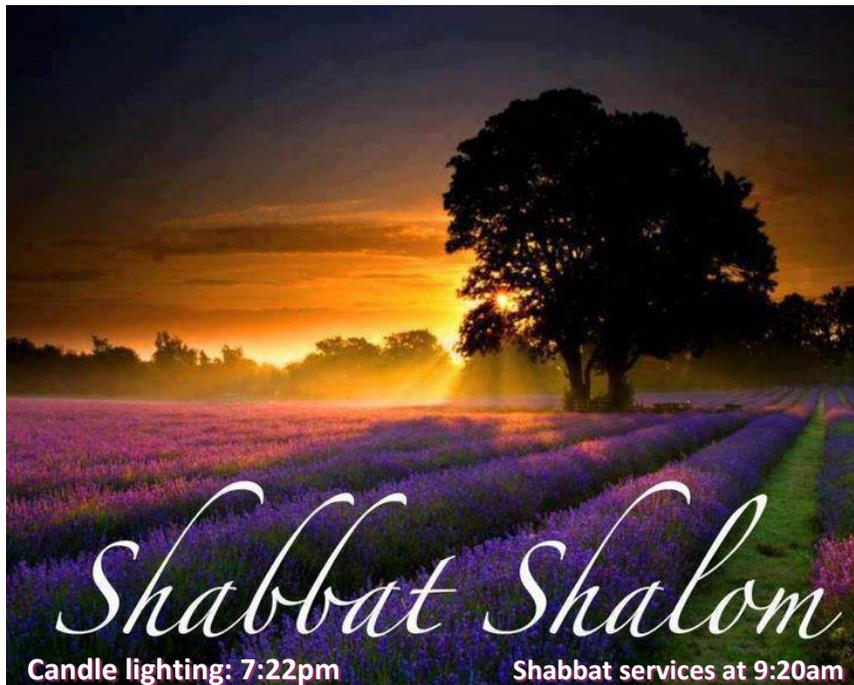




# Carnegie Shul Chatter

## September 6, 2017



## Hurricane Harvey and the Houston Jewish Community

You all know about Hurricane Harvey and its impact on the state of Texas and the city of Houston.

Interestingly, the **Israeli government reportedly plans to give \$1 million to Houston's Jewish community** in the aftermath of Hurricane Harvey. The money pledged by Israel will go toward restoring places such as synagogues, schools and Jewish community centers damaged by the storm.

"The Jewish State is measured by its response when our brothers around the world are in crisis," Diaspora Affairs Minister Naftali Bennett said in a statement released Monday, according to the *Jerusalem Post*. "For years the Jewish communities stood by Israel when it needed their help; now it is our turn to stand by Houston's Jewish community," Bennett added.

Below are two articles on the devastation that Harvey has wreaked on Houston's Jewish community in particular.

## The Aftermath

On June 14, 1972, Hurricane Agnes paid a very unwelcome visit to Harrisburg, PA. I had moved to Harrisburg in June, 1971 after finishing graduate school at Duquesne and was living in a basement apartment one block from the Susquehanna River when Agnes dropped by. Everything I owned was in that apartment.

More than a foot of rain fell in Harrisburg in less than 24 hours. The river, which usually is at 3 or 4 feet in the summer, rose well over its 17 foot flood stage and actually reached the second floor of the building in which my apartment was located. The JCC and Harrisburg's three largest synagogues were also located within a block of the river, and had major, major damage.

When I left the National Guard Armory evacuation center days later, I found that the 2100 block of Second St. had burned to the ground during the flood. I lived two houses away on the 2200 block.

Obviously, everything I owned was gone.

But thanks to the Red Cross, Salvation Army, and FEMA, I was able to buy some new items and was given a flood mobile home to live in for a year. Of course, things like family pictures and school yearbooks were irreplaceable.

I will never forget Hurricane Agnes, and I will certainly never forget those who donated to the Red Cross, Salvation Army, etc., who helped me get back on my feet.

I have donated to the Jewish Federation of Greater Pittsburgh's fund to help provide assistance to the Jewish community in Houston that has been devastated by Hurricane Harvey. You can do the same at [www.jfedpgh.org](http://www.jfedpgh.org).

## From the JTA

The Jewish community in Houston has seen “devastating” damage from Hurricane Harvey and could take years to recover, a federation official said.

“Recovery like this — it is a disaster larger than Katrina in terms of the amount of water that fell — we’re going to have short- and long-term recovery plans, but this is probably going to take us years to get back to where we were,” said Taryn Baranowski, the chief marketing officer for the Jewish Federation of Greater Houston.

Seventy-one percent of the city’s Jewish population of 63,700 lives in areas that have experienced high flooding, Baranowski told JTA on Wednesday. That includes 12,000 Jewish seniors.

