

Bangor shul celebrates 100th year

Beth Israel rededicates synagogue at ceremony

By Riva Bernian
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With the sounding of the shofar, or ram's horn, Sunday night, Congregation Beth Israel in Bangor signaled the beginning of a yearlong celebration to mark its 100 years of existence and to usher in its second century.

The synagogue, founded by a band of 17 European immigrants in a house on May Street in 1888, has existed in its present building on York Street for 75 years. The congregation was welcomed by both Rabbi Joseph P. Schonberger and by Norman Minsky, current president of the congregation.

Keynote speaker for the rededication was Rabbi Harold S. Kushner of Natick, Mass., recognized by Jew and non-Jew alike for his two best-selling books, "When Bad Things Happen to Good People" and "When All You've Ever Wanted Isn't Enough."

Recalling the pioneers of the synagogue, Kushner remarked that it is not easy to be the child of a pioneer -- to have the obligation but not the vision. He cited the many changes in the community, especially the increased technology available since the synagogue was founded.

He said the plague of the 20th century is not AIDS but loneliness, and that the cure for loneliness is a sense of community, which can be found in the synagogue and in a belief in God.

Kushner said it is necessary to recover a sense of reverence, a grounding for a sense of morality. He said principles of right and wrong are built into the universe, and that things may be legal but wrong.

"You are not the boss of the world," he told the audience. "That is the good news and the



THE TORAHS, or holy scrolls, of Congregation Beth Israel are carried to the al-

bad news." Man need not feel responsible for the world, he said. He could place his faith in a higher being.

He said the essence of prayer is doing it together. He reminded the audience that the prayers have been the same for thousands of years, but when the prayers are translated into a language that the reader understands, something is lost and the sense of unity is diluted.

"Liturgy unites; theology divides," he quoted from one philosopher. The individual needs to connect with other people, he said. Saying the prayers together creates a moment of holiness, and restores the feeling of reverence which had been lost when man saw the marvels he could create through technology.

"There is a sense of balance and justice built into the human soul," he continued. "God makes demands" and we need to have moral

tar during rededication ceremonies. (NEWS Photo by Marc Blanchette)

demands made of us. What man gets from religion, he said, is a sense that we count, and that God cares. Relying on oneself alone results in emptiness within. God offers forgiveness and renews strength, he said. Death need not be the end. Many human beings are not afraid of dying, he said. They are afraid of not having lived.

In order not to fear death, he cited three things that had been suggested by a wise man: plant a tree, have a child, and write a book. He said those things need not be taken literally. He said that the individual should invest his time in things that will live on after he is gone.

He referred to the plaque listing deceased members of the congregation, which was a reminder of their existence and continuing influence in the community.

"Man can handle mortality," he said. "It's disappearance he can't handle."