



H C R J

Winter 2023

HOUSTON CONGREGATION FOR REFORM JUDAISM

How Thanksgiving Can Help Us Cope



Thanksgiving is a uniquely American holiday, and because it is not relegated to any specific culture or faith, it has the capacity to bring our country together in a very special way. Its theme of gratitude is universal, and as Americans, there is a lot for which to be grateful.

Among the many things we cherish as a nation, few are more sacred than the fundamental freedoms of speech, assembly, and religion. These rights are not just constitutional guarantees; they are central pillars for a just and inclusive society.

Each of these freedoms are enshrined in the First Amendment, and they stand as an eternal testament to America's commitment to diversity and tolerance. These freedoms are designed to cultivate a society where people can coexist harmoniously despite significant differences in cultural backgrounds, political leanings, and religious beliefs.

When these freedoms are exercised respectfully, they play a vital role in establishing a just and inclusive society. By allowing people to raise their voices against injustice, advocate for a cause, engage in constructive dialogue, and peacefully address grievances, these freedoms provide the framework for civility and informed discourse.

While these freedoms represent the bedrock of our democracy, they are often exploited and used to generate conflict and division. It is not uncommon for mass gatherings, marches, and protests to devolve into irrational, narrow-minded mob scenes which are destructive and sometimes violent. It is also not uncommon to witness the rage, anger, and violence of such protests to eventually turn against the Jews.

This has certainly been the case over the course of the past few months. According to the Anti-Defamation League, antisemitic incidents across the United States have risen nearly 400 percent since October 7, 2023. This escalation in hate and violence has been felt most intensely on U.S. college campuses where Jewish students have been inundated by mass gatherings and marches protesting the war against HAMAS which often leads to an onslaught of antisemitic incidents, including violent assaults, intimidation, and harassment by fellow students.

As TV and social media coverage continues to broadcast hate-filled chants and slogans against our people and our faith, they spread misinformation about history, promote incorrect definitions of common terminology, and encourage anti-Semitism. These darkened days reflect the dangers that can emerge from the misuses of the freedoms we so cherish.

In response to the misuse of these freedoms, we need to be vigilant, and when it comes to standing up for the Jewish people and for supporting the State of Israel, we need to be unabashedly unified. This does not mean that we need to agree with everything Israel does, but we do need to stand strong as a people if we are going to be able to stand at all in the future.

Here is a truth that is very difficult to hear: this war, and its rippling effects throughout the world, has become an existential threat to all Jews (not just Israeli Jews), and therefore, we must stand united. Standing together, however, needs to be more than merely pledging words.

We need a plan of action. We need concrete ways to respond. To this end, our community has incredible tools and resources from organizations like the Anti-Defamation League and the American Jewish Committee whose missions include ongoing advocacy for the wellbeing and safety of the Jewish people and the State of Israel.

These resources are great for adults, but what about our youth (who are extremely susceptible to exposure to anti-Jewish content on social media)? What about our college students who currently find themselves ill-prepared to defend themselves against the aggressive anti-Israel and antisemitic forces surrounding them every day?

In examining our curriculum at HCRJ, we have come to recognize that our youth need better tools and vocabulary to address these issues. In response to this growing need, we have implemented lessons and programs for all ages which are designed to expand and strengthen connections to Israel and combat anti-Semitism.

While it may feel like the entire world has turned against us, the truth is that many of our neighbors have never met a Jew. Their misconceptions are often rooted in complete ignorance and perpetuated by absurd stereotypes. They may have no idea what we believe or what we stand for. Therefore, in our ongoing battles against the rising tide of anti-Semitism, we are going to need to be better ambassadors of our faith by using our freedom of speech and religion to reach out to the world around us.

We are also going to need to build stronger relationships with the faith communities around us. We are a minority, and we need all the help we can get. While anti-Semitism has been around for millennia, the kind of interfaith solidarity we have been able to establish over the past three generations is new.

Previously, when Jews were victims of murderous anti-Semitic attacks, it was rare for anyone to stand with us or around us. Today, we have generated deep and lasting relationships with a wide variety of faiths. This kind of sacred allyship is built on trust. Our commitment to nurturing strong, healthy relationships with people of all faiths is something that we must continue to pursue – especially at times like these.