Hurricane Harvey first made landfall on Friday evening near Corpus Christi, about 200 miles southwest of Houston. Local officials said at least 31 people are believed or suspected to have died due to Harvey, *The New York Times* reported Wednesday. Over 30,000 people are in shelters across the state, and rain was expected to continue in Texas until Friday.

Three of the city’s five major synagogues have experienced major flooding, Baranowski said. The federation is communicating with the rest of Houston’s synagogues — the area is home to 42 congregations and communities — but is focusing on helping people impacted by Harvey.

“We still have folks who don’t have electricity, we still have folks who don’t have plumbing,” she said. “It’s a pretty dire situation, so while we’re working to get those numbers, our top priority is getting people safe and to shelter.”

On Wednesday, the local Jewish Family Service said that dozens of Jewish families were either evacuated or moved to the second floors of their homes due to the flooding caused by Harvey.

Community members have seen up to eight feet of water in their houses, with some houses remaining flooded, Baranowski said.

“The majority of people have had to go to the second floor, and then be rescued from their second floor,” she said.

The Evelyn Rubinstein Jewish Community Center of Houston, the city’s only JCC, was flooded with 10 feet of water, and Jewish schools remain closed, with some experiencing major flooding.

“I’ll be completely transparent, it’s devastating,” Baranowski said. “This is a flood that no one could have anticipated it getting as bad as it did; it was a worst-case scenario. We live in a community that is densely populated in an area that got severely impacted by the weather.”

Kosher food is another issue.

“We were having an issue getting kosher food into the community for grocery stores. We’re working with some volunteer groups to get that into the community,” she said.

Chabad in Houston has been providing kosher food to some community members, although supplies were running short as of Tuesday, according to Chabad.org. The Hasidic movement is organizing food shipments, including through Amazon, for the community. The Orthodox Union has also started a *Help for Houston* website.

The federation is collecting donations and will start distributing them on Thursday. It is working in conjunction with the Jewish Family Service and the JCC in the relief efforts. Baranowski said the priority in donations is cleaning supplies for those returning to houses that were flooded.

Local Jewish camps are housing refugees forced to evacuate their homes, and the Israeli humanitarian group IsrAID is coordinating an aid

campaign, including sending volunteers to Houston.

In the face of disaster, the Jewish community remains unified, Baranowski said.

“We are a resilient community,” she said. “People are already beginning a process, they’re banding

together, they’re working with each other to help recovery.

“But we do know that recovery is going to be long, it’s going to be difficult. We can do it, but it’s going to be a process for the entire community and the entire city to get through.”

## Houston’s Jewish community devastated by Hurricane Harvey: ‘You’re pretty much helpless’

*By Etan Arom, The Jewish Journal, August 29,*

Michael Wadler’s *tefillin* were among the only things he owned that survived Hurricane Harvey.

As he was tossing objects into a trash bag before dawn on Aug. 27 while a rescue boat waited outside, he managed to grab the leather boxes, with their ritual scrolls, leaving behind other crucial belongings, such as his shoes. For most of the day, he walked around barefoot.

Practically everything he left behind was destroyed. After the floodwater recedes, Wadler will need to find somewhere to stay and start to rebuild.

“The hardest thing is to accept help from other people, because you need it,” Wadler said, speaking from a downtown Houston hotel where his family took shelter. “You’re pretty much helpless and you need it. It’s just hard acknowledging that.”

Although the damage to the local Jewish community is obviously significant, the full extent is as yet unclear. Flooding at the United Orthodox Synagogues of Houston, where Wadler is a member, caused as much as \$1 million in damages, even waterlogging a newly built wing designed to resist floods. Congregation Beth Yeshurun, a Conservative synagogue where Wadler’s wife teaches Sunday school, also flooded.

But even as torrential rain continued to lash southeast Texas, fundraising efforts kicked up to aid Jewish families in the recovery that would inevitably follow the disastrous flooding.

Partnering with the Jewish Family Service of Houston and other local Jewish organizations, the Jewish Federation of Greater Houston quickly launched a fundraising effort, with local Federations across the country, including The Jewish Federation of Greater Los Angeles ([jewishla.org](http://jewishla.org)), setting up webpages to help raise money. The Orthodox Union ([ou.org](http://ou.org)) and the United Orthodox Synagogues of Houston ([uosh.org](http://uosh.org)) also have fundraising pages.

So far, it looks like every penny will be appreciated.

“In terms of the number of Jewish families who were impacted by the storm, it’s certainly in the thousands,” said Rabbi Yossi Zaklikofsky of Bellaire, near Houston. “So this is anywhere from minor damage to the home to losing everything.”

