



CONGREGATION BETH EL SCROLL

SEPTEMBER 2026 • ELUL 5786 - TISHREI 5787

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From the Beth El Clergy

CELEBRATING BETH EL'S 75TH

BY RABBI GREG HARRIS



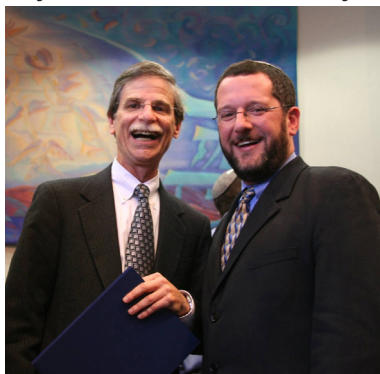
Twenty-five years ago, I parked my car outside Beth El to start my first day as the new Assistant Rabbi. When I arrived, the congregation had just celebrated the 50th anniversary of its founding. There were many of our initial families who shared stories of Beth El's early years. They recalled Rabbi Scolnic knocking on their door when they moved into the neighborhood to introduce himself. Or stories of the cows roaming the fields around the newly established Walter Johnson High School on Davis Farm. Today, the farm is the site of WJ, DSW, the Davis Library, and the medical complex. Over these decades, our community has grown, expanded our embrace, and become an important voice within the county.

This year, we will celebrate Beth El's 75th anniversary across the synagogue. We will honor our past, focus on our present, and build for our future. True to our core values, we will focus inward, outward, and upward. Through learning, prayer, and spiritual awareness, we will strengthen our inner sense of faith and Jewish pride. We will turn towards each other as we enhance the interconnectedness of our community through Shabbat dinners and countless experiences designed to help each of us deepen our roots in the Beth El community.

Through robust Tikkun Olam efforts, we will carry our responsibilities outward into the MoCo community.

We will turn upwards as we utilize traditional rituals and newer experiences for our spiritual expressions. Already, amongst many at Beth El, meditation sessions and sound-bath experiences have become popular alongside our daily minyanim and Shabbat services.

Over these decades, Beth El has been led by dedicated and caring



RABBI RUDOLPH Z"l AND THEN-ASSISTANT RABBI HARRIS AT THE 2005 SANCTUARY DEDICATION.
PHOTO BY MITCHELL SOLKOWITZ

clergy. This year, we will share some of the rabbinic and cantorial teachings which have inspired us from the bimah, in concerts, and various reflections.

Central to all these 75th Anniversary events is the knowledge that we are not celebrating just the longevity of a communal institution... but also the vibrancy

of an intertwined spiritual community where you have a home. Beth El is a place for joy, learning, prayer, and comfort. Fundamentally, these are not transactional moments but are based on nurturing relationships with each other. So, let's grab a cup of coffee and spend time together. For Hazzan Fradkin, Rabbi Megdal, and myself, we value these conversations.

I am so excited to celebrate Beth El this year. Beth El is more than an organization. We are a holder of stories, experiences, and dreams. After all, when Jacob placed his head down in the Book of Genesis and dreamt, he woke up and said, "Surely God is pres-

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SERVICE INFORMATION

MINYAN SCHEDULE

Sunday

9:00 am and **8:00 pm**

Monday - Thursday

7:30* am and **8:00 pm**

Friday

7:30 am

**Morning Minyan will take place at 9:00 am offsite on Monday,
September 7. Evening services will be via Zoom only.*

SHABBAT SCHEDULE

Friday, September 4

6:30 pm Friday Night Shabbat Service

Saturday, September 5

7:30 am Early Shabbat Service

9:15 am Main Shabbat Service - Dalya Gopstein Bat Mitzvah

8:00 pm Sound Bath and Contemplative Selichot Service

Friday, September 11 - Erev Rosh Hashanah*

6:45 pm Erev Rosh Hashanah Mincha and Festival Evening
Service

Saturday, September 12 - Rosh Hashanah Day 1

9:00 am Main Shabbat and Festival Morning Services

Friday, September 18

6:30 pm Friday Night Shabbat Service

Saturday, September 19

7:30 am Early Shabbat Service

9:15 am Main Shabbat Service led by Minyan Chaverim

Friday, September 25 - Erev Sukkot

6:00 pm Kol Haneshama Light Dinner

7:00 pm Kol Haneshama Friday Night Shabbat and Erev Sukkot
Festival Evening Service

Saturday, September 26 - Sukkot Day 1

7:30 am Early Shabbat and Festival Morning Service

9:15 am Main Shabbat and Festival Morning Service

*For more information on Beth El's Shabbat services and daily
minyanim, please visit bethelmc.org/services.*

**See page 4 for the full Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur schedule.*

SUKKOT SERVICE SCHEDULE

Friday, September 25 - Erev Sukkot

6:00 pm Kol Haneshama Light Dinner

7:00 pm Kol Haneshama Festival Evening and Erev Shabbat
Service

Saturday, September 26 - Sukkot Day 1

7:30 am Early Shabbat and Festival Morning Service

9:15 am Shabbat and Festival Morning Service

6:30 pm Festival Evening Service - via Zoom only

Sunday, September 27 - Sukkot Day 2

9:15 am Festival Morning Service featuring Deli Sermon by
David Bachrach

Noon Annual Sukkot Deli Kiddush (in person only)

The Deli Kiddush is generously sponsored by David Bachrach.