Finally, our battle against anti-Semitism must include an ongoing assessment of ourselves. We need to monitor our behaviors and impulses. We need to make sure that – as we confront the hatred directed against us - we do not succumb to the pitfalls of prejudice, intolerance, and bigotry against others. We need to make sure that the hate waged against us does not arouse any kind of hatefulness from within, and this is what I love about Thanksgiving.

Thanksgiving serves to remind us that we are all Americans. Thanksgiving invites everyone, regardless of our cultural backgrounds, political leanings, or religious beliefs to join in the celebration of gratitude. This year, our celebration may be darkened by the war, but when this all passes (and it will) we will still be American Jews with all the freedoms we are afforded – and for that we can be grateful.





Scholarship Established in Memory of Judy Katz

HCRJ has been blessed with the establishment of the Judy Katz Scholarship Fund. This fund is available to students throughout the year who are seeking financial assistance for Jewish educational programs including: Jewish overnight camp, Jewish day camp, Jewish day school, Jewish retreats, trips to Israel, and Jewish experiences around the globe.

This scholarship has been set up by Avi Katz, the owner of Katz Coffee, in memory of his mother, Judy Katz. Judy was passionate about Jewish education. She believed that Jewish learning and Jewish experiences were central to the survival of the Jewish people. The Judy Katz Scholarship Fund will ensure cost will never be an impediment to enabling our youth to access immersive learning experiences.

HCRJ is grateful to Avi and are truly blessed to be the guarantors of Judy's legacy to the Jewish people. To access funding from this special fund, please contact Rabbi Gross at rabbigross@hcrj.org.

MAZEL TOV

Mazel Tov to Mary Alice and Michael Parmet on the birth of their beloved granddaughter, Peyton Pearl Parmet.

Mazel Tov to Lee and Lisa Herman on the birth of their grandson John Webber Herman.

Mazel Tov to Jason and Renee Kariel on the upcoming Bat Mitzvah of their daughter Isabel on January 20, 2024.

Mazel Tov to Sarah and Steve Hajizade on the upcoming Bar Mitzvah of their son Noah on January 27, 2024.

HCRJ HIGH HOLY DAYS FEEDBACK

The Ritual Committee would like to hear from you! Please send feedback regarding the High Holy Days to laurensalomon@sbcglobal.net.

This can include feedback on any aspect of the holidays including music, ticketing, time of services, food, streaming, sound quality, or security.

HCRJ has received a \$150,000 security grant from the US Department of Homeland Security!

The grant funds will be used for the following:

- * 30 cloud based, high resolution cameras with local and remote monitoring.
- * New access control systems at the administrative office door, main entry door and patio gate.
- * Significantly enhanced exterior lighting along the entry drive, parking lot, and main entry canopy.
- * Wrought iron fencing along Bering and along the main entry drive from Bering to the eastern edge of the building.

We expect to start the work prior to the end of this year. The selection of security upgrades is a result of a security assessment coordinated by the Jewish Federation.

November Calendar

19		No Religious School
20	6:30 PM	HCRJ Office Closed Young Adult Committee Meeting
22		HCRJ Office Closed Thanksgiving Break
23		HAPPY THANKSGIVING
24	6:30 PM	HCRJ Office Closed (day) Shabbat Services
26		No Religious School
27	10:00 AM 6:30 PM	Yoga Landscape Art Class
29	10:00 AM 1:00 PM	Mah Jongg Watercolor Wednesday
30	1:00 PM 6:30 PM 7:30 PM	Mah Jongg Mah Jongg Learn & Play Jewish Hollywood on Zoom (PJP)

December Calendar

1	6:15 PM 7:15 PM	Shabbat B'Yachad Dinner Shabbat B'Yachad Services
2	9:00 AM 5:30 PM	Mitzvah Project-Undies for Everyone HCRJ Adult BINGO
3	9:00 AM 9:30 AM	Religious School Family Breakfast Religious School/Greene Family Camp Presentation
4	10:00 AM 6:30 PM	Yoga Landscape Painting Class
6	10:00 AM 1:00 PM	Mah Jongg Watercolor Art Class
8	6:30 PM	Hanukkah Shabbat Services and Latke Oneg
10	6:30 PM	Young Professionals Drinks & Dreidels
11	10:00 AM	Yoga
13	10:00 AM 1:00 PM	Mah Jongg Watercolor Art Class
14	1:00 PM 6:30 PM	Mah Jongg Beginner Mah Jongg (learn/play)
15	6:30 PM	Shabbat Services
17	9:30 AM 10:00 AM 12:00 PM	Religious School Religious School Schmooze Jewish Greece on Zoom (PJP)
18	10:00 AM 6:30 PM	Yoga Landscape Water Color Class
20	10:00 AM 1:00 PM	Mah Jongg Watercolor Wednesday Class
21	1:00 PM 6:30 PM	Mah Jongg Mah Jongg (Learn and Play)
22	6:30 PM	Shabbat Services
25		OFFICE CLOSED THRU January 2, 2024

