

YOUNG ISRAEL OF ORANGE COUNTY ב"ס"ד
5319 University Drive (#122)
Irvine, CA 92612



Hi, everyone.

Our Shul has been blessed, so many times and in so many ways, as we now embark on our seventh annual High Holidays season together. Through these seven years since our founding on February 29, 2008, we have evolved a style uniquely our own, aiming not to replicate others but instead to define our own unique identity and panache and to set our own trends that others follow.

We know we have accomplished our goal and beyond because, without a building of our own or all the “bricks-and-mortar” accoutrements that other temples and synagogues have, by right we should not have been able to sustain. And yet you, our membership, have been and have continued to remain fiercely loyal, year in and year out, perceiving that a shul, to be meaningful and spiritual, can touch lives profoundly without a building (thus far. . .) that we can call our own. We offer something unique, unique in its boldness, in its personal warmth, and in its message. For reasons that become clear as each year progresses forward, we also seem to offer something special for many people who come to us as new members, even though they have other more established choices. Yet there is something unique they find at YIOC. This past year has offered us a wonderful reflection of our unique identity and reminds us that we have been so blessed, where even “setbacks” have propelled us forward.

We never planned to do Rosh Hashanah services at Back Bay Conference Center (the “Bowling Alley”), but when the former Vista Verde School was unavailable to us, we gave it a try — and it emerged that **Back Bay is a perfect venue for Rosh Hashanah.** Someone next suggested trying a major “**Intermission Kiddush Break**” before the Sermon, Shofar, and Chazan’s Musaf, so we tried it — and that became a signature of ours.

Last year, an administrative snafu within Back Bay left us without a venue for Yom Kippur, so we were compelled to try a hotel. (The Back Bay staffer who made last year’s scheduling error was fired because of that glitch a few weeks later.) That hotel experience last year proved so spiritually rewarding that we now we are instituting the **Yom Kippur Hotel** as **our annual Signature High Holiday observance.** Several of our families now take advantage of the opportunity we offer to embrace the Orthodox religious experience in its totality by staying at one of our guest rooms and thus not having to drive to shul. Others appreciate the ease of not walking a marked distance on Yom Kippur and also being only moments away from an on-site place to rest privately during breaks. And the very setting affords a group camaraderie and relief from the static of the world outside.

Our Chanukah Sunday Party several years ago was jeopardized when the folk-dancing professional we hired had to cancel because of a leg injury, so she “made it up” to us by having her husband, a professional comedian, do a comedy performance. Marvin Silbermintz was a huge hit, and that became our Chanukah Signature Program: Nina’s soups, the burgers and franks on the grill, the latkes and jelly donuts — and a great comedian, like Avi Lieberman two years ago or Mark Schiff who was amazing last December.

It was the **biggest turnout we ever had for a Chanukah**. He was so super funny. For this coming Chanukah, we also have something *additional and new* on tap, too.

In March we had the largest turnout in our shul's history for **Purim. First Megillah**, then a great sit-down dinner in the next room accompanied by our new "Comedy Garage Sale Auction," and then the following day's professionally catered **Purim Seudah**, which we brought to Irvine after having traveled up to L.A. annually for the *Seudah* during our first several years. For those of you longer-time Irvine / O.C. shul-goers who remember the years before we came to Irvine, there was nothing like it. Now the others copy us — and the Orthodox community of Orange County is richer for it, just as it is richer for the role that so many of us played in 2007 and 2008 in launching and building the Irvine Community Mikvah, in launching the Friday Night Shabbat service that actually starts at the proper time, and even in creating a place where Sephardic Jews could daven in their unique rite. Beyond our shul's own direct programs at YIOC, *all of Irvine and Orange County Jewry* is richer for what we have brought to a Jewish community that lacked for nothing but vision.

