אור חדש
New Light Congregation
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New Light News November 2026

The Flashlight

It's no surprise that every year, the Orthodox world reignites an old debate: Should a Jew celebrate Thanksgiving? You can almost hear the arguments floating around the kiddush table. The very word "Jew" comes from the name "Yehudah," the fourth of Jacob's sons. Yehudah is built on the concept of giving thanks. In other words, to be a Jew is to be a "thank God-nik." So it would seem very natural for Jews to come out and celebrate the American Thanksgiving.

But it is not so.

Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik, dean of Yeshiva University and Rosh Yeshiva, certainly thought yes. He even moved his daily Talmud shiur earlier on Thanksgiving morning so he could fly to Boston from New York and celebrate with his family.

Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, the president of the Union of Orthodox Rabbis, said that **as long as** you don't see the holiday as religiously binding—**as long as you don't consider yourself obligated *to eat turkey***—you're perfectly free to join the celebration.

But Rabbi Yitzchak Hutner, the dean and Rosh Yeshiva of Yeishiva Rabbi Chaim Berlin in Brooklyn, voiced a different worry. Not about the turkey, not about gratitude, but about identity. About Jews blurring into the religious culture around them, adopting rituals anchored—however loosely—in a Christian calendar. He wasn't opposed to giving thanks. He was opposed to giving thanks **once a year**, in place of the constant Jewish rhythm of blessing and gratitude.

And truthfully, he had a point.

Because observant Jews already have Thanksgiving every Friday night. The table set, the family gathered, the words "Thank You, God" flowing through the blessings over wine, challah, food. And not just weekly—daily, hourly. We say brachot hundreds of times a day. A sip of water? A blessing. A piece of fruit? A blessing. We start our morning with Modeh Ani, before we check a phone or speak to another person, acknowledging life itself as a divine gift.

We don't thank G-d annually. We thank Him constantly.

Rabbi Eliot Pearlson reports that his teacher Rabbi Mordecai Goldstein, was once asked whether it was permissible to display an American flag on the bimah of a shul. After all, placing it so close to the holy ark might seem to elevate it to a sacred level. Rabbi Goldstein's answer was classic and profound. He said not only was it permissible—it might **actually be** obligatory. Why? Because the flag reminds us of our chiyuv, our obligation, to show gratitude to the United States—a country that opened its doors to Jews, saved millions from death, and allowed us to thrive and contribute in ways our ancestors could never have imagined.

The same goes for the Israeli flag as well. Out of gratitude for the miracle of Jewish sovereignty, for the homeland that shelters and unites us, for the courage of Israelis today who walk in the footsteps of Yehuda with fierce gratitude and fierce faith.

Rabbi Soloveitchik was right. Jews *should* celebrate Thanksgiving. Not as a replacement for our daily gratitude, but as an extension of it. It is another opportunity to say: we are Yehudim, the people named for thanks. The "Thank God-niks." And the world could use more of it.

Rabbi Jonathan Perlman

Co-Presidents' Report

October starts as a joyous month, but always ends sadly.

We began by celebrating Shabbat in our Sukkah, followed by Shimini Atzeret and Simchat Torah. This year for Simchat Torah we joined the Pop-Up Minyan at Friendship Circle and danced around the room with our Torah as we sang the 13 hakafots. Almost 50 people filled the room with song and laughter. The highlight of the evening was unfurling the Torah around the room. For many of the children, teenagers and adults, it was the first time they saw the sheets of an entire Torah from beginning to end. The Rabbi walked around the room and highlighted special sections of the text.

On October 15th, the Boards of Tree of Life, New Light and Dor Hadash met with TOLi (now named: The Tree of Life Center for Humanity) to discuss the Museum part of the building. (We also learned that the building will have a dairy/catering kitchen and the maximum capacity of the ballroom is 400 guests.) We heard a presentation by the consultants designing the museum. At present, the plan is that the Museum will be open on Shabbat.

There will be three parts of the area dedicated to the museum:

- Witness: what happened that day;
- Understand: history of antisemitism in the U.S.;
- Honor: Healing, connecting with the victims and renewal.

