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8 days of giving

by Annelise Hanshaw | December 10, 2020 | 0 comment

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December 15, 2020

Congregation B'nai B'rith celebrates Hanukkah with community service



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Jen Lewis, director of religious learning at Congregation B'nai B'rith, prepares lunch bags to distribute during the temple's celebration of Hanukkah.

Hanukkah begins at sunset tonight and will continue until sundown Dec. 18.

To celebrate the Festival of Lights this year, Congregation B'nai B'rith plans to light up the community with acts of service.

Each day of Hanukkah, members of the Santa Barbara congregation will observe a "mitzvah," meaning commandment. Mitzvah Day is usually observed the weekend before Thanksgiving, and the congregation meets for a large act of service.

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, CBB merged Mitzvah Day and Hanukkah to make "Mitzvah Week" -- eight days of serving inspired by commandments in scripture.

"On Mitzvah Day, we see it as an opportunity to serve others. It's an act of loving kindness, and loving kindness goes out. We should be kind to ourselves too, but loving kindness is about connecting with others and spreading the love," said Mariela Socolovsky, director of community engagement at CBB.



Tonight's Hanukkah lighting

Hanukkah begins tonight.

On the first day, congregation members will practice Leviticus 19:18: "... you shall love your neighbor as yourself..." CBB suggests making cookies for neighbors and friends or dropping off cards.

"Given the fact that Hanukkah was coming up, we decided to spin things around like a dreidel, and bring this idea of bringing things to light by doing good things in the word," Ms. Socolovsky told the News-Press.

There are suggestions on each day for acts of service and community organizations to partner with. Throughout the week, there is a toy drive and a coats and blankets drive to provide resources to the Teddy Bear Cancer Foundation and PATH Santa Barbara, a homeless shelter.

The projects were chosen to engage all members of the congregation, young and old.

Judaism has a guiding principle called "tikkun olam," which means "repair the world." There's a sense of social justice in the congregation.



COURTESY PHOTO

The congregation will be engaging in acts of service during the eight days of Hanukkah, a celebration it's calling "Mitzvah Week."

"We associate this time with miracles, things that are beyond life," Ms. Socolovsky said. "We want to make sure we can help rebalance the justice in the world."

Every night, the congregation comes together via Zoom to light a candle on the menorah. Members will talk about each day's mitzvah and sing.

"We used to get together in person," she said. "We had to find a way to transcend the building and stay connected, even though physically we can't be together, and still generate the feeling of togetherness and community."

Even though they must celebrate remotely, CBB will still have its Hanukkah Teen Cabaret, a lively event where teens present their talents.

For more information, visit cbbbs.org/mitzvah.

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