



Jewish Community Center of Paramus
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A Shabbat Message from Rabbi Arthur Weiner

Friday May 31, 2024 ~ Parsha: Bechukotai

Dear JCCP/CBT family,

May is Jewish American Heritage Month

May has been a busy month at the JCCP/CBT. We observed *Yom HaShoah* (Holocaust Memorial Day), and celebrated *Yom Ha'atzma'ut*, (Israel Independence Day). We celebrated two wonderful *Bnai Mitzvah*, enjoyed several successful events in the synagogue, said farewell to our Rabbinic intern Sami Vingron (now Rabbi Sami Vingron!) and mourned with members of the synagogue community who suffered losses. I was in Washington for a conference sponsored by the Zionist Rabbinic Conference (which I wrote about last [week](#)). And if that was not enough, I also oversaw the completion of several *Gittin* (Jewish divorce proceedings) in my role as a *Mesader Gittin* (Jewish divorce specialist). I'm one of three dozen rabbis throughout the world authorized to conduct Jewish divorce proceedings for the Conservative Movement. Yes, there is a lot going on. But before the month of May ends, I want to say a few words about **Jewish American Heritage Month (JAHM)**, an opportunity to reflect on the many amazing contributions of American Jews to the United States.

In 2006, President George W. Bush officially established May as Jewish American Heritage Month. This significant proclamation resulted from a concerted effort by American Jewish leaders, including Representative Debbie Wasserman Schultz and the late Senator Arlen Specter. They introduced resolutions in both the U.S. Senate and the House of Representatives, urging the President to recognize Jews in America and celebrate their remarkable contributions to the nation. After the successful celebration of the 350th anniversary of the first Jewish settlement in in America, President Bush wanted to proclaim a month that would honor the more than 350-year history of Jewish contributions to America and its culture. Since then, annual

proclamations have been made by Presidents Bush, Obama, Trump, and Biden. JAHM serves as an opportunity to recognize and celebrate the history of Jews in America, educate diverse audiences about Jewish culture, and spark crucial conversations about the American Jewish present and future.

What do we want others to know about Jewish contributions to our country. Let's consider the following ideas:

We have a 350-Year legacy

Jewish presence in America dates back to the colonial period, when 23 Sephardic Jews fleeing the Inquisition in Portugal arrived in New [Amsterdam](#) (now New York) on Erev Rosh Hashanah 1654. The first Jewish communities settled in cities like New York, Charleston, South Carolina, and Newport, Rhode Island. These early settlers faced challenges but also contributed significantly to the development of their local communities.

We have a variety of Jewish religious denominations

American Jewry has created unique expressions of Judaism. While Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform Judaism each have roots in 19th century Germany, each denomination has adapted to American society. Additionally, new movements like Reconstructionist Judaism, and Renewal Judaism have emerged, reflecting an amazing diversity of Jewish practice and belief. Each of the major denominations are Zionist and passionately support the State of Israel. Recent survey suggest that Israel is significant to more than 80% of American Jews.

We have had a profound influence on popular culture and American institutions

Jews have had a remarkable influence on Hollywood and American popular culture. Names like Woody Allen, Barbra Streisand, Steven Spielberg, Jerry Seinfeld, and the Marx Brothers (to name but a few) resonate with audiences worldwide. Through movies, television, books, and the internet, Jewish creativity, humor, and storytelling have become integral parts of the American cultural tapestry. In the arts and sciences, in our armed forces and in sports, our contributions have been vast and significant.

We are proud of the 37 Jews who have been awarded the [Presidential](#) Medal of Freedom, the highest civilian award of the United States, and honor the 18 Jews who

received the [Congressional](#) Medal of Honor, the highest military decoration an American servicemember can receive.

Courage and resilience in the face of challenges

The American Jewish community has faced adversity, and each generation has had to work to establish our place in the nation. Despite challenges, we have fought, persevered, succeeded, and worked so that others could also find their place in our great nation. And we have used our strength to advocate on behalf of Jews throughout the world facing violence and persecution.

JAHM encourages communities across the country to educate audiences about American Jewish life, culture, and communities. It sparks crucial conversations about the American Jewish past, present, and future. By sharing stories, traditions, and achievements, we foster understanding and appreciation, which is particularly important at a time of rising anti-semitism and bigotry.

For American Jews, Jewish American Heritage Month must be a time to honor and celebrate our heritage. It's a chance to express pride in our contributions, to think about our responsibilities to America and to each other, and to challenge ourselves to build on this amazing legacy, ensuring that our heritage will continue to inspire generations to come.

Shabbat Shalom,

Rabbi Arthur D. Weiner