

Erev Rosh Hashanah 5784 President's Remarks, Final

Shanah Tovah and Shabbat Shalom

I am so thrilled to serve as President of Judea Reform, because 5784 will be a very exciting year for us with so much to look forward to.

You can feel the energy at our services. Over the past year, our First Fridays and Community Shabbatot have flourished, as evident by your joyous turn out. Our Shabbat 123 program for our youngest congregants is booming, and our congregation is benefiting from the variety of worship times and spaces.

I would like to make special mention of our B'nei Mitzvah services.

Our B'nei Mitzvah students lead services with poise and provide insight and wisdom from their Torah portions. I encourage everyone to attend these services, whether in person or online. They not only show how much our religious school has prepared them, but they allow us to see the future of Reform Judaism. And it looks great.

We will start a search for an assistant rabbi this fall, because our community is growing, and the opportunity for making an impact on our community has never been greater. Most synagogues our size have closer to three clergy members, and despite having many scientists in our community our wonderful Rabbi Soffer will not be cloned. We are very fortunate to have two of our leading lights, Beth Posner and Andrew Geller, heading the search, which means we are guaranteed success, no pressure my friends.

We are sustaining this expanded rabbinic team through our Chazak Chazak, Strength to Strength Campaign. The purpose of this campaign is to invest in rabbinic leadership, establishing long-term funding so everyone who walks through our doors can have a meaningful and lasting connection with a rabbi. Our campaign is going very well. We owe a great deal of appreciation to the Campaign Leaders Ziva Raney and Steve Simon, and their entire team. If you want to know more about the campaign or be involved in the upcoming parlor meetings, please reach out to Ziva or Steve.

Our Director of Youth Education and Family Engagement, Michelle Crosbie, now beginning her second year, is a treasure for this community. The growth of our Religious School could not be overstated – not only in enrollment numbers, but also in the quality of the learning experiences of our students. Most notably, this year she and her team are working tirelessly to expand and enhance our teen education programming. In short, it's a great time to be growing up at Judea Reform.

In terms of our building, our sacred space, I am happy to say that although we will always have capital repairs and work to be done, we are in a great place, literally. We have a new HVAC system, we have fixed the foundation, we have a beautifully redone Prosnitz Patio and Vine Terrace. Enormous kudos go to Ray Jones and Mark Hainline, without whom none of this would have happened. We will all experience the joy of our newest project. In partnership with Jewish for Good, and thanks to the generosity of the Preminger family, we're building an amphitheater within the ravine behind our sanctuary. This amphitheater will allow us to use the beautiful, wooded area to provide a wide variety of outdoor programming including services, weddings, music, and so much more.

Now, allow me to get a little philosophical.

I often think about our synagogue's mission.

There are a number of Hebrew names that are used for referring to a synagogue. It can be a Beit t'filah, a House of Prayer. Certainly, today, there is a lot of prayer occurring here, as there is every Shabbat and major Jewish holiday.

A synagogue can also be a Beit Midrash, a House of Study. Or in Yiddish— Shul, from the word for school. Indeed, there is a lot of studying that goes on here, look to our Sunday religious school, and it was really exciting to be here on the first day of religious school last week, to see so many eager minds, or on Saturdays, when we have our Darchei Mitzvah class, Torah Study, and Talmud Study, or the large number of offerings coming up from our Adult Education Committee under the leadership of Chip Carnathan, including subjects that range from that fount of Jewish intellectual commentary, Mad Magazine to Jewish Rock and Roll to a class on Ecclesiastes and more.

But the Hebrew name that resonates with me the most is one of the oldest for synagogues: that of Beit Keneset, House of Assembly – a place where we gather. Because that is what we do, we assemble, we gather, but more than that we come together. We come together to build kehillah, which means sacred community. We are not just individuals in a room, but we build meaningful, purposeful connections between each other. This is community.

We come together for many reasons.

We come together to eat, After all food is of primary importance in Jewish culture, we enjoy dinner on First Fridays, onegs after Friday night services, lunch after community shabbatot, bagels at Torah Study, grade school dinners, my favorite – sufganiyot at Hanukkah. In fact, if ever there is something happening in our Beit Keneset without food, you can bet it is Yom Kippur.

However, we come together not just to feed our stomach, but also to feed our spirit. Because Tikkun Olam – repairing the world – is not just an abstract concept for us, it is the way that we live our lives, it's how we bring our Judaism to life.

We come together for Social Action, and I want to acknowledge the magnificent work of the Social Action Committee, led by Chip Hughes and Michael Blackman, as they are helping us heal the world. We don't just care about our Judea community, but we care about our greater community. And nothing shows that more than the many ways that we are making the world a better place.

From the Caring Community delivering meals to families experiencing birth, illness, or death, to Meals on Wheels, Habitat for Humanity, our work on Refugee Resettlement, Urban Ministries and so much more. You may have noticed that we now send our Social Action newsletter to the entire congregation so you can both learn about what we are doing and find opportunities where you would like to become involved.

There are so many other activities going on every week. We celebrate together and we mourn together. We k'vetch together and we comfort together. We play mahjong together and we appreciate art together.

This is who we are now, but we're always growing and learning– always asking questions about how we can enhance this wonderful congregation together. That means asking a question – each of us: The question is:

How do you want to connect to our kehillah, our community?

What do you want from your synagogue? How do you want to connect with your fellow congregants? How do you want to enrich your life?

This fall, that is after the HHD. We will be giving you the opportunity to tell us how you want to connect, what activities or projects would you like to engage in, or even, what do you want to know about our different committees.

In the spirit of our kehillah, I ask you to
Build connections to the people and passions that you care about, and
contribute to the vitality of our community.

Tai-ping, Esther and I wish everyone in our community:
Xin Nian Kuai Le

A Zis Gebentsht Yor, A sweet and blessed year.

Gut Yontif