

RABBI RUBERG'S ANNUAL JEWISH YEAR-END REVIEW

(2016 Edition)

On the eighth day of Hanukkah here are eight positive things that happened to the Jewish people during this past year. During a year of so much negative, here are 8 good things to consider. They are numbered randomly, not in order of importance.

1. Israel and Turkey Reconcile

Israel and Turkey, long an American ally, have recently gone from friends to antagonists. Israel-Turkey relations had sunk to their lowest ebb after the “Gaza Flotilla incident” a few years ago.

This year, Israel and Turkey signed an Agreement of Reconciliation. It is an example of how Israel and several of its neighboring Arab states have come together to collaborate against their common radical enemies, Iran and ISIS.

2. The United States Continues to Fund the Iron Dome

Much has been written about the strain between the Obama administration and Israel's Netanyahu government. But despite those tensions, the President and the US Congress, who themselves have had strained relations at best, came together to pass an unprecedented American aid to Israel package, highlighted by the funding of the Iron Dome defensive missile that performed so well to protect Israeli civilians in the 2014 Gaza War. It highlights that the ties between the United States and Israel are much closer than temporary disagreements.

3. 2016 Summer Olympics Jewish Highlights

- Aly Raisman wins three more gold medals in gymnastics (yay for Jewish pride)
- The IOC (International Olympic Committee finally honors the memory of the Munich11, the eleven Israeli athletes murdered in cold blood at the 1972 games.
- Israel wins multiple medals in judo (no golds, so no Hatikvah, too bad).

4. Tidewater young adults move to Israel

In 2016, the number of North American Jews making Aliyah to Israel rose significantly. The most recent group of over 100 arrived on Hanukkah and included our own Hannah Yarow. Hannah is the daughter of Beth El member's Rick and Debi Yarow. She has enlisted in the IDF (Israel Defense Forces) and will be serving her new country very soon. We are so proud of Hannah and the life path she has chosen.

She will be joining several other young people from our community who have chosen to make the Jewish homeland their home. They are Rachel Gross, Genna Brand, Dylan Sandler, Katie Becker and Levi Margolin.

5. Jewish observance to permeate the White House

While the large majority of American Jews voted for Hillary Clinton and not Donald Trump in the November election (71% to 24%), we should note that an unprecedented degree of Jewish living will be taking place in the Trump White House beginning January 21. Among the president-elect's closest advisors are his son-in-law and daughter Jared Kushner and Ivanka Trump. They are observant Jews. Ivanka will have an office in the West Wing. That means that for the first time ever, Shabbat candles will be lit regularly and Kosher food will be served regularly in the White House.

The Trump-Kushners are said to currently shul-shopping. Stay tuned.

6. Orthodox-ordained woman takes the title “rabbi.”

For several years, a liberal Orthodox yeshiva, Yeshivat Maharat, has been granting the equivalent of rabbinic ordination to the graduates of its intense Talmudic education program for women. While its graduates have been engaged as spiritual leadership partners for men serving as rabbis in any number of congregations, they have refrained from using the title “rabbi” so as not to offend many in the Orthodox community. In 2016, for the first time, a graduate of Yeshivat Maharat, Leila Kagedan, was hired by a New York area Orthodox synagogue as its sole spiritual leader and will be known as “rabbi.”

Rabbi Kagedan’s example is a sign that egalitarianism has slowly but surely arrived in the Orthodox world, while being implemented within Halachic parameters.

7. The Bernie Sanders Candidacy

Senator Bernie Sanders did not win the Democratic nomination. Indeed his position on issues relating to the State of Israel was not a popular one among many active and involved Jews including myself was not a popular one. Nevertheless, he is a child of Holocaust survivors whose speech and demeanor reflects his Jewish upbringing. As was frequently said of him “he looks and sounds like a Jewish grandfather.

And he won thousands upon thousands of primary votes

Who knows? Even with a post-election uptick in anti-Semitism the possibility of a Jewish President may be closer than we think.

8. Creativity and Innovation at Beth El

Three new initiatives marked educational and ritual programming in 2016, incorporating the long-standing principle of Conservative Judaism- tradition mixed with change. They are Friday Night Alive, Hebrew School 2.0 and Beth El-Temple Israel post Bar-Bat Mitzvah Midrasha.

And so there you have them. 8 POSITIVE DEVELOPMENTS FOR 8 DAYS OF Hanukkah.