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**New Light Congregation**

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## **New Light News February 2025**

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### **The Flashlight**

Dear friends,

“Should we stop saying a prayer for the hostages?” Stephen Cohen wanted to know last Shabbat after four female soldiers were released by Hamas as part of a complicated deal that is part of a general ceasefire. Certainly, some gratitude should be expressed, but the liberation of the hostages is far from complete. I was at the CDS Gala on Saturday night and the head of school led the assembly in Shehehiyanu, the prayer for anniversaries and when we acquire something new. I would rather say the blessing forward “ha tov v’ha’mativ,” to the One is good and who does good.” In the complex system of releasing prisoners we wait to express a full celebration until all are returned (including the dead).

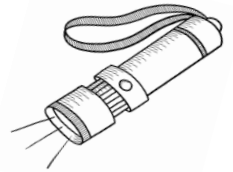
The four who were released, Naama Levy, Karina Ariev, Daniella Gilboa, and Liri Albag, are significant because they were all spotters in the lead up to the attack on the Nahal Oz post on October 7<sup>th</sup>. A fifth spotter, Agam Berger, is slated to be released in the coming days. These women alerted their superiors to unusual activity going on the other side of the fence. They saw convoys of white pickup trucks with Hamas fighters driving along the border with increased frequency, stopping occasionally and peering into Israel with binoculars. They would put up drones several times a day, according to the spotters. Their reports, they said, appeared to be dismissed. The testimony of these spotters will be crucial in the continuing investigation on how Hamas got so far and did so much damage. It will also show the courage that this group of women took to defend their base Nahal Oz. It should provide comfort to the families of the survivors that their daughters did not go down without a fight. It is another reason to say “Baruch Hatov v’ha mativ,” Blessed be the God who is Good and will do Good.”

In Squirrel Hill, David Devir has organized Sunday vigils to free hostages and finally he is seeing his prayers answered. Each person at the rally held the photo of a hostage that had been kidnapped giving personal meaning to the one who held the sign. Each person is a world and we should not despair that their captivity will be forever. Now we can relax the hostilities and bring back our loved ones who were only be used as pawns.

At the beginning of the morning service every day we bless the God who “releases prisoners.” We hold out the hope that God will make good on his promise to us. We cherish each life and try to maintain the patience that the prisoners will be free. As read in the Book of Exodus in the month of Shevat, Moses continued to appear before Pharaoh to insist that he let the people go. We need to be hopeful that all 250 hostages are accounted for, bringing an end to this grisly war and creating safe boundaries around our beloved nation.

In faith,

Rabbi



## Presidents' Report

“When you worship power, compassion and mercy will look like sins.”

“Benjamin Cremer, a Wesleyan pastor and writer who is based in Idaho, posted that thought last year.... [T]his sentence captures our political moment. It helps describe America’s moral divide .... [O]ur baser nature is telling millions of Americans that cruelty is good, if it helps us win, and kindness is evil, if it weakens our cause. That is the path of destruction. As the prophet Isaiah said, ‘Woe to those who call evil good and good evil.’ ... Woe to us all.”

David French, New York Times, January 27, 2025

On Thursday, January 23<sup>rd</sup>, we attended the Federation Security Conference led by Shawn Brokos. The purpose was to review ongoing and proposed efforts to enhance our security in light of the rise in anti-Semitic attacks in Pittsburgh and rising political violence across the country. The news was sobering.

### Number of Anti-Semitic Incidents Reported to Federation, by Year

2020:	44
2021:	82
2022:	122
2023:	300 (year of trial)
2024:	283 (most after October 7 <sup>th</sup> )
2025 (so far):	12

We are all familiar with the graffiti attack on Chabad (our old building) – but due to efforts of the police and others, the perpetrators were apprehended and have been charged with hate crimes. Some of the Federation security initiatives which you may not have been aware of include:

- **Virtual Block Watch:** The Federation is compiling a list of homes with security cameras (Ring doorbells, etc.). The Virtual Block Watch is one of the Jewish Federation’s proactive volunteer measures for keeping our community safe through collaborative efforts. This is an opportunity to be an active bystander and work in concert with your neighbors, community leaders, and law enforcement to prevent, deter, and, in some cases, solve crimes. If you have exterior home security cameras, we ask that you join our neighborhood registry and if called upon by the Jewish Federation or law enforcement, to voluntarily share that information or footage. If interested, you can enroll at: <https://jewishpgh.org/info/virtual-block-watch/>
- **Security Grants:** In 2024, the Federation assisted in obtaining almost \$1.5 million dollars in State security grants and over \$500,000 in Federal grants for 29 Jewish institutions.
- **Training.** Ms. Brokos and her staff conducted over 93 training sessions for almost 7,600 individuals. Training topics include: Advanced Countering Active Threat with Defensive Tactics, Stop the Bleed/CPR, De-Escalation Training, First to Respond, and Personal Safety. We can request training for our members. Please write us if you are interested.