On this page you will find the HCRJ calendar of programs. As our programming schedule is ever changing and growing, please visit our website at www.hcrj.org for details and up to date information.

Questions regarding our programs— please contact Beth Nelson at Beth@hcrj.org or call 713-782-4162.

January Calendar

3	10:00AM 1:00PM	Mah Jongg Watercolor Wednesday Art Class
4	1:00PM 6:30 PM	Mah Jongg Mah Jongg (Learn and Play)
5	6:15PM 7:15 PM	Shabbat Dinner Shabbat B'Yachad Services
7	9:00AM	Mitzvah Day
8	10:00 AM 6:30 PM	Yoga Landscape Watercolor Class
10	10:00 AM 1:00 PM	Mah Jongg Watercolor Wednesday Class
11	1:00 PM 6:30 PM	Mah Jongg Mah Jongg Learn and Play
12	6:30 PM	Gospel Shabbat Services
14		NO RELIGIOUS SCHOOL
15	10:00 AM 6:30 PM	Yoga Landscape Painting Class
17	10:00 AM 1:00 PM	Mah Jongg Watercolor Wednesday Class
18	1:00 PM 6:30 PM	Mah Jongg Mah Jongg Learn and Play
19	6:30 PM	Shabbat Services
20	10:30 AM	Bat itzvah of Isabel Kariel
21	9:30 AM	Religious School
22	10:00 AM 6:30 PM	Yoga Landscape Painting Class
24	10:00 AM	Mah Jongg Watercolor Wednesday Class
25	1:00 PM 6:30 PM	Mah Jongg Mah Jongg Learn and Play
26	6:30 PM	Shabbat Services
27	4:30 PM	Bar Mitzvah of Noah Hajizade
28	9:30 AM 12:00 PM	Religious School Stories from Curacao on Zoom (PJP)
29	10:00 AM 6:30 PM	Yoga Landscape Painting Class
31	10:00 AM 1:00 PM	Mah Jongg Watercolor Wednesday Class

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

A warm thank you to those who contributed to the 2023-24 Annual Campaign. Your generosity helps us continue to expand ways to learn, worship and celebrate inside and outside of the walls of our temple.



Madeleine Appel	Bruce & Carol Applebaum	Norman Berlat
Marcia Berretta	Paul Messina & Megan	Fran Brochstein & Jimmy Jones
Dick & Claire Brooks	Bladen-Blinkoff	Gary & Linnea Kob
Betty & Stan Doctor	Larry & Kaki Buck	Bill & Marcia Chaffin
The Edelman Family	Marilyn Fram	Esther Friedman Family Foundation
Paula Goldstein	Mel & Nancy Gross	Jenard & Gail Gross
Steve, Sarah & Noah Hajizade	Mike & JoAnn Innerarity	Lane & Doris Kalmin
Jeff & Karen Kabin	Mike & Kitty Kahn	Jay Marks
Marc, Betsy & Sarah Levinson	Norman & Sheila Loewenstern	Barry & Marjory Okin
Myra Mayer	Giora & Norma Nikkaran	Janie Polunsky
Aaron & Jaime Perkins	Peter & Yvette Pintar	Larry & Helen Rose
Charlotte Robinson	Jim & Naomi Rosborough	Judy Serkin
Robert & Amber Rosenblum	Bari Ross	Brad & Deborah Sondock
Bruce & Laura Shelby	Sherry Snyder	Ed Hurwitz
Martha Stelly	Steven & Melissa Wolfson	Roxana Arroyo

