

A Hanukkah Message

December 11, 2023 (Hanukkah)

This Hanukkah, I'm reminded of what our Babylonian sages taught regarding the lighting of the Hanukkah lamp: "It is a mitzvah to place the *hanukkiah* at the entrance to one's home, on the outside. If one lives on a higher floor, then place it in the window facing the public domain. In a time of danger, one can place it on their table and that is sufficient."

Given what the Jewish people have experienced these past two months—from the massacres in Israel to the rising antisemitism worldwide—it's tempting to conclude that we ought to place our Hanukkah lamps safely on the table inside our homes this year. But, we must not. This is not a moment to withdraw from the world and conceal our Jewishness.

This is a moment to reaffirm our broad Jewish commitments. *Kol Yisrael Areivim Zeh Ba'Zeh*, the entire Jewish world, is intertwined with one another. That is why two buses full of JTS's leaders, students, staff, and faculty joined nearly 300,000 others to support Israel and to condemn the rising antisemitism on November 14 at the March for Israel. That is also why JTS has been a proud partner with other organizations in a variety of events and initiatives; we participated in the protest in front of the UN calling attention to Hamas's sexual violence against Israeli women, and I joined a [panel with Masorti/Conservative leaders](#) from Argentina, Germany, and the UK to discuss the rise in antisemitism and the impact on our communities worldwide.

This is also a moment to reach out to our neighbors. Recently, the president of Columbia University accepted my invitation to join me for lunch at JTS, and our conversation was filled with shared commitment to ensuring the emotional and physical safety of our students, and to working together to eradicate antisemitism in Morningside Heights. Our Milstein Center for Interreligious Dialogue hosted a prominent imam, a proponent of Compassionate Islam, to continue forging common ground. We partnered with Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion Cantorial School students [to bring light and song into the world](#) at the "We Have Come to Banish the Darkness" concert last week. We also are welcoming members of the Jerusalem Youth Chorus this Wednesday to speak, learn, and sing with the JTS community. This special chorus brings Israeli and Palestinian teens together to sing and develop dialogue skills and relationships.

During these past months, List College has nourished our undergraduates' minds and souls, helped them process their experiences, and supported them as they continued to engage in the Columbia/Barnard community intellectually, communally, and interpersonally. We are so proud of their maturity, strength, and wisdom during this challenging time. I am confident that List College is best poised to meet this defining moment, and we are actively looking for ways to expand our program so that more students can benefit from this singular opportunity. List College is a perfect place to invest in the Jewish future.

I am equally proud of our graduate-level students who have served diverse communities through their internships and placements, offering sorely needed support, education, context, and hope.

Our alumni continue to inspire me, as they raise much-needed funds, help young students comprehend current events, organize rallies, lead missions to Israel, provide counseling, and offer comfort, inspiration, and hope to their communities.

These past two months have driven home once again the importance of learned, dedicated, fearless Jewish leaders who are able to immediately pivot to meet the needs of the present—and the future. Witnessing so much positivity and light during this very dark time spurs us to redouble our efforts to build a robust pipeline of Jewish leadership for the future. Our Committee on the Cultivation of Religious Leadership is well underway, generating new initiatives to identify and train top talent. This January we are launching a low-residency Mekhinah for students interested in becoming a rabbi. It will enable students to prepare for Rabbinical School while living and working outside of the New York area, something never before available.

Other pipeline plans include teen-learning initiatives, new partnerships, and certificate/degree-programs that will all enable JTS to expand its student base and curricular reach.

During this Hanukkah season, please join us in investing in the training of tomorrow's Jewish leaders by supporting the [JTS Fund today](#). Together, we can raise the light of Torah into a world in so desperately in need of it.

With warm wishes for a *Hag Urim Sameah*—a joyous and uplifting Hanukkah!