Saturday, October 3 - Shemini Atzeret

7:30 am Early Shabbat and Festival Morning Service
(Yizkor)

9:15 am Shabbat and Festival Morning Service (Yizkor)
featuring D'var Torah by *Shaliach* Yoel Gleizer

7:30 pm Erev Simchat Torah Festival Service

Sunday, October 4 - Simchat Torah

9:15 am Festival Morning Service

Upcoming Events at Beth El

Connect

Sept. 1
12:30 pm**Senior Caucus BBQ**

Catch up with friends, enjoy a bbq lunch, and stay for music with a live band.

Sept. 3
7:30 pm**Hearing Men's Voices**

Martin Sieff will lead discussion of "When and Where Were You Happiest?"

Sept. 4
2:00 pm**Community Shofar Gathering**

Join Hazzans Fradkin and Lubin at Modena to hear the shofar before Shabbat.

Sept. 6
5:00 pm**Community Shofar Gathering**

Gather at the home of Rabbi Harris and Sarah Roark to hear the sound of the shofar.

Sept. 18
12:00 pm**Let's Do Lunch! with WBE**

Join Women of Beth El for lunch at Corner Bakery.

Sept. 19
8:00 pm**NextUp: Sins and S'mores**

A unique Havdalah experience for Jewish professionals in their 20s and 30s.

Sept. 21
3:30 pm**Support After Loss**

A brief teaching and discussion with Rabbi Deborah Megdal.

Sept. 30
4:00 pm**Beyond BEENs Happy Hour**

Join Beyond BEENs for our annual gathering in the Beth El Sukkah.



Engage

Sept. 15
7:00 pm**Movie Outing: *Death & Taxes***Join us at the DCJCC for the JxJ film screening of *Death & Taxes*.Sept. 28
7:00 pm**Volunteering at Manna Food**

Volunteers ages 11+ needed to help with this food-sorting tikkun olam project.



Pray

Sept. 5
8:00 pm**Selichot Sound Bath & Service**

Join us for a unique three-part journey of Sound, Havdalah, and Selichot.

Sept. 19
9:15 am**Minyan Chaverim**

Minyan Chaverim will lead the Main Shabbat Service on September 19.

Sept. 25
6:00 pm**Kol Hanesham Musical Shabbat**

Light dinner is followed by our musical service then an oneg in the sukkah.



Learn

Sept. 2
7:00 pm**Honey and Healing**

Join WBE to learn about the fascinating world of bees and benefits of honey.

Sept. 16
9:30 am**Theology with Rabbi Harris**

Rabbi Harris's Wednesday study class resumes September 16.

Sept. 21
3:30 pm**High Holiday Seminar**Join Rabbi Harris in conversation with Michelle Brafman, author of *Draw Near to Me*.Sept. 23
1:30 pm**Joyful Living and Wise Aging**

Join this six-session course exploring aging well from a Jewish perspective.

Sept. 30
9:30 am**Ancient Rabbinic Law**

Join Rabbi Megdal for a weekly exploration of ancient law via Zoom.

Find out more and sign up to participate at
bethelmc.org/events

5787 HIGH HOLIDAY SCHEDULE

EREV ROSH HASHANAH

Friday, September 11

6:45 pm Mincha & Festival Evening Service
Sermon by Rabbi Greg Harris

ROSH HASHANAH DAY ONE

Saturday, September 12

9:00 am Festival Morning Service*
Sermon by Rabbi Greg Harris

10:00 am Kol Haneshama Service*
Led by Rabbi Rami Schwartz

10:00 am Park Service
At Ovid Hazen Wells Recreational Park

10:00 am Families with Young Children (ages birth to Pre-K)
At Greenwich Neighborhood Park
Led by Dan Goldman and Karen Berman

10:00 am Families with Children Grades K-2
At Bethesda United Methodist Church
Led by Sarah Roark

10:00 am Families with Children Grades 3-5
At Bethesda United Methodist Church
Led by Shoshana Levine Ferrer

10:00 am 3rd-5th Grade Student Service

10:00 am Jr. Congregation (Grades 6-7)
Led by Tali Moscovitz

11:00 am Teen Discussions

6:30 pm Festival Evening Service*

ROSH HASHANAH DAY TWO

Sunday, September 13

9:00 am Festival Morning Service*
Sermon by Rabbi Deborah Megdal

10:00 am Families with Young Children (ages birth to Pre-K)
Led by Dan Goldman

10:00 am Families with Children Grades K-2

10:00 am Families with Children Grades 3-5

10:00 am 3rd-5th Grade Student Service

10:00 am Jr. Congregation (Grades 6-7)

11:00 am Teen Discussion

4:00 pm Tashlich Service
At the bridge over the stream behind Sunrise Senior Living on Battery Lane