As with most museums exhibitions today, visitors takes a circuitous path through the displays, allowing them to dwell at some and by-pass others. The mosaic and ark from the Pervin Chapel, as well as a rotating selection of the artwork donated by the public, will be part of the displays in the "Honor" section. How much of the actual words or the motivations of the shooter or evidence from the trial will be displayed is still being discussed.

The Center has asked us to participate in the creation of a video about New Light as one of the exhibits in the Museum (each congregation will have a video). We will be working with professionals provided by the Center to help design and create the video. Though we have no idea what will be involved at this time (potential length, content, etc.), if you have any suggestions or would like a speaking role, please contact Barbara or Steve.

The building is still on track for being completed in December, 2027. The Tree of Life Congregation and the Museum should be occupying the building by May, 2028.

On October 20th we were visited by the current Consul General of Israel, Ofir Akunis. Though in office for over two years, this was his first opportunity to visit Pittsburgh. After touring the under-construction Tree of Life site, he expressed surprise that it has taken so long to rebuild. And of, course, we talked about current U.S.-Israeli politics and the upcoming Israeli election.

Consul General Akunis, second from the right in the first row, between Audrey and Steve.

He expressed hope that a unity government will be created that can deal with the multiple issues facing Israel, including Gaza and the West Bank, the Haredi , and West Bank settlers. Joining us was Ofir Dayan, Visiting Researcher at the University of Pittsburgh. Ms. Dayan is the author of "Intifada Globalized: Why Young Westerners are Turning Away from Israel" recently published in English in September 2026. The book explores the growth of anti-Zionism on U.S. college campuses and what can be done by the Israeli Government to help combat both anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism in the U.S.

The last week of October ended on a sad note. Eight years ago, a lone anti-Semitic gunman shot his way into an un-secured Tree of Life building and murdered eleven members of Tree of Life, Dor Hadash and New Light. The memories of Richard Gottfried, Dan Stein, Mel Wax, Joyce Fienberg, Rose Mallinger, Jerry Rabinowitz, Cecil Rosenthal, David Rosenthal, Bernice Simon, Sylvan Simon, and Irving Younger will forever be in our hearts.

Barbara Caplan
Stephen Cohen

CPR Class - Thank You Jamie!

Jamie Frame conducted a much appreciated CPR class on October 18. According to Beth, one of the students who took the class:
"It really made the whole process of what CPR is and why to do it less intimidating and especially sharing your personal story demonstrates how important it is for all of us to be aware of ways we can help those in our communities."

We are very grateful to Jamie for doing this critical training.

November Board Meeting

The meeting is Sunday, November 8th at 10:30 AM in Helfant Chapel and on Zoom.

Chanukah Dinner and Party

This year's party will be on Sunday December 6th at 5:00 PM the ballroom.

$20 per person. Please RSVP to Barbara Caplan (412-521-4332 or 412-519-714) by November 24th.

November Birthdays

Judy Blumenfeld
Barbara Caplan
Marilyn Kramer

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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Secretary/Calendar	Janet Cohen	janet@newlightcongregation.org

New Light Congregation Calendar November 2026

Cheshvan – Kislev 5787

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1	**2**	**3**	**4** Talmud Class, 6:00 PM	**5**	**6** **4:52p** Candle lighting Services, 6:00 PM	**7** Parshas Chayei Sara **5:58p** Havdalah (48 min) Services, 9:45 AM
8 Board Meeting, 10:30 AM	**9**	**10**	**11**	**12**	**13** **4:45p** Candle lighting Services, 6:00 PM	**14** Parshas Toldos **5:51p** Havdalah (48 min) Services, 9:45 AM
15	**16**	**17**	**18** Talmud Class, 6:00 PM	**19**	**20** **4:40p** Candle lighting Services, 6:00 PM	**21** Parshas Vayetzei **5:46p** Havdalah (48 min) Services, 9:45 AM
22	**23**	**24**	**25**	**26**	**27** **4:36p** Candle lighting Services, 6:00 PM	**28** Parshas Vayishlach **5:43p** Havdalah (48 min) Services, 9:45 AM
29	**30**					

Pittsburgh, PA 15217 - Candle lighting times 18 min before sunset.

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