Honors and Memorials

From Larry & Audrey Bernstein In memory of Marvin Schwartz
From Larry & Katherine Buck In memory of Irv Robbins
From Roy & Sheila Camberg In memory of Joel Androphy
From Leonard & Eleanor Chaikind In memory of Irv Robbins
From Alan & Harriet Faden In memory of Brian Schultz and Dr. Joe Schoss
From Sidney Gerber In memory of Irv Robbins
From Mikal & JoAnn Innerarity In memory of Irv Robbins
From Mandy Selber In memory of Rae Kreisman Selber
From Lila Shain In memory of Leland Shain
From Lila Shain In memory of Rebecca Shain
From Suzy Shapiro In memory of Irv Robbins
From Rochelle Skibell In memory of Shirley Eriksen
From Sherry Snyder In memory of Charles Snyder
From Juan & Susanna Stern In memory of Jennifer Stern
From Juan & Susana Stern In honor of John Hess' 80th Birthday
From Richard & Phyllis Ullman In honor of Justin Deutsch's Promotion

General Operating

From Paul & Julie Herman In memory of Irv Robbins
From Robert & Johnita Lebow In Honor of the Bar Mitzvah of Noah Ladin
From Theresa Velez

Adult Education

From Elizabeth Shulak In honor of Shelley Green's Birthday
From Judith Finkel In honor of Justin Deutsch

Rabbi's Discretionary Fund

From Sheryl Androphy In memory of Joel Androphy
From Jeffrey Barman In honor of JoAnn Innerarity
From Patti Furman In memory of Irv Robbins
From Aaron & Jaime Perkins In honor of Samantha's Bat Mitzvah
From Charlotte Robinson In memory of Irv Robbins
From Bob & Lisa Suvalsky In memory of IrviRobbins

Temple Life

Gregg & Betsy Goldstein
German Portorreal

Welcome to HCRJ!

Please join us in welcoming
the newest members of
HCRJ:

Kimberly & Matt Buchholtz
Stacey & John Cook
Dee Dee Dochen & Paul Grossbard
Anne & Mitch Dubner
Reva & Bruce Edison
Tiffany & Jared Heathman
Jacob & Taylor Hoffman
Shoshana & Daniel Jackofsky
Travis & Leslie Lozier
Maria May
Joe Kaplan & Janet Meller
Niorly Mendoza
Katherine & Geoffrey Moskowitz
Amber & Robert Rosenblum
Julie & Eric Schwartz
Samuel & Rachel Walton



HCRJ MITZVAH DAY



Sunday, January 7, 2024
Breakfast Buffet — 9:00AM
Kickoff with Rabbi Gross — 9:30AM
Activities — 9:45AM - 12:30PM

God works through our hands, particularly on Mitzvah Day. On this day, the HCRJ community unites to make a difference in the lives of our extended community members who need a helping hand. May the works of our hands today inspire us to continue to do mitzvot whenever an opportunity arises.

18+ projects to involve the whole family young and old.

* Planting, making blankets for shelter dogs, creating cards for Star of Hope Mission, Blood Drive and more... For more information please contact Beth Nelson at Beth@HCRJ.org or call 713-782-4162.

Gospel Shabbat **Friday, January 12, 6:30pm**

On Friday, January 12th, we will be observing MLK Weekend with a special musical tribute, and the return of the choir from *The Church Without Walls* for our annual Gospel Shabbat!

Our HCRJ choir will be participating, too. Join us as we celebrate the ever-unfolding story of liberation and freedom in the world in ways which only Gospel music can do.



ZOOM MOVIE OPPORTUNITIES

Thursday, January 11 at 7:30p.m.

With Host John Kenrick

Duck Soup: "Hail Freedonia!" - As the rise of fascism threatened world peace, The Marx Brothers offered Hollywood's most hilarious-and unapologetic-- comic send-ups of war and politics.

Thursday, January 18 at 7:30p.m.

Funny Girls Part 2

It was clear from the outset that we could only cover so many laugh-worthy ladies in our first edition, so here's another collection of uproarious Jewish women. We've got it all covered here, from movie stars like Oscar winners Goldie Hawn and Judy Holiday to TV favorites like Fran Drescher and Golden Girls Bea Arthur and Estelle Getty. We also make room for standup sisters Rita Rudner and Elayne Boosler, to raunchy mirth makers like Sophie Tucker and Rusty Warren. All this and the titter-worthy talents of Sarah Jessica Parker, Lainie Kazan and more!

Sunday, January 28th at Noon

"Stories from Curaçao's Jewish History"

with Ron Gomes Casseres

This presentation will include both historical and current stories about the Curaçao Jewish community and practices. Curaçao will also be introduced for those who may not be familiar with my home country. There will be several photographs to show aspects of Curaçao, the synagogue and Jewish heritage sites.