KOL NIDRE

Sunday, September 20

6:20 pm Mincha*

6:40 pm Kol Nidre Cello*

6:50 pm Festival Evening Service*
Sermon by Rabbi Greg Harris

6:20 pm Kol Haneshama Service*
Led by Rabbi Rami Schwartz

7:00 pm Teen Discussion

YOM KIPPUR

Monday, September 21

9:00 am Festival Morning Service*
Torah Service (10:00 am)
Sermon/Yizkor/Musaf (11:00 am)
Sermon by Rabbi Deborah Megdal

10:00 am Kol Haneshama Service*
(concludes with Yizkor and Musaf)
Led by Rabbi Rami Schwartz

10:00 am Park Service
At Ovid Hazen Wells Recreational Park

10:00 am Families with Young Children (ages birth to Pre-K)
At Greenwich Neighborhood Park
Led by Dan Goldman and Karen Berman

10:00 am Families with Children Grades K-2
At Bethesda United Methodist Church

10:00 am Families with Children Grades 3-5
At Bethesda United Methodist Church

10:00 am 3rd-5th Grade Student Service

10:00 am Jr. Congregation (Grades 6-7)

11:00 am Teen Discussions

12:00 pm Youth Lounge Hangout (4th grade+)

2:15 pm Nigun Circle and Meditation*
Led by Hazzan Asa Fradkin and Rabbi Rami Schwartz

3:30 pm High Holiday Seminar*
Led by Rabbi Greg Harris

3:30 pm Support After Loss
Led by Rabbi Deborah Megdal

4:30 pm Mincha*

6:00 pm Neilah/Ma'ariv*

7:45 pm Conclusion of Fast/Shofar*

*Available via Livestream

More information, service descriptions, service leader bios, and to register for tickets, visit www.bethelmc.org/hhd2026

From the Beth El President

From Generation to Generation: Celebrating 75 Years at Beth El

BY SAM BOXERMAN

As we welcome the New Year, we have a special reason to reflect on one of Judaism's most enduring ideas: *L'dor v'dor* – from generation to generation.

This year, we are celebrating Beth El's 75th anniversary. For three-quarters of a century, generations of members have gathered here to pray, to learn, to celebrate, to mourn, and to build our Beth El community together. Each generation has inherited something precious from those who came before, and each has added something of its own for those who will follow.

Our 75th anniversary invites us both to look back with gratitude and to look forward with purpose. We honor the vision, dedication, and generosity of those who built and sustained our congregation. At the same time, we recognize that the responsibility for its future now rests with each of us.

We will celebrate this diamond anniversary throughout the coming year – 75 Shabbat dinners, Mitzvah Magic led by our affinity groups, Scholar in Residence,



Artist in Residence, community walk, guest speakers, a Civil Rights trip, Israel trips, and our special anniversary gala on March 14, 2027. Save the date!

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks taught that Judaism depends upon our ability to transform history into memory – not simply to know what happened in the past, but to understand that we are part of an ongoing story. He described each Jew as a letter in a scroll that has been written across thousands of years. Every generation adds its letters, ensuring that the story continues.

I invite you to participate – to add your letter – as we add to our Beth El story in this special anniversary year.

May 5787 be a year in which we strengthen the bonds between generations, welcome new families and new voices, and ensure that our Beth El community remains vibrant, meaningful, and enduring for the generations to come.

Shana Tova. ■

Celebrating 75 Years at Beth El

In 1951, 17 families gathered in living rooms and borrowed spaces to found Congregation Beth El. They were driven by a shared dream: a Conservative synagogue rooted in learning, praying, and connecting. From services held in churches to children learning in makeshift classrooms, Beth El was built by people who believed. Today, that founding vision has grown into a vibrant home for over 1,000 households.

Beth El today is a community that shows up: for learning, praying, and connecting. We embrace egalitarian practice, lifelong Jewish education from early childhood through adulthood, and a deep commitment to Tikkun Olam. There are many ways to experience this community, whether through Shabbat, a class, a volunteer project, or a simple hello in the hallway, and we are proud of every one of them.

As we look ahead, we know that the next 75 years will be shaped by people we haven't met yet, asking questions we haven't yet imagined. Today we are building a foundation worthy of our future.

Throughout the year the congregation will host special events and experiences, as well as integrate anniversary activities into annual programming, to mark this milestone moment in our community. As we add more exciting experiences to this year's celebration, we will add them to this page and the congregation's public calendar. You won't want to miss the energy and enthu-

siasm of our 75th year!

Some of the highlights for the year include:

On-location at Beth El – Recording of the *Chutzpod!* Podcast: November 22: *Chutzpod!* is a renowned frank and wide-ranging conversation on how to build a good life, using real-life quandaries and millennia-old Jewish wisdom. Each week, Rabbi Shira Stutman and journalist Hanna Rosin bring a Jewish lens to life's toughest questions, asked by listeners and audience members.