Compared with some members of the Shul of Bellaire, where he officiates, Zaklikofsky was lucky: Only 6 inches of rain pooled into the ground floor of his home, as opposed to the 3 to 4 feet some of his congregants saw.

Zaklikofsky acted as the spokesperson for a group of area Chabad rabbis that launched a

united fundraising appeal to assist Jewish families affected by the storm. He spoke on the phone Aug. 28 as friends and community members gathered in his home to help clean up, the vanguard of a recovery effort that will likely take several months.

The Houston neighborhoods where its Jewish communities are concentrated, including Willow Meadows, Meyerland and Central City, were among those most deeply impacted by Hurricane Harvey, which dumped months' worth of rain in mere days after making landfall late on Aug. 25 in southeast Texas.

The Jewish Federation of Greater Houston estimated that 12,000 Jewish seniors live in the impacted areas, and more than two-thirds of Houston's estimated Jewish population of 63,700 reside in areas devastated by massive flooding. Many have been displaced by floodwaters that reached as high as 10 feet.

With more rain expected, relief efforts were hampered by submerged highways, and the community's needs during the coming months were not yet clear, said Taryn Baranowski, chief marketing officer for Federation, speaking on Aug. 28.

"We don't know how and what we'll have to spend funds on, but we know it's going to cost quite a bit for us to recover," Baranowski said.

That uncertainty didn't stop Rabbi Ari Segal from encouraging his community to help.

Now the head of school at Shalhevet High School in Los Angeles, Segal lived in Houston from 2004 to 2011, serving as principal and head of school at the Robert M. Beren Academy, a K-12 Modern Orthodox school near the flood-prone area of Willow Meadows, a hub of the local Jewish community. In the aftermath of Hurricane Harvey, the school was being used as an emergency shelter, Segal said.

On Aug. 28, Segal sent an email to the Shalhevet community with the subject line, "Let's Help Houston," which featured links to various fundraising pages. "It is important as a community of faith that we support our brothers and sisters both financially and spiritually," Segal wrote.

Speaking on the phone later that day, Segal called the Houston Jewish community "very resilient," saying he's heard numerous examples of people taking in their neighbors without a second thought. But Segal, who lived through severe storms during his sojourn in Texas, said that even with financial help from outside Houston, rebuilding still will pose a significant challenge.

"Even after the damage is done, even if the rebuilding process starts, even if the money's pouring in, which, please God all of that will happen, it's challenging for communities to rebuild themselves and kids to bounce back and live through it," he said.

Segal said he'd received an outpouring of responses to his email from people saying they had donated.

Besides their cash, some members of the local Jewish community offered their prayers as well.

Rabbi Yonah Bookstein of Pico Shul learned on Aug. 25, a Friday, that at least two members of his congregation had family members in Houston. On Sunday morning, he organized a prayer vigil to follow regularly scheduled Sunday services, where members of Pico Shul recited psalms while praying for the safety of those trapped by the storm.

"I believe in the power of prayer," Bookstein said on Aug. 28. "Most of the families whose members were stranded on Sunday were rescued as of this morning. You know, we're grateful."

## Hank Greenberg Film a Home Run!

A great community program was sponsored by the Carnegie Shul, with the screening of *The Life and Times of Hank Greenberg* at the Hollywood Theater in Dormont on August 30. The movie was presented free of charge, thanks to funding provided by a grant from South Hills Jewish Pittsburgh.



*Ellen Roteman and Roz Hoffman register guests.*



*Attendees receive their free popcorn and soda.*



*More than 200 attended the event.*

## In Our Ahavat Achim Family

Mazel Tov to Ellen Roteman who recently signed a contract with Menucha Publishers to have her first children's book, *The Sukkah Sleuths: The Case of the Missing Chanukkah Candles*, published. A fall, 2018 release is planned.

Please share your news for the Chatter; send info to Mike Roteman at [mrmike7777@yahoo.com](mailto:mrmike7777@yahoo.com).

## Yahrzeit Plaques

Commemorate a loved one by dedicating a yahrzeit plaque in his or her memory at the Carnegie Shul. These beautiful plaques, mounted on the sanctuary walls, are lit on the loved one's yahrzeit, Yom Kippur, and days when Yizkor is recited. The names are also read aloud from the Bimah during services on the Sabbath of the yahrzeit and on Yom Kippur. To purchase a plaque, for only \$175, please email Mike Roteman at [mrmike7777@yahoo.com](mailto:mrmike7777@yahoo.com).



Please consider sponsoring a Kiddush in honor or in memory of a loved one, for only \$36. Your sponsorship will be announced from the bimah and in the weekly Chatter. To sponsor a Kiddush, email [mrmike7777@yahoo.com](mailto:mrmike7777@yahoo.com).

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