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## Yokosuka/Ikego Communitites Celebrate Holiday Season



Photos by Taylor Ardito, James Kimber, Tetsuya Morita, and  
MC2 Conner Houghtaling, CFAY Public Affairs



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# AROUND CFAY



## Chapel of Hope Lights the Menorah

**Story by Garrett Cole, photo by Taylor Ardito,  
CFAY Public Affairs**

In September 2023, Commander, Fleet Activities Yokosuka welcomed Chaplain Alex Hamilton as the new Jewish Chaplain, marking the first time in over three decades that the base had a rabbi stationed at its Chapel of Hope. This historic moment fills a spiritual void and breathes life into the Jewish community on the base.

Hamilton, who also serves as a staff chaplain, understands the significance of his role. "I think it's important to be here because I think every single service member, family, dependent, contractor, and civilian government employee has the ability to worship how they want, as in our constitution," he emphasizes. The absence of nearby synagogues makes CFAY's Chapel of Hope a vital place for the Jewish community, a fact not lost on Rabbi Hamilton.

"For me, my goal is to make sure that this community is really a community," he states passionately. "It's not just me; it's everyone here. I want it to be a collaborative effort where people come together to make this Jewish community what they want, and I just want to be a tool to facilitate that."

Research supports the positive impact of spiritual communities on mental health, and Hamilton is determined to provide this support. "Studies show that people have better mental health if they are steeped in their spiritual community," he explains. "It feels good to have a place that you can call your own, and the more people pitch in, the more they feel like it's their own."

The excitement in the community is palpable. With Hamilton's arrival, a blank canvas awaits them. "There's so much potential,

and the people in the community that are here are so excited," he remarks. "There's really no telling what we can do, and I hope that more people can find their way to the Jewish community."

One way Hamilton and the community reach out is by celebrating Chanukah. They hosted a public event to showcase their pride and the spirit of Chanukah. When asked about the event's impact on service members stationed overseas in Japan, Hamilton responded, "Holidays help with homesickness. It allows for coming together and connecting with families by celebrating the same things and participating in the same traditions, even if the families are thousands of miles away."

Reflecting on the new Jewish Chaplain's impact, Commander Fleet Activities Yokosuka Capt. Les Sobol said, "It provides the Jewish community on CFAY with their own faith leader. He helps build stronger relationships within the community. I think it is important for them [Jewish community] to have someone from their own community represent them." Capt. Sobol praised Hamilton's dedication, stating, "He hit the ground running, he has proven to be an asset to the CFAY team and the community. Alex is grateful to be here and part of the team. He cares about what he does, and it shows through his great work."

Command Chaplain, Cmdr. David Kim, expressed his enthusiasm about the event, saying, "It was great to see the [Jewish] community come out of the woodwork and come together. Seeing everyone out here tonight is encouraging." He noted the positive impact of having Hamilton, stating, "Having Chaplain Hamilton here has given the Jewish community someone to help organize and come together. It is great to see what he has been doing and seeing the community grow."

Hamilton's arrival at CFAY marks a turning point for the base's Jewish community. With his passion, dedication, and collaborative approach, he is revitalizing the community's spiritual life and creating a welcoming space for all to celebrate their faith and traditions. In his tenure, Hamilton aimed to ensure that everyone on the base could worship freely, fostering a sense of unity and belonging among the Jewish community at Commander Fleet Activities Yokosuka.

For more than 75 years, CFAY has provided, maintained, and operated base facilities and services in support of the U.S. 7th Fleet's forward-deployed naval forces, tenant commands, and thousands of military and civilian personnel and their families.