Scholar in Residence: February 12-13: Dr. Yehuda Kurtzer is the President of the Shalom Hartman Institute and a leading thinker and author on the major challenges facing the Jewish people. He is the author of *Shuva: The Future of the Jewish Past*, the co-editor of *The New Jewish Canon*, and the host of the *Identity/Crisis* podcast.

Artist in Residence: March 5-6: We are bringing inspiring voices in Jewish music to Beth El for Shabbat morning and afternoon programs and the Friday night Shabbat dinner.

Annual Gala: March 14: An evening of food, festivities, and featured entertainers as a grand celebration of our 75th anniversary with fellow Beth El members of all life stages and generations.

Find out more about how we're celebrating 75 years of Beth El at bethelmc.org/75thanniversary. ■

Sparkling Community: Beth El Shabbat Dinners @Home

BY REBECCA WEISMAN, DIRECTOR OF ENGAGEMENT AND OUTREACH

As we celebrate Beth El's 75th Anniversary, we invite you to spark community by lighting the Shabbat candles and sharing a meal with fellow Beth El congregants. Reconnect with friends or welcome someone new into your home – a family from Beth El Pre-school or Religious School, a family in your neighborhood or school, someone you often sit near during services, a familiar face from Beth El events, a colleague in a similar career, or a fellow Beth El Empty Nester. However you choose to celebrate, you'll be helping strengthen the relationships that make Beth El such a special community.

Whether your table is set for one guest, one family, or many, every Shabbat dinner is an opportunity to build meaningful connections. We invite you to invite your own guests but can also help match those who want to meet someone new – whether as a host or as a guest.

Sparkling Community: Beth El Shabbat Dinners @Home will take place throughout the Fall, from September 25 (the first night of Sukkot) through November 20.

Every registered host family will receive a special Beth El Shabbat Dinners @Home Host Bag to help make hosting easy and welcoming.

Ready to participate? Register to host or be

matched with a host family by filling out our 75 Shabbat Dinners @Home form at bethelmc.org/75shabbatdinners.

Hosting a dinner: To ensure you receive your Beth El Shabbat Dinners @Home Host Bag and any support you may need, please register at least one week before your dinner (by the Friday prior to the Shabbat you plan to host). As a reminder, these will be held September 25 (the first night of Sukkot) through November 20.

Request to be a guest: To participate this Fall, please register by September 30. Beth El will do our best

to match guests with hosts based on their request.

Our goal is to spark 75 Shabbat dinners in honor of Beth El's 75th Anniversary. Let's celebrate 75 years of community and help spark the next 75 years, one Shabbat table at a time. ■



Mitzvah Magic

BY SETH STERN

Beth El is celebrating its 75th anniversary with "Mitzvah Magic."

Every month through next spring, a special mitzvah project will aim to highlight a specific middah or value.

The kickoff collective mitzvah will be the traditional Kol Nidre food drive benefitting Manna Food Center on September 20.

Each month's mitzvah magic event will be organized by a different group within the Beth El community, and the Men's Club is leading off with the food drive.

This year, Beth El will be competing with other local congregations to see who can donate the most.

So please bring any of the following healthy foods: canned fruits and vegetables, proteins (low-sodium beans and tuna or salmon), grains, or other healthy items like shelf-stable individual milk boxes and cooking oil and spices.

In the past, Beth El families with young children have used the food drive as an opportunity to impart the value of tikkun olam while teaching practical skills. For example, some take a family outing to the supermarket

and give each child a budget to spend purchasing food for the Kol Nidre drive.

October, with the middah of Tzedakah, will feature Beth El's annual Mitzvah Day on October 25. Anyone interested in helping organize activities should reach out to Jonothan Polon at jonpolon@hotmail.com or Donna Shimshi at donnashimshi@gmail.com.

Mitzvot in subsequent months will emphasize values including Courage (*Ometz Lev*), Patience, Endurance (*Savlanut*), Awe (*Yirah*), Well-Being (*Shmirat HaGuf*), Humility (*Anava*), Friendship (*Reut*), and Compassion (*Rachamim*).

The mitzvah might be a collection, an educational event at the synagogue, a stream clean up, or another activity that benefits a group reflecting the month's middah.

If your group within the Beth El community would like to take the lead in organizing future mitzvah magic events, please reach out to David Rifkind at David.Rifkind@stinson.com. ■



Fall 2026 Scolnic Adult Institute

BY DORENE ROSENTHAL

Start the new year off right by learning something new and to make it even more fun, invite a friend. Join us this fall for another exciting Scolnic Adult Institute. Classes will run for six weeks, beginning Tuesday and Wednesday October 20 and 21 through December 1 and 2 (with a week off for Thanksgiving). Enjoy classes from some new instructors like award-winning Washington Post columnist, Len Shapiro (Jews in Sports) or Jewish women's history professor, Rabbi Melanie Aron (Women in Judaism Through History). Take the opportunity to learn more about the Middle East conflict from our star Israeli instructors Amir Tibon (Israel's Borders: A Virtual Geo-Political Tour) and Dr. Steven Klein (The Tragedy of Gaza). Or take classes from some of our popular returning instructors like Rabbi Megdal (Law and the Human Heart), Rabbi Abramson (Kashrut: A Diet for the Soul), Rabbi Fishman (Chosenness: Superiority,

Responsibility or Something Else?), Dr. Jerome Copulsky (Jewish Counter-Zionism: A Tradition Reemerging) or Dr. Naomi Daremblum (Crossing the Andes: A Comparative History of the Jews in Chile and Argentina). Maybe you want to try something more "artsy" like Grappling with Jewish Identity Through Film with Rabbi Harris or Jewish Composers and the American Popular Song with congregant Henry Kahn and Andrew Zatman. With this terrific lineup, you are sure to find something to pique your interest. Classes will once again be offered in-person, via Zoom (recorded), or via Zoom watch party (recorded).

