

Rabbi Kalman Topp  
*Senior Rabbi*

Rabbi Adir Posy  
*Associate Rabbi*

Arik Wollheim  
Cantor

Jack Fenigstein  
President

Rabbi Simon Dolgin *ז"ר*  
Rabbi Emeritus

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## **Beth Jacob's Shabbat of Celebration Honoring Yom Ha'atzmaut Draws a Crowd of 600**

On Shabbat morning, May 3, about 600 people packed Beth Jacob's Shapell Sanctuary to participate in services, and to join together in song in honor of Israel's 66<sup>th</sup> Independence Day. Cantor Arik Wollheim teamed up with a cappella group the Pella Singers LA in leading lively prayer services sung to popular Israeli melodies.

"This is one of the ways in which we show our solidarity with, and love for, the State of Israel and our Israeli brothers and sisters," says Cantor Wollheim. "These songs will forever be implanted in our hearts and minds, and setting our Tefilah to their melodies serves as a salute to our beloved Jewish state."

In his drasha, Rabbi Kalman Topp, Beth Jacob's senior rabbi, compared Sfirat Ha'omer, the time period between Pesach and Shavuot, to Chol Hamoed. Both Chol Hamoed and Sfirat Ha'omer are full of mixed imperatives and emotions – holy as well as mundane, joy as well as sorrow. We observe, in rapid succession, days of mourning - Yom Hashoah and Yom Hazikaron - as well as days of celebration - Yom Ha'atzmaut, and Yom Yerushalayim.

"We're really living during a Chol Hamoed of Jewish history," Rabbi Topp remarked. "It's an in-between period of time – we are not in the depths of exile but also haven't fully realized redemption. But in this intermediate period we make sure to give attention to the competing elements – the horrific tragedy of the Shoah and all the lives lost – but also the glorious simcha of Israel and the country it has become.... Israel has changed the way we view ourselves. We have renewed confidence as a people." He noted that like Chol Hamoed "Israel may be a secular institution but it has tremendous sanctity."

This Shabbat of celebration was part of Beth Jacob's year-long program aimed at energizing Tefilah and enhancing participation with a new focus on music. The effort had the desired effect, with a large crowd attending services this past Shabbat, and hundreds enthusiastically singing along to familiar tunes. Cantor Wollheim has brought the Pella Singers on twice. He has previously joined forces with the Maccabeats, who co-led Beth Jacob's High Holiday services with record numbers in attendance. There are plans to host the Maccabeats again in the near future.



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“The sound of an a cappella group differs from a traditional choir both in style and form. The idea of combining a contemporary sound with old text and traditional melodies, thus creating something new, is very exciting,” says Cantor Wollheim. “This hybrid approach to music in my mind also represents the philosophy of our shul: building a future that is connected to our past.”

Beth Jacob is a Modern Orthodox Congregation which has played a pioneering role in the development of Jewish life in Southern California. Beth Jacob is dedicated to creating a community of engaged, Torah educated, socially conscious, Zionistic and caring Jews. Beth Jacob strives to provide members of all generations, and the broader Jewish community, a spectrum of spiritual, educational, social, *chesed* and cultural opportunities.

For more information, contact call 310-278-1911, or visit [www.bethjacob.org](http://www.bethjacob.org).