

New photography exhibit examines faith during the pandemic

NEWTON, MA, Wednesday, April 7, 2021 — How does one worship alone? How have people of different religions embraced their faith traditions during the pandemic? How have sacred texts and rituals provided comfort in these times of isolation?

[Hebrew College](#) is tackling these questions in a pandemic-inspired [photography show](#) entitled “Faith in Isolation Expressed,” which can be viewed in-person by appointment from April 12 through June 6, 2021.

“All religions have beautiful things to share with one another. I want to show how different religious practitioners who were isolated from their communities were strengthened by their faith, revealing the core values of their inherent purpose,” said Beacon Hill photographer and teacher Brenda Bancel, who is curating the show. “I want to show how they embraced this time with grit and grace.”

This is the first exhibit of the new Hebrew College Arts initiative, and the first in-person public event at Hebrew College since the start of the pandemic. The Hebrew College Arts Initiative, launched last year, provides an outlet for fostering love of Torah, social justice, pluralism, and creativity through visual art. It is supported by Combined Jewish Philanthropies of Greater Boston’s [Arts and Culture Initiative](#).

The exhibit shows how people around the world turned to sacred texts and rituals to express their pain, hope, and compassion during this unprecedented time. Images range from “Before the Pandemic with the Western Wall” and “Mecca with the Hajj,” to St. Peter’s square with masks, barriers, and emptiness. There are parking lots where people have come together for prayer; a memorial of white flags; Passover zooms; church groups feeding the hungry; outdoor bat mitzvahs; and funerals in empty funeral homes.

Bancel, who is committed to using photography to bring awareness to important social issues, hopes the new show will be a “testament of our resilience rooted in faith.” After a career in advertising, she studied at the New England School of Photography and Harvard Divinity School, and founded the TAKE 5 Foundation, focused on instilling children with a sense of creativity, hard work, and success.

As part of the program, Hebrew College is organizing [“Faith in Isolation: A Multifaith Panel Discussion,”](#) a virtual panel on April 18 with leaders from the Jewish, Christian, and Muslim traditions, who will respond to the exhibit and explore how they and their communities have expressed their spiritual commitments during the pandemic—through prayer, meditation, study, and acts of service and advocacy.

“This thoughtful and evocative exhibit provides us with a much-needed context to process all that we have experienced over the past year—loneliness, loss, gratitude, and hope,” said Rabbi Or Rose, director of the [Miller Center for Interreligious Learning & Leadership of Hebrew College](#); “Our panel discussion and other programming will allow for powerful sharing across traditions.”

“Where do we look for inner strength to move forward? The light that shines through is how we approach the ever-changing mysteries,” said Deb Feinstein, Hebrew College Board of Trustees member and founding chair of the Arts Committee. “Brenda confronts these questions and doubts with honesty and care, providing us with hope in this powerful photographic journalistic exhibition.”

Hebrew College is an innovative national institute for Jewish learning and leadership based in Newton, Massachusetts. We are dedicated to Jewish literacy, creativity, and community, and a world of dignity and compassion for all. Our students are future rabbis, cantors, and educators, and people at every stage of life who love to learn. Together, we are infusing Jewish life with substance, spirit, beauty, imagination, and a sense of purpose. Learn more at <https://hebrewcollege.edu/>.