Stay tuned for more exciting teasers and details. The class offerings brochure/registration packet will be available mid-September.

Visit bethelmc.org/scolnic for more information, course catalogue, and to register. ■

Friday Evening Kol Haneshama Services Return on September 25

BY SCOTT J. GLICK

The Friday Night Kol Haneshama Shabbat services return to Beth El on September 25.

These lay-led services blend tradition and creativity, drawing upon contemporary and innovative Jewish music from around the globe, including from B'nai Jeshurun and Romemu in New York, and Shira Chadasha and Nava Tehila in Jerusalem. The services include melodies that calm, songs that enliven, and prayers and readings that elevate and deepen the spiritual experience.

Join us at 6:00 pm for a light dinner, followed by our Friday Evening Erev Shabbat and Erev Sukkot Musical Service.

After services, all are invited to join us for kiddush and oneg in the Beth El Sukkah. For more information and to register, go to bethelmc.org/kol-haneshama-0925. (Registration is not required to attend the service and oneg.)

75 for 75

Community is usually defined as a group of people living in the same place, sharing common interests, or having a similar background. We think of community as a noun. If we think about community as a verb, it requires us to think about engaging in the practice of intentionally building relationships and taking actions that can lead not only to shared experiences but also to shared experiences but to greater connections and a greater sense of belonging.

In thinking about community as a noun and as a verb,

at our September 25 service, the leaders of the Friday Night Kol Haneshama evenings at Beth El will be kicking off "75 for 75" to coincide with Beth El's 75th Anniversary. Our hope is that by June of next year, each person attending Kol Haneshama Friday nights at Beth El will have made at least one new connection and collectively, we will have made at least 75 new connections!

A new connection could be someone truly new that you have not met before, or it could be someone who you have said hello to on occasion but to whom you never were formally introduced. If you make a new connection either

during one of our dinners, during the service or during an oneg, please let any of the service leaders know at the end of the evening, or send one of us an email after Shabbat is over. We'll keep track during the year and announce our progress each month.

GUEST SPEAKERS RETURN IN OCTOBER

Along with our musical service, Kol Haneshama brings interesting guest speakers to our after-service onegs to speak on a variety of topics. Save the dates: On October 23, Izzy Klein will speak on "When and Why Did it Become Politically Popular to be Anti-Zionist?" On November 13, Gigi Sohn will discuss "The Role of the FCC – Past, Present, and Future." More information will be available soon on the Beth El website. ■



Books & Beyond

Draw Near to Me: A Novel Inspired by the Book of Genesis

BY ROBIN JACOBSON

Some 60 years ago, poet-playwright Archibald MacLeish won both a Pulitzer Prize and a Tony Award for his play, *JB*, based on the Book of Job. Ever eloquent, MacLeish explained why he opted to construct a modern play within the “ancient majesty” of the Bible: “When you are dealing with questions too large for you which, nevertheless, will not leave you alone, you are obligated to house them somewhere – and an old wall helps.”

Congregant Michelle Brafman’s new novel, *Draw Near to Me*, likewise offers the unique appeal of a contemporary story that is in conversation with an ancient biblical story. Brafman’s suspenseful novel of a Jewish family living in the D.C. suburbs draws deeply from the Genesis account of Joseph.

THE JOSEPH STORY

Famously, in Genesis, Joseph’s jealous brothers sold him into slavery. They let their father Jacob believe that his adored son had been killed by a wild beast. The brothers’ evil deed condemned Jacob to a life of agonizing grief and ripped Joseph from his home, setting him on a path that led to his suffering and imprisonment in Egypt.

In time, Joseph deployed his talents to rise to the top of Pharaoh’s royal court. Yet even from that safe and successful perch, how could he possibly forgive his brothers for what they did? Nevertheless, as Genesis recounts, he did forgive them. Brafman’s novel sensitively explores whether and how family members can forgive each other for what would seem to be unpardonable acts.

KRISTY WEINSTEIN AND HER FAMILY

Draw Near to Me is a stand-alone sequel to Michelle Brafman’s earlier novel, *Swimming with Ghosts*. In that novel, we met Kristy Weinstein, who seduces her best friend Gillian’s husband and deliberately sets out to sabotage Gillian’s life.