Please RSVP to Beth Nelson at Beth@HCRJ.org

Reflections on the War in Israel from HCRJ's Religious School Director: Betti Buck



Betti was born in Israel and her family lives in Ashkelon (on the border with Gaza)

As I sit here writing this, it has been 40 days and 40 nights! For 40 days I have been walking around with a stomachache and a huge lump in my throat. Forty nights I have been thinking about mothers whose sons have been held captives, about fathers whose daughters are in the hands of terrorists, about the crying children and babies, about grandparents who may need care, about couples who have been taken away from their loved one. My heart aches and the tears won't stop.

When I open my eyes in the early morning hours, I keep wishing that it was all a bad dream, a nightmare that will go away as soon as I'm fully awake. Instead, I pick up the phone and make sure my family has survived another day in Ashkelon. Since all the kibbutzim and cities north and south of Gaza have been evacuated, Ashkelon is now the closest target for rockets and missiles coming out of Gaza. The sound of the sirens, which go on and off every few minutes, cause mental and emotional damage for children as well as adults. Fortunately, the iron dome intercepts most of the missiles, but as businesses and schools remain closed, nothing even resembles a normal day since October the 7th.

On this fortieth day, it hit me how meaningful this number is in our Jewish history. The flood (Noah) lasted 40 days and 40 nights. Moses went to Mount Sinai for 40 days and 40 nights. The Israelites wandered the desert for 40 years. The spies, who were sent to scout the land of Canaan were there for 40 days. And ironically, Goliath the Philistine, teased Israel for 40 days before he was defeated by David. Thus, the number 40 in Judaism has long represented a formative period for preparation and emergence.

Just as the 40-year period in the wilderness allowed the Israelites to find an identity as a people before they entered the holy land. Much like the days of the flood cleansed the world of evil to start anew. I am full of hope that this is another opportunity for a new age, a new era of meaningful growth for our future as a people and as a nation.

Before the war, Israeli citizens and the Israeli government were busy with judicial reform. Internal struggles had led to a great divide among the people. Questions regarding who should serve in the army, who should serve in the government, and who should oversee the supreme court, were pitting the left against the right and the secular against the religious. Now, this seems like such a minor detail. Now, it is no longer about left and right, liberals vs. conservatives, pro-reform or not, ultra-orthodox vs. seculars, or who is right and who is wrong. Now, the entire focus of all Israelis (as well as Jews around the world is) related to this war against HAMAS.

As of October 7th, the Israeli people have put internal issues aside and have become completely focused on UNITY. Every single person found themselves doing something for the other. Israelis of all ages are joining the cause in every way they can. They are cooking for soldiers, helping families who lost loved ones, helping those who have lost their home, advocating for Israel on social media, posting posters of the hostages, I initiating ways to help small businesses, and donating time and resources to the countless causes. This is what we do when we are pushed against the wall.

This support is coming from the Jewish people and Israel's supporters all over the world. Such solidarity is referred to as *Nefesh Yehudi* – a Jewish soul. You may recognize the phrase from the Israeli national anthem: *Nefesh Yehudi Homia*, which speaks to the continuity of Jewish life throughout the Diaspora and our ongoing commitment as a people to the Land of Israel as our homeland.

This year, I implemented a curriculum that I wrote for our students. Of course, I had no idea that this war would come, but it has become an important part of how we are shaping the hearts and minds of our students at HCRJ. The curriculum is centered around the phrase, *Am Echad B'lev Echad* – One Nation with One Heart. What a way to sum up all that we are right now! With all of that said, my passion for being here and increasing our students' and community's connection to Israel as the homeland for all Jewish people has never been more meaningful or more important.

HCRJ HAPPENINGS!

It's been a busy few months at HCRJ. We hosted Happy Hour & Havdallah, Mah Jongg game day, participated in social action projects, had a beautiful day with *Cars, Coffee & Conversation*, Sponsored a *JCC Book & Arts Festival Program*, enjoyed Kenny & Ziggy's at our annual Deli Shabbat and we aren't done yet!!



On November 10, HCRJ dedicated this beautiful Mezuzah above from Ann & Dr. Marvin Lerner and family in loving memory of Frieda & Ike Lerner.





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