



אור חדש

**New Light Congregation**

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## **New Light News November 2021**

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### **A Word from the Rabbi**

Dear Friends,

A few weeks ago, I shared a “Stronger Than Hate” story at Friday Night Services. It was published by Pittsburgh native Linda Schuster in the Washington Post. It is an incredible story that included our community in the numbing months after the shooting on October 27, 2018. We were so involved in our grief at that time that it amazes me that Pittsburgh Jews could still do the amazing outreach we do at all times for refugees and medical emergencies that come to our city from all parts of the world. Talk about “Stronger Than Hate.”

The story is called “The Gift of Eihab Falah.” It is the story of a 25 year old Israeli Druze man living in a small town in the Galilee. The Druze are Arabs who are a small majority in Israel and have their own religion and identity apart from Muslims. Unlike other Arabs, their men serve a three year stint in the Israeli Army and are devoted to the Israeli state. Eihab was a captain in the IDF. He dreamed of being a career soldier. Eihab Falah also had dreams of playing basketball professionally. Finally after the army, he chose to go into the field of sports medicine and started medical school in Italy.

On break from med school in the Summer of 2018, Eihab was hospitalized with a rare disorder called sinonasal undifferentiated carcinoma. He was treated with barrages of chemotherapy but the tumor kept growing back. Eihab suffered from severe headaches and the doctors could offer nothing more with the exception of costly and difficult neurosurgery. There was only one place in the world where this particular type of neurosurgery had been perfected: UMPC. The Fallah family, six in all, raised money quickly to save the life of their son and brother. All six of them landed in Pittsburgh in December 2018.

Tsipy Gur who directs “Classrooms without Borders” and arranged our last congregational trip to Israel, knew of the Falahs from an acquaintance back in the Galilee and had been in contact with them before their arrival. She asked a friend, Michael Bernstein, if he had any idea where they could lodge. Michael, in turn, found himself proposing an apartment above the three-car garage at his Squirrel Hill home. The Bernsteins had never loaned out a part of their home to strangers, but Michael’s wife, Amy, gave the Falahs a key to the main house, which attached to the apartment. The Bernsteins and Falahs bonded during the course of the medical care and ultimately invited them to reside within them in their home.

Anat Talmy, a friend of Tsipy’s, also got assisted in getting word out on social media to Pittsburgh’s Israel community and rides were arranged, food was brought, grocery card gift cards delivered. Therapeutic massage was also arranged. Nina Butler, the famed champion of “Bikkur Holim” in the ‘Burgh, helped to design a website to arrange meal trains for the Fallahs.

Dr. Marlene-Berman Cohen who studies neuroscience at CMU got on board when she read about

Eihab on the website. When UPMC doctors failed at finding a cure, Marlene organized a group of fellow scientists and medical doctors to thrash out ideas for any possible type of treatment. She petitioned oncologists and hospital executives and any other authority who would take a phone call — ultimately helping the Falahs secure permission for the experimental use of a particular chemotherapy drug. Nina, who usually arranges support for out of town Jews, especially Orthodox Israelis, said she had never seen in all her years of “Bikkur Holim” the kind of outpouring of love showered on the Fallahs throughout the Jewish community.

All of this happened five weeks after October 27<sup>th</sup> 2018.

Eventually, despite all of the assistance from our shtetl, Eihab succumbed to his illness. The story illustrates two incredible things that I look for in many “Stronger Than Hate” stories that occurred around this time. The first lesson is: Never underestimate a people who are educated to care for others even in the wake of despair and disillusionment. Pittsburgh Jews were hurting badly. You could tell by the number of people who showed up to light the Hanukkah menorah at Tree of Life during this same period. And yet quietly, Jewish volunteers responded to the Eihab Falah situation in the same manner that they would at any other time. And perhaps, searching for meaning, the effort to help was even more intense. The second lesson is that the hospitality and interventions shown by Pittsburgh Jews defeated the shooter’s fundamental claim for justice: “Destroy all attempts at incursion by foreigners and those who enable them to save our great country.” Our move was just the opposite.

Linda Schuster writes: “The Falahs were everything the Pittsburgh shooter had railed against on social media: They spoke a different language, ate different foods, practiced a religion other than Christianity. But it was precisely their humanity — the very thing the shooter sought to obliterate — that made so many here want to help them. And in helping the Falahs, they seemed to have helped themselves.”