Kristy’s actions are rooted in childhood insecurities and jealousies. Kristy’s mother, Flo, was ashamed of her because she was an illegitimate child; she favored Kristy’s younger half-sister, born in wedlock to a different father. In *Swimming*, Kristy discovers that Gillian’s late father was her biological father too, due to a brief affair he had with Flo. This shocking revelation sends Kristy careening down a dangerous path of destructive behavior.

As *Draw Near to Me* opens, Kristy, age 48, the mother of two teenage children, is blissfully caring for her new baby girl, born after a surprise “geriatric” pregnancy. This joyful time turns agonizing when Kristy’s husband inadvertently comes across her journal and realizes that his beloved baby daughter may not be his.

This is only one of many serious challenges to the relationships among family members in *Draw Near to Me*. None of the troubled relationships have been addressed, let alone resolved, when Kristy is in a freak biking accident that sends her into a coma. Can the family rally to care for her? Will she recover? And if she does, will the family be able to repair the many shattered bonds of trust?

REPAIRING BROKENNESS

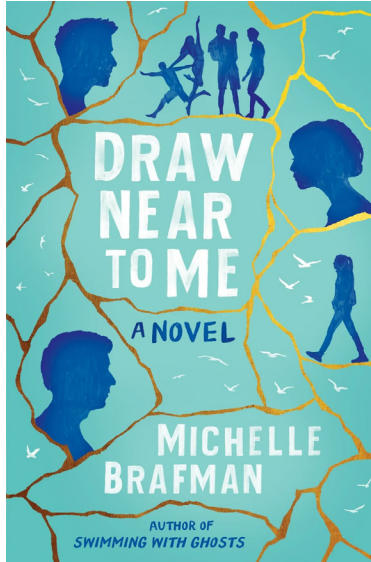
Draw Near to Me suggests that for family ruptures to heal, they must first be faced. The novel is decorated with images of Japanese kintsugi, an art form that repairs broken pottery, not by disguising cracks or fissures, but by highlighting them with gold, silver, or platinum lacquer. (Book club members may recall that artist Edmund de Waal (*Letters to Camondo*) used kintsugi in an exhibition to underscore the ruptures endured by a French Jewish family.)

Kintsugi is reminiscent of the Jewish tradition that maintains that the holy Ark contained the broken, shattered first set of Sinai tablets along with the replacement set of intact tablets. The shattered tablets represented the Israelites’ past betrayal (worshipping the Golden Calf), a betrayal they repented, but never forgot,

as they journeyed onward. *Draw Near to Me* asks whether a family can confront and repair past wrongs to move forward. ■

Michelle Brafman will discuss *Draw Near to Me* with Rabbi Harris during Beth El’s Yom Kippur Seminar. She will also delve into her novel in a Beth El-Adas Israel program in the Adas Israel Library on Sunday, November 15, at 10:30 am. Register at <https://www.adasisrael.org/event/meettheauthor-michellebrafman-nov2026>.

And don’t miss the October Book Chat at Beth El on Nicholas Lemann’s *Returning: A Search for Home Across Three Centuries* on Sunday, October 18, at 11:00 am. Register at <https://www.bethelmc.org/book-chat-1018>. You can read the Scroll review of *Returning* at <https://www.bethelmc.org/2026/06/being-jewish-in-america/>.



Israel in Focus

Elul Reflections and New Year Resolutions

BY LARRY SIDMAN

We have entered the month of Elul, a 30-day period of introspection during which we prepare for the *Yomim Noraim*, the ten days of awe, commencing with Rosh Hashanah and concluding with Yom Kippur. Our tradition teaches us that we should reflect with extraordinary intentionality about how we have lived in the past year and how we might improve our lot and the lives of those around us in the coming year. We are invited to explore our relationships with God and people. Some of us focus primarily on our conduct towards our families and friends. Others may focus more on the external world: local communities, our nation, Israel, and the plight of humanity. We sound the shofar each day of Elul, underscoring the heightened attention necessary to be ready for the High Holidays.

The Torah and Haftarah readings immediately preceding and continuing through the month of Elul provide guides for our reflections. The fifth book of the Torah, Deuteronomy, reiterates many of the commandments and responsibilities of Jews with respect to worship of God and treatment of others. It rivets our attention to the consequences of our behavior. In stark terms, parsha Ki Tavo spells out the blessings flowing from following the mitzvot and the curses resulting from violating them. Similarly, the corresponding Haftarah readings, drawn from the prophet Isaiah, and collectively known as readings of consolation following Tisha B'Av, herald the glorious redemption of the people of Israel following the horrors of conquest and ensuing exile.

One common theme that is strikingly similar in the Torah and Haftarah readings during this period of preparation is the link between the Jewish people's conduct and the objective of reaching Eretz Yisrael and the quality of their lives once they reside there. In successive readings, the goodness of Eretz Yisrael is the ultimate reward for following in God's ways. Described in parsha Eikev as a "land of wheat and barley, of vines, figs, and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey," inheriting the land of Israel is the capstone blessing, the fulfillment of God's promise to the Jewish people. Conversely, if the people of Israel stray, their glorious land will be ravaged, and they will suffer death and destruction. In these readings, the land of Israel is central to the identity and fate of the Jewish people.