It was we who brought to Irvine the programming of **Public Community Sedarim** on **both consecutive nights** every Pesach. Unprecedented until we pioneered it, and now copied by others. Again, we had major turnouts each night this year. We are the originals. Likewise, we introduced to Irvine the Shavuot night catered dinner, as a prelude to all-night learning. And, yes, our innovation now is copied by others, though we alone have "Looney knocking on the door."® But our **Omer Count** remains unique, impossible to copy, although the National Council of Young Israel will be promoting our innovation next April to urge all 139 Young Israel shuls around the country, serving more than 25,000 Orthodox-affiliated American Jews, to copy it. Like our annual **DR. STEPHEN BOOK MEMORIAL PASSOVER FUND**, the daily Omer Count also has emerged as a significant fundraiser for us.

And, of course, our extraordinary collection of Torah and General Judaic Learning Offerings. When we announce and launch classes, they run for years and grow. Our weekly **Chumash-and-Rashi** class, now in its seventh year, has grown to attracts 15-20 people. Our **Talmud Class** has grown to empower us to daven afterwards with a Maariv minyan. Our **Sunday Morning Women's Class** often attracts 20 regulars, who come for two hours of solid text-based learning on the highest level. Your devotion to serious adult learning has shaped our shul demographic towards an exceptionally bright, academically oriented, and intellectually curious congregational community of deeply intelligent people who enjoy continued lifelong Judaic learning. Among the regulars who attend our classes are many who drive 45 minutes and more throughout Orange County, just to learn with us.

We have been blessed to "make minyan" more successfully than we ever did before. Yes, every year at this time we experience concern that we need two more men to emerge, to come on a committed regular basis on Shabbat mornings to bolster our numbers, but we have been blessed so often. We likewise have expanded to a wide range of generations at our shul services: people in their 20s and 30s alongside those in their 40s and 50s, and then the Baby Boomers and beyond. And Ellen no longer sits alone across the *mechitzah*.

We are what more than 80 Orange County Jewish households have not been able to find elsewhere: a **warm Boutique Shul, where it is the people who are the shul's "bricks and mortar."** A shul of highly established and accomplished Jews, truly

prominent on a national and even world scale, in the greater public spheres of **business, academia, and the arts**; others beginning life journeys at local campuses like UCI. We are a shul built around **personal growth** — Judaic learning, aspiring to be greater than we thought we could be, to learn more, to know more, to teach and to lead. We are a shul **where people who could not daven a very few years ago now capably lead** Orthodox Shabbat services. Where people who cannot read Hebrew learn that reading so rapidly that we barely use the “Transliterated Prayers” Siddurim we bought a few years ago.

So we are a learning/ teaching **Boutique Shul**. Our viable *minyanim* on Friday evenings, Shabbat mornings, and Sunday mornings contribute to the integrity of our Shul, but our weeknight classes and our Shabbat evening experiences and Shabbat Day classes, **attended in the aggregate by one hundred Jews** who come to us from **all over Orange County every week**, also define us. We are a successful center — *the magnet school* in Orange County — for those who wish to **convert to Judaism** through the **RCC Gold Standard**, assuring their future generations of acceptability, and we are a center for born-Jews of all stripes who wish to learn more Judaically than they ever knew before: **several tracks** of Hebrew language study, **Chumash** and **Rashi**, **Talmud**, Rambam **MISHNEH TORAH**, SHULCHAN ARUKH and **Mishneh B'rurah**. Private pastoral care and one-on-one learning.

Looking ahead, we are so hopeful for so much more, for **the opportunity to touch more lives** in the warm and loving way that we uniquely have evolved. Towards that end, we dramatically upgraded our websites [www.yioc.org and www.rabbidov.com] and made it possible, for the first time, for you to pay shul bills and donations directly on-line. *Again, like last year*, we are *not* raising membership fees. **Last year's rates remain the same.** **And we offer so much at the best rates** in town. A nice thought to contemplate.

But we will not end the letter yet, because there are two more recent topics to address, each highlighting what we uniquely bring to our community beyond the obvious. We sit here comfortably in Orange County with Israel on the cusp of continued war and attrition. And we are a very deeply passionate group. We are unabashed, not defensive or even hesitant, but boldly assertive in Israel's defense. In the past two years alone, the sons of five **YIOC** families have made *aliyah* and presently are in *Tzahal*, defending the homeland, searching for and destroying tunnels of terror, performing heroic national service for the Jewish People. We know them. We know their families. We know their hearts. We know their souls. And we could not be prouder of them or to know we played a role in their evolutions.

