

**Reflections on the arson at Beth Israel Congregation in Jackson, MS**  
**January 12, 2026**

The images of the charred remains of Beth Israel in Mississippi stir up the most tender places in us, evoking painful memories of synagogues, Torah scrolls, and sacred Jewish texts burnt and ravaged throughout history. This synagogue in particular is reliving a traumatic experience from decades ago. Synagogues are not just places to pray but are respites in times of danger, places to heal in times of pain.

Antisemitism will endure as long as the U.S. as the administration centers xenophobia and Christian nationalism in its policies and discourse. Jews are less safe when the U.S. government is abducting our neighbors, eroding international law, starting new wars, and funding the ongoing genocide in Gaza. We are less safe when anyone is experiencing violence and discrimination.

We yearn for safety. And, we know that safety is a felt sense that can only be gained through spiritual work, emotional health, and relationships of interdependence and solidarity where we live.

The legacy of Beth Israel's brave leadership, including Rabbi Dr. Perry Nussbaum z'l, acting in solidarity with Black neighbors for civil rights, is a shining beacon teaching that the Torah's guidance is best lived through bravely fighting for all people's rights to dignity and freedom.