As we engage in the reflection preceding Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, these passages are almost eerily relevant. After nearly 2,000 years of persecution, exile, and murderous destruction, we have achieved the rebirth of the State of Israel and the rebuilding of Eretz Yisrael. The modern State of Israel has made the desert bloom, advanced the state of medicine and emergency health care, emerged as a global leader in digital innovation, and exported much of what it has learned to the poorest countries in the world, especially in Africa. Yet,

today, 78 years after Israel's declaration of independence, it is fighting a nine-front war, the avowed goal of which is its destruction.

Similarly, for most of the post-World War II era, Jews living in the United States, in general, have achieved greater acceptance, prosperity, increased political power, and freedom from physical and psychological attack. America earned the moniker "*goldena medina*" that our immigrant predecessors sought when they arrived on our shores. However, in the past decade, accelerating dramatically during the Gaza War following Hamas' October 7 massacre, American Jews, along with Jews around the world, have experienced a frightening surge in ever more violent antisemitism. Perpetrators of this new wave of antisemitism often justify their reprehensible behavior by reference to their opposition to the policies of the Netanyahu government, especially the manner in which it has prosecuted the Gaza War. The more extreme among them adopt the mantra of Israel's sworn enemies that the State of Israel is illegitimate and has no right to exist as the homeland for the Jewish people.

In short, Israeli and American Jews have enjoyed great blessings for decades. Now, the curses seem to be everywhere. What are we Jews to do? Each one of us must decide for him/her/themself. Permit me to share two recent experiences that frame my response.

In July, I spent a day at Capital Camp where I met approximately 25 Israeli kids, between 12 and 14, all of whom had lost a parent or a sibling, most as a consequence of the Hamas massacre and the ensuing Gaza War. They were in the United States as part of the Friends of the Israel Defense Forces Legacy Camp program. Despite the nearly incomprehensible burden of sorrow that each of them carried within, they exhibited simultaneously totally kid-like behavior, horsing around and teasing each other, and distinctly "untween" gratitude and resilience.

A few weeks ago, a college classmate of Ukrainian descent and proudly self-proclaimed anti-Zionist posted a query on our class listserve asking whether Israel had committed a pogrom in Gaza. I answered in the negative, defining the term "pogrom" and referring to the history of pogroms in Ukraine and the role of Ukrainian militia in actively assisting the Nazis in World War II. My response provoked a reply from another classmate who wrote that actions of the current Israeli government fit the "classic definitions of apartheid, ethnic cleansing and genocide." He concluded with the remark that my initial response "sullies you," essentially holding me responsible by association with certain actions and policies of the Netanyahu government that I deplore.

My takeaway from the juxtaposition of these two experiences is that Israeli and American Jews would

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FROM THE CLERGY CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

ent in this place, and I did not know it!" Shaken, he said, "How awesome is this place!...He named that place Beth El." (Gen 28:16, 17, 19)

Beth El continues to be a place of dreams, possibilities, and discovery. You are part of Beth El's story.

My maroon Mazda 626 that I parked in the lot 25 years ago is long gone. It was replaced by a minivan and then another. And now I have a small practical sedan again. I could not have imagined how I would grow, learn, be humbled, and inspired by my Beth El experiences. I have been invited into people's lives, taught from our rich tradition, and tried to articulate my own sense of authenticity throughout. Beth El has become my family's home. And, I hope it is yours too.

There will be a whole array of 75th celebrations shared in the *Scroll*, announcements, and other ways. I look forward to the years ahead together. May Beth El move from strength to strength. ■

ELUL REFLECTIONS CONTINUED FROM PAGE 9

do well to engage as much as possible with each other, listening attentively to each other's concerns and empathizing with each other's needs and dilemmas. Let us not fear offering and accepting constructive criticism of each other and our respective governments. At the same time, let us always remain mindful that we are one people responsible for each other.

This deceptively simple prescription requires us to look inward and embrace hope and strength, a powerful combination that is part of our Jewish DNA. Returning to our preparation for the High Holidays, throughout the month of Elul and continuing through Yom Kippur, each day we read Psalm 27. It concludes: "Be strong and make your heart courageous, and hope in God."

May the new year 5787 be filled with blessings for all of us. ■

CONTRIBUTIONS

Please remember that contributions can be made easily, quickly, and securely via our webpage – www.bethelmc.org/give

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Ariella Gilbert and the wonderful improvements she helped implement by Jonathan and Sandy Simon
Beth El's 75th anniversary by Alan and Candice Goldstein
Dale Rosenthal and Michael Cutler becoming grandparents by Sheila Bellack

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Toby Schonfeld and James Blasingame by their Beth El friends

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Sarah Roark and **Rabbi Greg Harris** on the aufruf of Sarah's son, **Gabriel Roark**, and **Julia LeMel**.

Paul and **Carolyn Weinberg** on the aufruf of their daughter, **Raquel Weinberg**, and **Avi Wannon**.

Boaz Knobel on his bar mitzvah on August 22. Proud parents are **Ariel Heifetz Knobel** and **Yishai Knobel**.