Israel takes a beating in the world press, but we long ago figured that one out, and we now are inured to the slander. Alone among national congregational bodies of all denominations, including Orthodoxy, Young Israel takes an unapologetic stand that Israel's claim to settle Jewish communities in Judea and Samaria is a right that is undeniable and, frankly, non-negotiable. Palestine is a city in Texas, not a place in Judea and Samaria. That land legitimately belongs to the Jewish People, won in a defensive war that Israel desperately sought to avoid. We do not make apologies for Jews living in and building new communities there — and certainly no apologies for Jews expanding Jewish life in East Jerusalem. If that annoys some people, we do not apologize for living.

And so, we recite a prayer every Shabbat morning of the year for the State of Israel, the first flowering of our Redemption, and a second prayer for *Tzahal*, and a third prayer beseeching

G-d to bless and watch over the armed forces of the United States of America who defend freedom throughout the world. That is an integral part of our congregational shul identity.

And one more word, a matter of great pride. Many years ago, the free-market economist (and 1976 Nobel-Prize winning MOT) Milton Friedman explained why he advocated so many ideas that were not “in synch” with the times, as during the 1960s at the height of the Lyndon Johnson Years and LBJ’s “Great Society” agenda. Friedman wrote these words:

“What, then, is the role of books [that advance ideas that are unpopular in a present milieu]? Twofold, in my opinion. First, to provide subject matter for bull sessions. As we wrote in the Preface to *FREE TO CHOOSE*: ‘The only person who can truly persuade you is yourself. You must turn the issues over in your mind at leisure, consider the many arguments, let them simmer, and after a long time turn your preferences into convictions.’

“Second, and more basic, to keep options open until circumstances make change necessary. There is enormous inertia — a tyranny of the status quo — in private and especially governmental arrangements. Only a crisis — actual or perceived — produces real change. When that crisis occurs, the actions that are taken depend on the ideas that are lying around. That, I believe, is our basic function: to develop alternatives to existing policies, to keep them alive and available until the politically impossible becomes politically inevitable.”

Milton Friedman, *CAPITALISM AND FREEDOM*, 1982 Preface, reprinted in 40th Anniversary Ed. (U. of Chic. Press, 2002), at xiv.

In recent weeks, we have beheld yet another result emerge from the paradigm shift that we initiated and worked hard to integrate into Irvine and Orange County, dating back nine years. We carried it through into our shul’s founding Mission Statement: that this Jewish community cannot grow but, rather, forever will wither and flounder in suspended stasis until an *unequivocally Orthodox* Day School is launched *right here* as the imperative alternative to a school where boys need not wear yarmulkas and where students graduate after twelve years knowing less Judaism than when they began. We absorbed *enormous* contumely and criticism, and we were assaulted verbally *and physically* with the worst of vows to drive us out of town. We stood our ground. We did not falter. And, today, those at the fore who *led the assault* find themselves at the forefront of launching an Orthodox Day School in Irvine. When crises occur, the reparative actions that are taken depend on the ideas lying around. The crisis demanded action, and we kept the ideas alive, available, and inevitable. Through time and perseverance, we changed a community’s paradigm and way of thinking. And, as a fitting adjunct, we now also are beginning to consult privately with the other school, too — at *their* request and invitation — to share our vision for them.

That, too, is the power of our Shul Without a Building (Yet). To be a voice of conscience and to stand for what is right — not because it is popular but because it is right. So, please, kindly support our shul by renewing your membership dues at this time. Thank you so very much.

Rabbi Dov Fischer
RAV, YOUNG ISRAEL OF ORANGE COUNTY
5319 University Drive (# 122)
Irvine, CA 92612
(949) 551-1515 (Rabbi's Office)
ravesq@cox.net