heritage to the next generation.

## **8. G-d-consciousness**

Judaism nurtures the awareness that G-d is actively involved in everything. There are no coincidences in Judaism; everything that happens to us is purposeful and for the best. (**Gam Zu leTovah**). We can feel secure knowing that we are wrapped in G-d's loving embrace, His Shechinah.

## 9. Enjoy the physical world

Jews are not ascetics hiding from the world in Monasteries as Monks or as Trapa) Tibetan Monks; living a Jewish life requires a full immersion society and in the world. The challenge is to use the physical as a means to an end, elevating it towards the spiritual, and not let the physical take control of you. So, enjoy that special delicious Starbuck's Caramel Machiatto. The Talmud teaches that in the World to Come, **the Almighty will take us to task for not partaking in any permissible pleasure that was available.** (Jerusalem Talmud, Kiddushin)

## 10. Action is paramount

While feeling and intent are obviously important in everything we do, the Torah is most concerned about action. Do the *mitzvah*, the commandment, even if your heart isn't it. Being good is too important to be conditioned upon those rare moments of inspiration and pure motivation. That's why Judaism's terminology for charity is '**Tzedaka**,' which comes from the Hebrew root '**Tzedek**,' justice. The word 'charity' comes from the Latin word '*caritas*' – affection, dearness, since charity connotes an act of loving kindness that stems from love and concern.

**Tzedaka** doesn't rely on feelings of love to kick in. Do the just and right thing and write that check. And by forcing yourself to do the right thing, chances are your feelings will get in on the act.

Now that I did my part, it's your turn to come up with some of your own inner good feelings about being Jewish.

I am looking forward to hearing from y'all and wishing y'all to remain strong and proud Jews, so this awesome tradition will continue Be'ezrat Hashem LeDor vaDor, for generations to come. **AM ISRAEL CHAI!** Amen!

With Blessings! *Rabbi Ben-Zion Lanxner, Mara d'Atra.*



## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

To begin, let me express for all of us how grateful we are for Rabbi Lanxner's return after the High Holy Days. Thank G-d, he is back up and around and again providing magnificent spiritual leadership to our congregation. Many prayers for a *refuah shleimah* (perfect healing) were offered on his behalf, and Hashem faithfully answered them.

This seems like an opportune time to remark on something that I have been wanting to speak to for a while now: the idea that prayer can lead to healing, literally, in terms of physical well-being. As some of you know, I have studied and written about this topic since the 1980s. What few people know, perhaps, is that there is a substantial medical research literature on the topic totaling in the hundreds of published studies. Based on the findings, published in peer-reviewed medical journals, there is actual empirical evidence that the impact of praying for another person's healing can have an effect. Now, just how this occurs or in what circumstances, or why sometimes it doesn't lead to a complete cure—these are questions that can only be answered by G-d. But, for sure, know this about the effect of prayer: it's real!

Now, granted, as religious believers we already knew that. But the idea that this has been confirmed by research studies is kind of cool. Of course, we do not need the validation of science for us to continue to pray for our friends and loved ones and fellow Jews, but in case you ever wondered, that validation does exist. Therefore, we would do well to follow the advice of the rabbis who have encouraged us to pursue this. I am also reminded of a famous scriptural verse often cited by our Christian friends. I am not sure if it's *kosher* to cite it here in a *shul* newsletter, but I will anyway. Its author was Paul—a Jew, by the way, at least at one time—who in his letter to the Thessalonians famously implored his audience to “Pray unceasingly!” In my opinion, this is great advice, no matter what faith one subscribes to.

Through prayer and G-d's response to our prayers, we not only can contribute to healing in another person but we can help to heal and repair the world. In Hebrew, this goes by the well-known phrase *tikkun olam*. This is often interpreted or misinterpreted in the context of specific actions or behaviors that advance some partisan social or political cause. But it is not the fault of *tikkun olam* that it may be prone to misuse or inappropriate invocation. It's a beautiful concept and indeed a *mitzvah* to pursue it. What it really is about is what the Jewish mystics called “redeeming the sparks,” working to unlock the innate *kedushah* (holiness) in every aspect of creation. We do this through our performance of *mitzvot*, especially through acts of mercy and justice and lovingkindness. Each of us, as religiously observant Jews, is called to be an agent of *tikkun olam* in the larger world as well as in our own lives and interpersonal relationships.

