

THE ALEPH TIMES MONTHLY UPDATE

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Aleph welcomes Twelve-step Program meetings to building

In addition to advocating for Jewish prisoners while they serve out their sentence, The Aleph Institute also works to help the incarcerated rebuild their lives once they finish their time behind bars. Part of the struggle for many people released from prison is dealing with substance addiction and abuse in the outside world. To assist people fighting this battle, Aleph has opened its doors to daily meetings for Pittsburgh groups employing the Twelve-step program.

The Twelve-step method is a program invented by Alcoholics Anonymous in 1939, through which those combating addiction learn and implement twelve steps to recovery. Over time, Twelve-step methods have been adopted to address a wide range of substance-abuse and dependency problems. According to Wikipedia, over 200 self-help organizations—often known as fellowships—with a worldwide membership of millions—now employ Twelve-step principles for recovery.



Pittsburgh Twelve-step program groups needed a place to hold their meetings after a recent spate of bomb threats at the University of Pittsburgh disrupted gatherings at their former Oakland meeting location. The bomb threats, which began on March 14 and continued almost daily through April 21, led to security changes under which only people with a Pitt ID card could enter University buildings. As a result, non-Pitt affiliated Twelve-step participants were left out in the cold. This hindrance to the functioning of the programs led them to seek elsewhere for their meetings. They found that new home at Aleph.

Aleph now opens at the earlier time of 7 a.m. to accommodate the groups.

Mission Statement

The Aleph Institute is a not-for profit Jewish religious, educational, and humanitarian organization serving the Jewish community. We offer a multitude of services to confined Jewish men and women and their families, focused on the premise that "no one is forgotten" and that "no one is alone."

Quick Links

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"It's our privilege to be able to help the community and provide these services," Aleph Executive Director, Rabbi Moshe Mayir Vogel said.

[Profile: Jon Pushinsky, Aleph Board Member](#)



Growing up during the Civil Rights Era, Jon Pushinsky's parents made it a point to teach their son the importance of civil liberties and equality.

"I grew up in a household where civil rights and civil liberties were important values taught by my parents to me and my siblings," Pushinsky said. "During the Civil Rights Movement, I recall my parents' positive reaction when MLK was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. They taught me people of all races should be treated equally."

Today, Pushinsky has turned protecting those values learned in childhood into his life's mission as an independently practicing civil rights attorney in Pittsburgh.

Pushinsky is a member of The Aleph Institute's Executive Board.

"I feel connected to Aleph's mission. Its work is linked to my interest in civil rights," Pushinsky said.

He first became acquainted with Aleph in 1998 while representing plaintiffs in a lawsuit challenging a Pennsylvania prison's refusal to provide inmates kosher food.

Pushinsky is well-recognized in the legal field. In 1991, he was awarded the American Civil Liberties Union of Pennsylvania's Annual Civil Liberties Award. In 1993, the governor of Pennsylvania nominated Pushinsky as an appointee to serve as judge on one of the state's appellate courts.

Outside of legal work, Jon enjoys riding bicycles and reading.

"I read anything I can get my hand on. I always carry a book with me," he said.

[Volunteer Profile: Brian Cynamon](#)



Somehow between his duties as a *gabi* for two Pittsburgh congregations, volunteering with Boy Scout Troop 109, practicing real estate, serving as a notary, providing transportation services, and proctoring SAT and AP tests, Squirrel Hill resident Brian Cynamon finds the time to volunteer with Aleph.

"I felt that I had the time and that it's the right thing to do," Cynamon said.

A volunteer with Aleph for two and half years, Cynamon visits Jewish inmates in Pennsylvania prisons, engaging them in conversations about Torah.

"I feel that I get a very good rapport with the people I see all the time," he said. "The people [in prison] for the most part aren't scary. And most of them are reasonably well-educated."

Prior to volunteering with Aleph, Cynamon, now retired, worked in the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare for over 35 years.

He said Aleph is something of a continuation of his previous career—in both positions he has provided support for those facing difficult situations.

Cynamon believes that his relationship with the prisoners he visits isn't a one-way deal.

"I think I get back just as much as I give them," Cynamon said. "I get a good feeling from doing this."