Plans for 2025 include:

- **LPR - License Plate Reading Cameras.** The City of Pittsburgh is installing four license-plate-reading-cameras (LPR) cameras designed to monitor all vehicular traffic to identify license plates and passengers at four intersections in Squirrel Hill.

Forbes & Murray

Shady and Wilkins

Beechwood and Forbes

Beechwood and Hazelton (by Brownhill Road)

The Federation is seeking grants to add these cameras to local Jewish organization buildings (including Beth Shalom).

- **Police Boxes.** All buildings are required to have an external box accessible by the Fire Department to bypass building security measures. We have made our building too secure! The Pittsburgh Police is seeking funding to install a similar box that the Police can access to gain entry into our buildings. Beth Shalom has such a box installed.
- **New Proactive Threat Notification System.** Our current Blue Box security system is designed to alert leadership after a threat has been detected. The Federation is seeking to develop a new text-based notification system to proactively distribute alerts about potential or ongoing threats outside our area. They hope to do a test in May, 2025

For over ten years the Jewish Federation of Pittsburgh has prioritized enhanced security for the Jewish community. After 2017 significant State and Federal grant dollars became available to underwrite those security efforts. While we hope they will never be needed, it is good to know that training, grants, and personal protection programs exist – just in case.

If you are interested in learning more about any of these programs, please write to Barbara or Steve.

## February Board Meeting

The next board meeting is Sunday, February 2, 10:30 AM, in Helfant Chapel and on Zoom. Use the same Zoom connection as for Shabbat.

## Congregational Sunday Lunch

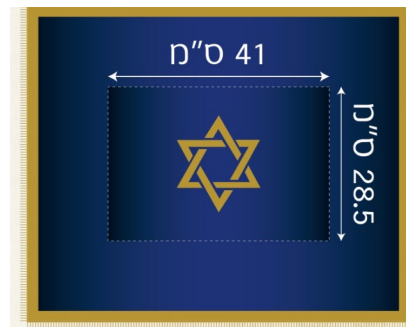
Shake off the winter doldrums and join everyone for lunch on Sunday, February 23 at noon in the ballroom. \$20 per person. Reserve your spot with Barbara by February 16 - call 412-421-1017 or email [barbaracaplan@comcast.net](mailto:barbaracaplan@comcast.net).

## Request for Donations for New Bima Table Covers

The Board would like to replace the two (Beth Shalom-owned) bima covers in Helfant Chapel with our own, in royal blue to match our new Torah mantles. We estimate the cost for two bima covers plus two lectern covers at no more than \$2,500. Please send in your contributions. Each bima cover will be embroidered in front with the words “New Light Congregation.” The images below are pdf proofs that show dimensions.



Bima cover



Speaker stand cover

<p><b>February Birthdays</b></p> <p>Janet Cohen Bruce Hyde Carol Kanterman Charlotte Cooper Waldbaum Harry Waldbaum</p>	<p><b>February Anniversaries</b></p> <p>Rochelle &amp; Aryeh Sherman</p>
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**Reminders**

- To purchase Memorial Plaques, Simcha Tree Leaves or Stones contact Barbara Caplan.
- To purchase bricks for our “Garden of Freedom” contact Barbara Caplan.
- To purchase Giant Eagle gift cards contact Karen Coburn.
- For information on our cemetery contact Stephen Cohen.

**NEW LIGHT CONGREGATION**

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[www.newlightcongregation.org](http://www.newlightcongregation.org)

Rabbi  
Co-President/Social VP/Yahrzeits  
Co-President/Cemetery/Website  
Membership  
Sisterhood  
Treasurer/Men’s Club  
Religious Committee  
Corresponding Secretary/Calendar

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Eric Cohen, Bruce Hyde	
Janet Cohen	<a href="mailto:janet@newlightcongregation.org">janet@newlightcongregation.org</a>

# New Light Congregation Calendar February 2025

Sh'vat 5785

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
						<b>1</b> Parsha B0 Services 9:45 AM
<b>2</b> Board Meeting, 10:30 AM	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b> 5:27p Candle lighting Services 6:00 PM	<b>8</b> Shabbos Shirah Parshas Beshalach Services 9:45 AM
<b>9</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>14</b> 5:36p Candle lighting Services 6:00 PM	<b>15</b> Parshas Yisro Services 9:45 AM
<b>16</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>21</b> 5:44p Candle lighting Services 6:00 PM	<b>22</b> Parshas Mishpatim Services 9:45 AM
<b>23</b> Lunch, noon, ballroom	<b>24</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>28</b> 5:52p Candle lighting Services 6:00 PM	