We learn in the Torah stories that cover this period of time from October through December 2018 that Abraham was known for his kindness to strangers. It is an attribute that grows from his humility and ability to see goodness in all people. It is also a quality that comes from living through trauma. When you help someone in need or even make them happy in the midst of your own depression and misery, you feel transcendent in ways that words cannot describe.

Yasher Koach Pittsburgh! Stronger Than Hate!

Shalom,

Rabbi

## **Maimonides Class Continues**

The discussion continues each Wednesday evening at 7:00 P.M.

## **Board Meeting**

The next board meeting is Sunday, November 7 at 10:30 A.M. Use the same Zoom connection as for Shabbat:

## **Presidents' Report November 2021**

### **CEMETERY UPDATE**

In September, we received the proposed historical display for the New Light Memorial Chapel. The Board and families reviewed it and submitted comments to the consultant. In addition, the building sign was installed.



We are still planning for a spring 2022 dedication of the building.

### **ERADICATE HATE GLOBAL CONFERENCE**

Many members of New Light attended the conference held in mid-October. Over 500 individuals came in person to the Convention Center with over 1,000 watching on line. The three days were packed with conversations about: the rise in hate speech and extremist groups, the legal environment governing hate speech, the financing of extremist groups, the role of internet social media companies in spreading hate speech; and, finally, the response of government and local communities to hate speech violence. Anti-Semitic hate speech and violence against Jews far outstripped all other forms of hate speech.

The goal of the Conference is to identify specific projects to be researched during the coming year to combat hate speech. New Light's creation of the Anti-Semitism Research Fund endowment at the Pitt/CMU Collaboratory Against Hate will help fund some of these projects.

### **THIRD YEAR COMMEMORATION**

A joint Havdalah Service was held at CMU on Saturday night, October 23<sup>rd</sup>, the 18<sup>th</sup> of Heshvan. Over 100 members of the three congregations attended the service led by Rabbi Perlman, Rabbi Dyen and Rabbi Myers. New Light held a commemorative Schacharit Service, Sunday morning, October 24<sup>th</sup>. The public commemoration was held on October 27<sup>th</sup>, at Prospect Park (Schenley Park).

### **MEMORIALIZATION WORK GROUP**

The Working Group (MWG) reached a tentative consensus on the parameters of the Memorial. In addition to the criteria reported in the last newsletter the group agreed to include an indoor learning center space with the memorial.

An initial constructive discussion was held with a subset of the MWG and representatives of the Tree of Life rebuild steering committee.

Finally, the congregational representatives plan to meet to foster better relationships among the three congregations.

## Chanukah Party

New Light Sisterhood invites you to a Chanukah dinner on Sunday, December 5 at 5:00 PM in the Beth Shalom Ballroom. Please bring your own menorah to light candles.

*Reply to Barbara Caplan at 412-521-4332 or Sharyn Stein at 412-521-5231 before Friday, November 19.*



## Scholarship funds available

The Jewish Scholarship Service of Greater Pittsburgh awards need-based scholarships to Jewish graduate and undergraduate students who have resided in Allegheny, Beaver, Washington, Butler and Westmoreland counties for at least two year. The online application for the school year 2022-23 will be available in late November or early December at [jfcspgh.org/scholarships](http://jfcspgh.org/scholarships) and is due by February 24, 2022.

For more information contact JFCS at 412-422-5627 or [alowenberg@jfcspgh.org](mailto:alowenberg@jfcspgh.org).

### November Birthdays

Judy Blumenfeld  
Barbara Caplan  
Hugh Casper  
Marilyn Kramer  
Yetta Speiser  
Jenny Swerdlow

## Reminders

- To purchase Memorial Plaques, Simcha Tree Leaves or Stones contact Ileen Portnoy 412-683-7985
- To purchase bricks for our “Garden of Freedom” contact Barbara Caplan 412-521-4332
- To purchase Giant Eagle gift cards contact Marilyn Honigsberg at 412-521-7174
- For information on our cemetery contact Stephen Cohen at 412-421-3999

## NEW LIGHT CONGREGATION

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