

**publisher's notebook**

# A Mighty Oak Has Fallen!

The majestic and spacious sanctuary of Southfield's Congregation Shaarey Zedek has been the setting for some of the Detroit Jewish community's most memorable occasions. Framed by its soaring ark and stained glass windows, brides have been united with grooms, babies have received their Hebrew names, b'nai mitzvah have chanted their haftorah portions, milestone birthdays have been celebrated, rallies in support of Israel and Soviet Jewry have been staged, and leaders have been eulogized.



**Arthur M. Horwitz**

But none of those occasions compared to the tragedy that several hundred attendees witnessed on Feb. 12, 1966, when a brilliant but mentally unstable congregant utilized a gun he had easily purchased in Toledo to fatally shoot the revered Rabbi Morris Adler. Then, the assailant took his own life with a bullet from the same weapon and inflicted emotional pain and scars that still haunt the congregation and the community.

Fifty years ago, there were no grief counselors or trained teams of psychologists to tend to the traumatized eyewitnesses and others, as Rabbi Adler's life slowly slipped away at Sinai Hospital. Meanwhile, Rabbi Adler's assistant, Rabbi Irwin Groner, was thrust into the difficult role of leader, healer and consoler. Today, 90-year-old men and women still shed tears of shock and pain alongside their children as they recall Rabbi Adler, his wife, Goldie, and the pandemonium in the sanctuary that Shabbat morning.

The bullet killed, but the wounds it left on others have not healed.

Rabbi Adler was an iconic figure whose

wisdom, wit, teachings and passion for civil rights attracted national attention and admirers from across the religious, political and socio-economic spectrum. To this day, those who gathered within and around Shaarey Zedek to honor his memory were part of the largest funeral in Jewish Detroit's history.

For Congregation Shaarey Zedek, there are physical reminders of Rabbi Adler's impact and presence. One of the social halls bears his name, and his bust is displayed adjacent to the synagogue chapel. For some, the building itself is a daily reminder of the rabbi's vision — and persistence — in championing the congregation's move from Detroit to Southfield. His writings and prayers are part of the congregation's liturgy. And he is remembered on the anniversary of his passing.

However, the Jewish community as a whole has done little to remember Rabbi Adler and build upon his legacy. In writing about Rabbi Adler after his passing, *Jewish News* publisher and editor Philip Slomovitz offered the following:

*"A mighty oak has fallen! The mourners are in all ranks, among all faiths, and tears flow like water over the passing of a giant in our midst ... The entire community has lost a dedicated leader. Our Negro neighbors lost their best friend, the most consistent advocate of their just rights. The labor movement lost a champion ..."*

*"Now, if we wish to truly honor his memory, we must carry on where he had left off, we must rededicate ourselves to the advancement of the highest Jewish cultural goals, we must raise the educational standards of our*

*schools, we must support every effort to assure racial equality and the best living standards for those who labor for their livelihoods. And we must never forget that we are obligated to be vigilant in the battle against intolerance, to assist in Israel's up building, to strengthen the movements that had given birth to Israel and whose goals remain the defense of Israel ..."*

*"Rabbi Adler's name will not be forgotten; neither will his teachings be ignored. He pleaded for knowledge, and we shall gather new strength to provide it ..." — March 18, 1966.*

Shaarey Zedek is planning a gathering later this year to further honor and remember Rabbi Adler. The Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Detroit, the Jewish Community Relations Council, the Michigan Board of Rabbis, the United Auto Workers and interfaith groups throughout the Detroit area should be partners in this initiative. It would also provide the greater community an opportunity to celebrate Rabbi Adler's life and — 50 years later — join with Shaarey Zedek in the ongoing process of healing.

We encourage you to visit [www.djnfoundation.org](http://www.djnfoundation.org) where a special, interactive feature section about Rabbi Adler has been created within its William Davidson Digital Archive of Jewish Detroit History. In addition to a compilation of selected stories from the pages of the *Detroit Jewish News*, the section contains video and audio clips and written recollections about Rabbi Adler from community members. It also provides you with an opportunity to add your own written, audio or video recollections that will become a part of the permanent archive. ✳

For more on Rabbi Adler, see page 10.

**editorial** continued from page 5

supported the bipartisan-backed BDS provisions of the new trade law. The law also features legal safeguards for U.S. companies doing business in Israel.

**STAYING FOCUSED**

Israeli settlements remain a political lightning rod. The U.S. Congress as well as more than 20 state legislatures are weighing bills that would curb the BDS effect. Many states — Florida, Illinois, Ohio and South Carolina among them — have sought to extend protections to the settlements although Washington's support clearly carries more impact. In Michigan, some legislators are reviewing language used in other states and consulting with knowledgeable sources in an effort to determine if similar legisla-

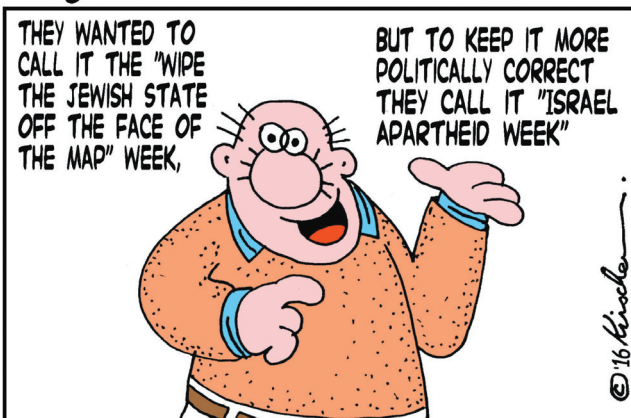
tion should be introduced in Lansing, the Jewish Community Relations Council of Metropolitan Detroit told the *JN*.

We should acknowledge President Obama for staunchly standing with Israel and placing America "firmly on record opposing BDS and supporting enhanced commercial ties between the United States and Israel," as AIPAC put it.

But we should also take the leader of the Free World to task for not vigorously stating it's the Palestinians, under Mahmoud

Abbas' faltered leadership, who have spurned the best way forward: direct bilateral negotiations to resolve the bitter standoff over the West Bank. ✳

**Dry Bones**



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