Jacob Katthagen on his bar mitzvah on August 22.

Proud parents are **Elyse** and **Michael Katthagen**, and proud grandparents are **Fran** and **Robert Rubin**.

September's milestone birthdays: **Andrew Auerbach**, **Susan Bersoff-Matcha**, **Barry Friedman**, **Steven Geller**, **Susan King**, **Richard Kulp**, **Karen Lebovich**, **Alyson Marlin**, and **Alex Munitz**

September's milestone anniversaries: **Steve Calem** and **Sandra Rubin** (35 years), **Daniel Rosenblum** and **Sharon Waxman** (25 years), **Adam** and **Shelley Ducker** (25 years), **David** and **Marnie Fagan** (25 years), **Jonathan** and **Deborah Forrest** (25 years), **Jonathan** and **Eileen Kay** (25 years), **Rob** and **Claudia Schwartz** (25 years), **Adam** and **Robin Sidel** (25 years), **David** and **Beth Javdan** (20 years), **Michael Torrisi** and **Daphnie Drassinower** (15 years), **Jonathon** and **Lindsay Dworkin** (10 years), **Elyssa Tanenbaum** and **Mark Kaufman** (10 years)

CONDOLENCES TO

Aileen Kantor on the death of her father, **Lawrence Goldberg**. Lawrence was the grandfather of **Jacqueline**, **Melissa**, and **Jenna Kantor**.

Sheryl and **David Friedlander** on the death of Sheryl's mother, **Elaine Libman**. Elaine was the grandmother of **Noah** and **Rafael Friedlander**.

Ron and **Wynne Sitrin** on the death of Ron's brother, **Michael Sitrin**. Michael was the uncle of **Gabriella**, **Aliza**, and **Chloe**.

The family of longtime congregant **Harriet Rabin**. Harriet was the mother of **Mark Rabin**.

Diane Klein and **Richard Klein** on the death of Diane's father, **Burton Raimi**. Burton was the grandfather of **Max** and **Alex**.

Joseph Goldstein on the death of his wife, **Ellen Goldstein**.

Jim and **Robin Lerner** on the death of Jim's mother, **Lillian Lerner**. Lillian was the grandmother of **Alexandra** and **Jordan**.

David Goodfriend and **Sue Emmer** on the death of David's father, **Ted Goodfriend**. Ted was the grandfather of **Ben** and **Ari**.

Murray and **Marilyn Hammerman** on the death of Murray's sister, **Eunice Hammerman Miller**.

The family of longtime congregant **Herbert Tanenbaum**.

Stephen and **Kim Redlich** on the death of Stephen's father, **Leonard Redlich**. Leonard was the grandfather of **Samantha**, **Rebecca**, and **Melissa Redlich**.

CHAI SOCIETY 60+

Senior Caucus End-of-Summer BBQ - Tuesday, September 1, 12:30 pm. Join the Senior Caucus and welcome fall with a BBQ lunch, followed by an exploration of Jewish heritage through music with a live band. Registration for lunch is now closed, but all are welcome to join us for the musical performance, which will start at approximately 1:30 pm. If you plan on joining us for the band only, please contact Katie Friedman at 301-652-2606, ext. 130 or kfriedman@bethelmc.org to let her know to expect you.

Joyful Living and Wise Aging - Six weeks beginning Wednesday, September 23, 1:30 pm. Join us for a new and exciting course at Beth El for individuals or couples over the age of 55, facilitated by Laura Primakoff, Ph.D and Erica Edelman, Ph.D, Beth El congregants and psychologists.

The course was originally developed at the Institute of Jewish Spirituality. Through a Jewish perspective, we explore the unique opportunities and challenges of aging well. The six-session in-person weekly class begins immediately following the High Holidays in September, Wednesday, September 23, through Wednesday, October 28. The class is participatory and experiential in nature. Previous participants in Wise Aging groups have reported that the richness of the group interaction combined with the readings makes for powerful insights.

For an additional description of the course, see the article in the July/August *Scroll*.

The course fee is \$36 for Beth El members and \$50 for non-members.

The class will be limited to 15 people and acceptances will be made on a first-come, first-served basis. The deadline for applications is September 18. Go to bethelmc.org/joyful-living-0923 for more information and to apply to be in the course.

Beyond BEENs Happy Hour in the Sukkah - Wednesday, September 30, 4:00 pm. Join Beyond BEENs for our annual gathering in the Beth El Sukkah to schmooze and reconnect with friends. Register at bethelmc.org/sukkah-happy-hour-0930.

Senior Caucus Coffee with the Clergy - Thursday, October 1, 2:00 pm. Join the Senior Caucus for our every other month Coffee with the Clergy. This is an informal time to catch up with each other, hear what is going on at Beth El, enjoy a light snack, and do some Jewish learning together. In October, Rabbi Megdal will join us as we meet in the Beth El Sukkah. To register, go to bethelmc.org/coffee-1001 or contact Katie Friedman at 301-652-2606, ext. 130 or kfriedman@bethelmc.org