

## **President's High Holy Day Remarks**

It is such an honor to for me to greet you on the eve of a new year.

*As you are getting into the spirit of these holy days and opening your hearts and minds to the sacred ideas in our texts, please know we have a team of professionals and volunteers here to ensure a welcoming & hospitable experience. They each deserve our deepest appreciation for their work to make these celebrations possible & SO special. We also have a team of experts and volunteers who are taking appropriate steps to uphold the Jewish value of safety & security. Everyone here can play a part ...demonstrate the warmth of our congregation by greeting people, even those you do not know, with a smile and good wishes. Also, wearing your nametags helps make this a warm and safe community as well.*

*It is important that we are aware of our space in these moments too:*

*You can find restrooms in back hallway before you reach the Monsein Community Court and there is an All Gender restroom available near the rabbi's study. Please also note where your nearest exits are in the event we need to leave swiftly.*

Now...changing gears a bit... to what I REALLY want to talk about...

Last year I stood before you incredibly proud of this congregation and the amazing leaders who helped sustain us through our challenges of 2018. I also stood here a bit unsettled about the year ahead hoping for some healing for our community, praying for peace in our hearts and minds, and I was anxiously anticipating my first full year as president of Judea Reform Congregation.

I stand here tonight again so proud, but this year it feels different! Tonight, I am filled with joy, excitement and gratitude. But what I feel most is optimism. We are no longer in YET another interim year, we are now in a year of transition. I am so inspired by our new rabbi, the partnership we are creating and the impact I see him having already! And with his energy & enthusiasm **it is exciting for me to think about what is to come for Judea Reform Congregation, what's in store for our community!**

A few weeks ago, I had the honor to sit amongst most of our past presidents. It was a special opportunity to share some important congregational history with Rabbi Soffer during his onboarding. In that room we had **50 years of Judea Reform history!** Stories were shared about what the congregation was like when they served as president – there were smiles, and nods and even some laughter. One

theme was clear from each of them – it was all about what was possible in building this community. There was so much passion and pride in that room.

In a recent NYTimes Opinion piece, Bari Weiss, wrote that we must be focused on the long game, that to stand up to hate is to affirm who we are as a people. In these times, we must continue to stand up - to protect our values, our history, our families and for those yet to come.

*“In these trying times, our best strategy is to build, without shame, a Judaism and a Jewish people and a Jewish state that are not only safe and resilient but also generative, humane, joyful and life-affirming.”*

So...how do we build? How do WE, Judea Reform Congregation build our community even better and stronger – embracing our diversity and creating a place for each of us to be comfortable and proud.

I say...we commit to growth and to understanding what growth means for each of us and all of us as a community.

Here is what I think it means:

For starters, we can already see that growth means the number of members in our congregation has

increased - in the last 3 months alone we have welcomed members in at least 46 new households; Growing the congregation in this way means lots of other things too:

- It means increased attendance at our programs & the need for more outreach;
- It means people want to be together more and we seek to find more ways for you to engage
- It means increasing demands on our staff and our building
- It means increasing our intentional focus on pastoral care.
- It means increased diversity, differences in perspective and opportunity for dialogue.

But, what else might **growth** mean here at Judea Reform?

- As individuals some may want to grow spiritually. Through Torah and worship we can find ways to deepen our individual perspectives and thoughts about what it means to be Jewish today. Rabbi Soffer brings new ideas & opportunities for us to explore.
- Our commitment to our children must evolve. Our youth are leading the way on so many issues. Here, our youth programming will need to grow –

we can develop a continuum, from our babies through graduation, in a variety of ways: learning, socializing, youth group...

- How about creating deeper community engagement so that we can be in relationships with each other more – through study, music, celebrations, and socially.
- I know this community will continue to further our commitment to social action & justice work. With our feet and our voices we already work toward justice for all people. And, we can grow our partnerships in the larger community and with the Reform Movement to uphold our Brit Olam – our covenant with the world – for immigrant justice, LGBTQ rights, environmental care, civil rights, affordable housing and so much more.

There has always been a tension in Judaism between the particularistic needs of the individual and congregation AND the universal, global needs. It is not either/or... it is both. It is a balance.

I don't profess to have all the answers. We get to figure that out together. As I said last month at our Board Installation service ***Lo Alecha Hamlecha ligmor, lo alecha ligmor. "It is not our responsibility to complete the task, but neither are we free to avoid it."*** But it sure is exciting to think about the future together.

In this new year ahead, as Jews & as members of this congregation, let us join together to continue what our ancestors started – to build this community proudly and celebrate & reaffirm life – that we may all be inscribed in the Book of Life.

*Shanah Tovah U'Metukah!*