

Dear Members of Temple Beth El,

I am writing to you on behalf of the TBE Antisemitism and Israel Committee.

As some of you may already know, there was a tragic antisemitic attack on a synagogue in Jackson, Mississippi, earlier this month. Temple Beth Israel, founded in 1860, the only synagogue in Jackson, the capital of Mississippi. It is a vibrant and historic community, and sadly, it is no stranger to tragedy. In 1967, during the height of the civil rights unrest in the South, the synagogue was the victim of a Ku Klux Klan bombing.

On January 10, 2026, in the middle of the night, an antisemitic arsonist set fire to the synagogue, causing significant damage and destroying two precious Torah scrolls.

I immediately called my friends, who told me that the community was shocked and devastated. While they were still assessing the damage, it was already clear that the two Torah scrolls had been completely destroyed. The remaining scrolls were saved because they were in the Ark, which was not burned, but they did suffer significant smoke and water damage.

The arsonist was apprehended quickly after his father reported him to the FBI. Investigators found extensive antisemitic material on his computer. He told his father that he was setting fire to what he called the “Synagogue of Satan.” Tragically, this type of hatred is becoming more common and even more troubling, it often receives limited attention in the mainstream news.

Yet alongside this hatred, we are witnessing extraordinary resilience.

Almost immediately, another Jewish congregation provided prayer books so that Temple Beth Israel could hold Shabbat services in a local church that opened both its doors and its heart to the Jewish community. Space was also made to fully unroll the salvaged Torah scrolls so they could dry and, hopefully, be restored.

The Jewish community in New Orleans quickly organized support, sending food and pastries so that an adult bat mitzvah, scheduled for that weekend, could still take place. The community has come together in the most powerful way.

Temple Beth Israel’s spiritual leader, student rabbi Benjamin Russell, has been nothing short of remarkable during this time. He has stepped up as a true Jewish leader, holding his community together during an unimaginably difficult time. In a recent *Jerusalem Post* article, he said: “We will not only survive, we will thrive,”

He went on to add:

“We have prayed through wars, depressions, pandemics, demographic shifts, and antisemitism in every decade, and every single time we did more than survive—we adapted, we rebuilt, we showed up. And that is exactly what we are doing and will continue to do now.”

You can read the full article here: <https://www.jpost.com/diaspora/article-883775>

Temple Beth Israel is receiving support from many sources, but if you would like to make a donation, you may do so at the following link: <https://www.bethisraelms.org>

On behalf of our congregation and the Kulanu Committee, this is both a call for continued vigilance in these perilous times and a reminder of the extraordinary strength, resilience, and unity of the Jewish people. May we always be ready to support one another.

With gratitude and hope,

Scott Sekuler  
on behalf of the TBE Kulanu Antisemitism and Israel Committee