When we pray for another, or for anything at all, we are seeking G-d's intervention to repair something that had become shattered. This can be health, it can be the body politic, or it can be our relations with our families or friends or other members of our congregation or Jewish community. We probably all have had experience in our life of dealing with friends or family members or fellow congregants who drive us nuts, but by seeking G-d in prayer to bring *tikkun* (repair) to these relationships, we are acting in the godly fashion that is required of us as observant Jews. Through the act of praying, we are serving as Hashem's agents of mercy in the world, translating our *emunah* (faith) into actions by petitioning His intervention to heal or repair what is ill or broken. What a great *mitzvah* this is! We should never let a day go by without turning to G-d in prayer.

*L'shalom,*  
Jeff Levin



## December Service Schedule

### Friday, December 5

Kabbalat Shabbat 6:00 pm  
Candle Lighting 5:07 pm

### Saturday, December 6

Shacharit 10:00 am  
Shabbat Ends 6:05 pm

### Friday, December 12

Kabbalat Shabbat 6:00 pm  
Candle Lighting 5:08 pm

### Saturday, December 13

Shacharit 10:00 am  
Shabbat Ends 6:06 pm

### Sunday, December 14

Annual Membership Meeting 4:00 pm  
Hanukkah Celebration 5:00 pm

### Friday, December 19

Kabbalat Shabbat 6:00 pm  
Candle Lighting 5:11 pm

### Saturday, December 20

Shacharit 10:00 am  
Shabbat Ends 6:09 pm

### Friday, December 26

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

### Saturday, December 27

Shacharit 10:00 am  
Shabbat Ends 6:13 pm



December 1

Harry Hareluk

December 6

Emily Rogers

December 21

Paul Farmer

December 4

Shauna Bauer

December 12

Eden Via



December 1

*Jeff & Colleen Wolf*



## **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

- ❖ December 7<sup>th</sup> the Jewish Federation of Waco is having its annual brunch meeting at Moroso Italian Restaurant – 4700 Bosque Blvd. at 11am. A minimum contribution of \$180 to JFED is required to attend. Deadline is December 3<sup>rd</sup> to register for the brunch. Any additional questions can be directed to Judy Hersh.
- ❖ We will have our annual congregational meeting on December 14<sup>th</sup> followed by our Hanukkah Party celebration. The meeting will begin at 4:00 with the celebration to follow.

**Happy Hanukkah!**



Bring you menorahs and candles!!

We will have yummy treats and eats and BINGO!!!

**THANK YOU** for your donations in November!

### *Shabbat*

Susan Raphael  
Jeff Levin  
Carrie Draher

Henry Hacker  
Chris Culver  
George Keller  
Kathleen Keller

Javis Howeth  
Paty Haessly  
Susan Lanxner

### *In Memory Of*

Louis Rosen  
Harry Harelík  
Carol Mitchell  
Kathleen Keller  
Evelyn Burchman  
Barbara Dankenbring

Samuel Milberger  
Susan Raphael  
Arthur Schwartz  
Martin & Loren Schwartz  
Margaret Harelík  
Harry Harelík

### *In Honor Of*

Margot Grae Harelík  
Harry Harelík





# YAHREZEITS

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 December 5**

Kislev 15	Pauline Bartz Moses W Cinnamon Elihu Frankfort Devorah Lanxner
Kislev 16	B Roddy Mrs. Dave Wizig*
Kislev 17	Mary Freidman Moze Novich Max Reid*
Kislev 18	Robert Weidhorn William Goldblatt Harold Warren Israel H Novich
Kislev 19	Rachel Rosenthal Max Corman Robert Glick Mose Harris Jack M Silver*
Kislev 20	Sidney Fleischman
Kislev 21	Flora Epstein Toby Schwartz Vernon Wolf

## **Kaddish will be read on December 12**

Kislev 22	Yetta Cohen
Kislev 23	Amanda Goldstein Sarah Leah Markusefeld*
Kislev 24	Maragaret Harelik* Carrie Loewenstein Samuel H Robinson Sarah E Schaevizt*
Kislev 25	Edith Elaine Koss* Leon Rouvant Sam Rubel*
Kislev 26	Sadie Berman* Chaim H Green Margot Meyers Diana Green Rosner
Kislev 27	Shirley Kleiner Cochavah Lavi
Kislev 28	Cecile Aronson Dora Goldberg Max Knop* Henry Novy*

## **Kaddish will be read on December 19**

Kislev 29	Paul Adams Saul Morris Gellman Julian L Levinson Sam Rosenberg* Mrs. Harry Smith*
Kislev 30	Jake Berkman Infant Mrs. L Levy*
Tevet 1	Mary Roddy Harry Udashen*
Tevet 2	Beatrice Klein Sobel Baby
Tevet 5	Mrs. Aaron Levy Norman Stein

## **Kaddish will be read on December 26**

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
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*