

Erev Rosh Hashanah
President Remarks
9.25.22

Shana Tova!

Sadly, just two weeks ago, Isabel Samfield, the last living member of Judea Reform's founders, passed away.

Isabel was an incredible woman just shy of 97 years old who lived her Jewish values through every step of her life despite the many obstacles she faced. As a freshman at University of Texas, Isabel and other young women organized a group called Hillel Independent Organization for Jewish students. This is where she met her beloved Max. She was passionate about music from age four and shared her talents with the many synagogues she joined as a child and then later as she and Max traversed across the country until they settled in Durham. It is here where she made her home, raised her family and turned her passion for music into her profession.

Isabel and Max, and a handful of local Jewish families dreamed of a Reform Congregation for the Durham and Chapel Hill area. In 1961 these visionaries got to work, spread the word, hosted services and meetings in their

basements and planted the foundation from which our sacred community grew. By 1971, just a decade later, Judea Reform boasted 100 families and dedicated its own synagogue building, down the hill, on Cornwallis Road. Back then, High Holy Day services were held at the Community Church of Chapel Hill.

Today, with just over 600 families, Judea Reform is the largest reform congregation in the Triangle and our High Holy Days are held here in the Levin Social Hall named in memory of the mothers of fellow founders, Charlotte and Dick Levin. **All that we are and all that we do rests on the shoulders of those like the Samfields and the Levins who had the vision to build a Jewish community in a relatively small town in the South.**

Starting in Texas and all the way to North Carolina Isabel brought Jewish people and Jewish communities together. How beautiful that she remained in the community she was integral in building until her death. Rabbi Friedman will be leading her Memorial Service, here at Judea, on October 16th.

Today is bittersweet. It is so sweet that we are finally gathered together in our beit mikdash (sanctuary) welcoming 5783. Yet bitter because we gather together, for the first time in our history, without a single founding

member of this sacred community. Our founder's legacy is now entirely in our hands and it is up to us to sustain Judea Reform for ourselves, our children, our grandchildren and the generations that follow. Although gone, founder's like Isabel will never be forgotten because they are the architects and builders of our sacred community. Now we are charged with maintaining and growing what our founders envisioned and created - a reform congregation that provides the framework for each of our members to live their Jewish values. One of the most important prayers in our liturgy is the V'ahavta; from the books of Deuteronomy and Numbers; it teaches us how to love God. **How to live Jewishly.**

“You shall love Adonai your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might. Take to heart these instructions with which I charge you this day. Impress them upon your children. Recite them when you stay at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you get up. Bind them as a sign on your hand and let them serve as a symbol on your forehead; inscribe them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates....”

While we read this prayer so often, Do we hear it? Do we live it? Can we do more?

As an institution, we live our Jewish values through social action, civic engagement, study and community. When you arrived this evening, along with your program, you received another handout which maps to the many ways you can engage with your fellow congregants at Judea Reform. It will also be emailed after the HHD's. I invite you to select one of the Jewish values I listed on the handout – *Tzedek* - Social Justice and Social Action, *Limud* - study, *G'milut Hasadim* - Acts of Loving Kindness, *T'fillah* - Prayer and Worship and *K'hillah* - Community, and pick an engagement opportunity. For example, join Rabbi Soffer as he leads a class in taking a closer look at siblings in the bible, or get involved with one of the many initiatives led by our Social Action Committee such as the Get Out The Vote effort - Souls to the Polls. Join Rabbi Soffer and Zemer Allan at Saturday Community Shabbats or get to know your fellow members at the new member meet and greets and wine and cheese havdalah.

I hope you will consider this handout as my invitation to dig deeper this year, try something new, engage in a way that you have not before. Our goal at Judea Reform is to provide everyone the place and the space to enhance their own Jewish identity and live their Jewish values. These programs and the many more which are in the planning stages are a great way to do it!

Because your comfort is so important to us, we will continue to offer both in person and online opportunities. While we are eager to welcome you back into our building we respect your pace.

Isabel inspires me. And I hope she inspires you too.

Isabel was a community founder and a community builder. Every step of her life she lived her Jewish values by engaging in community; Isabel was responsible for all of JRC's music for shabbat worship AND High Holiday's long before we had a cantor core or Allan Friedman. She was a regular participant and guest conductor of the Triangle Jewish Chorale and she was an early member of our L'dor V'dor society continuing to support Judea Reform with an afterlife bequest from her estate. And then finally, when she needed to rest on what she built, had the grace to let us support her through our Caring Community.

With Isabel and all of the other founders gone, **the responsibility of maintaining this sacred community feels even more important. Let's do that together.** If we have not yet met, give me a call or introduce yourself when you see me around the building. I am eager to be in community with each of you and I'm always up for a chat.

And this year, when you dip your apple into your honey, maybe dip twice. **The first to mark the sweetness of**

**your own Jewish journey in the upcoming year and
the second in loving memory of Isabel and the legacy
she and all of our founders entrusted to us.**