In 2018, the Parliament of Canada unanimously passed Bill S-232, the Canadian Jewish Heritage Month Act, designating the month of May to recognize the contributions Jewish Canadians have made to Canada's social, economic, political, and cultural mosaic.

From 2018 until just a few weeks ago, Canadian Jewish Heritage Month had never been formally celebrated in our provincial capital. It's not that moments of Jewish communal significance are ignored in Victoria. Every April we solemnly gather for Yom HaShoah. Every January there is official recognition of International Holocaust Remembrance Day. Since October 7, 2023, political leaders of all parties and at all levels have joined us to mourn the murders and recall the horror of those atrocities.

Which is why author and historian Dara Horn's titled her 2021 book, *People Love Dead Jews*. Horn makes the painful observation that for many outside the Jewish community, engagement with the Jewish people has focused more on commemorating Jewish deaths than respecting the lives and culture of the living Jewish community.

Since October 7 and the unprecedented rise in antisemitism in Canada and around the world, so much of our own Jewish communal life has also focused more on Jewish OY than Jewish JOY.

On May 27, I was proud to lead a delegation of Temple Sholom members and Jewish community leaders for the first official public celebration of Jewish Heritage Month in our provincial capital. In partnership with BC's Minister of Public Safety and Solicitor General, Nina Krieger, and at the invitation of The Honourable Raj Chouhan, Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia, we publicly celebrated our people, culture, heritage, and faith with food, music, and remarks from community leaders and dignitaries.

What we did in Victoria is a model for what we have been trying to do this past year at Temple Sholom: to celebrate how Jewish Canadians live, not only speak about how Jews have died or been targeted.

We will always mourn our dead. We will always advocate for our community and defend our people and institutions against hatred. We must.

But Judaism is not sustained by fear alone. It is sustained by Shabbat dinners filled with laughter, children marching with stuffy Torahs and getting raisins every Saturday in our sanctuary, teenagers returning from BBYO events inspired and proud, seniors gathering in friendship lunch and conversation, acts of learning, justice, kindness, creativity, and community.

At Temple Sholom, celebrating Jewish joy is not a distraction from the challenges we face. It is our response to them. To live proudly, publicly, and joyfully as Jews remains one of the most powerful statements we can make about who we are and the future we are determined to build.

As we enter the summer and prepare for the year ahead, may each of us commit not only to defending Jewish life, but to deepening it. Come to services. Gather for Shabbat. Support

Jewish learning. Send your children to camp. Volunteer. Celebrate. Bring your full self into Jewish community. In a moment when so much seeks to define Jews by tragedy, let us define ourselves by the beauty, resilience, wisdom, and joy of Jewish life itself.

L’chaim! To Life!