I stand before you today, humbled by the trust this community has placed in me, asking me to be the next senior rabbi of this congregation. And I am extremely grateful to Reb Moshe for so beautifully putting words to that trust yesterday.

Last night Reb Moshe told the story of how he worked to convince me to come and join him 12 years ago. I am glad and honored over those 12 years to have found at TBZ my community, my family, and a place where I can bring my whole self to you as a spiritual leader.

I am overflowing with gratitude to all of you, to the leadership of TBZ and to Reb Moshe, and I am grateful to God to be here, with all of you today.

To Reb Moshe I want to say thank you, for your friendship, for your leadership, for being a visionary and creating this community. I thank you for your trust in me, for letting me be ME, for making me laugh and sometimes cry together with you. You have given me a very precious gift. I remember early in my time here, I kept asking you to define my portfolio. You were a bit hesitant to do this, because clearly defining roles is not your style of rabbinate. Not having much choice, I went with it, and this allowed me to grow beyond one portfolio, beyond being the rabbi of one part of the community or one committee. Your willingness to hold a dynamic of open-ended responsibilities helped me become your partner in leading this precious community. Thank you.

I want to share with you a private practice that I have. Every time I am about to lead services and I wrap myself in my tallit I say the words “Vetaher Libeinu Le’Ovdecha Be’emet” - May my heart be pure, to serve You in truth. And I always stop for a moment in the word truth- be’emet. This, will continue to be my simplest prayer as I move into the next stage of my leadership. I am here to serve, to serve God, the Jewish people, our community, all those who I can reach in my service, in truth, honesty and integrity.

When I was six years old, in Chile, I once dressed up as a rabbi for a birthday costume party. My father, the first Conservative rabbi in Chile, helped choose my costume of a long black skirt and glasses. I wore a tallit and painted a beard on my face. I was a wonderful rabbi, dressed like a 40-year-old man in a black robe. I won the costume competition, and for a long time that was enough and I was very happy.
As a teenager, I knew that I wanted to learn more about Judaism, but I was afraid to admit even to myself that I wanted to become a rabbi. I had never actually seen a woman rabbi and could only imagine the rabbis of my youth. I did not resemble them at all...

And yet, 24 years after that costume party, I was an ordained rabbi, serving as the rabbi of Camp Ramah NOAM, working with the youth movement of the Masorti (Conservative) Movement in Israel. One day at camp, we were planning to stage a Jewish wedding with a group of ninth graders. When one of the counselors asked me to dress as a Masorti rabbi, I smiled and answered, in the full glory of my pink sandals, pink shirt and blue pants - “I AM dressed as a Masorti rabbi.” We all laughed and in that moment I truly realized how different I am from the rabbi I had imagined 24 years earlier.

And now, almost 16 years after being ordained as a rabbi, I stand here as the next spiritual leader of this congregation knowing full well that women in all parts of society still struggle for access to public leadership, for pay equity, and for respectful workplaces. I am proud that TBZ is a place that has never questioned my being a woman rabbi, and I am even prouder that we are raising our children with few doubts about women’s public role in Judaism. But I also recognize that there is still so much work to do around gender equity, both in the Jewish community and in the general society.

As the next Spiritual Leader of TBZ my vision for us is to continue to grow as an independent and inclusive Jewish congregation, with members of all ages committed to each other, to joyful participatory worship, to meaningful Jewish learning, to spiritual growth and acts of social justice.

I look forward to serving all members of the congregation, continuing Reb Moshe’s work while recognizing that I represent a different generation of rabbis, and that I bring with me the lessons of a different background. I aspire to be a leader that recognizes the growing needs of both younger and older members, as well as the needs of people from a variety of backgrounds.

As I look to the future and imagine the next ten years and beyond, I envision how much we can accomplish, realizing the vision for TBZ that we have articulated together. This will be the place we come to nurture a love for Judaism, for Jewish learning, ritual, and prayer; where we come to deepen our commitment to justice and compassion; and a place we come to help each other live lives of meaning and purpose. We are and will be a community of seekers, where meaningful experiences of prayer, justice, activism, loving kindness and learning are rooted in Jewish values and where meaningful education for all ages is part of our daily experience.

Vetaher Libeinu Le’Ovdecha B’Emet - May Our Heart Be Pure to Serve You in Truth
Spiritual Leadership and the Courage of Hope
Yom Kippur 5779
Rabbi Claudia Kreiman
I truly believe that our community at its best has the power to impact the larger Jewish community of Boston and beyond. As we strengthen our own community and practice, the unique aspects of our congregation will spread outwards and we can help redefine what it means to be Jewish in this new and challenging era.

Our rabbis teach us that one should pray only in a house with windows\(^1\). This teaching recognizes that when we come together as a community, we must be careful not to cultivate an inner experience alienated from what is going on outside of the synagogue walls. Often when I stand here in our beautiful sanctuary, I look at the windows and I think of this teaching.

In the book “God in Search of Man” Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel writes “religion declined not because it was refuted, but because it became irrelevant, dull, oppressive, insipid. When faith is completely replaced by creed, worship by discipline, love by habit; when the crisis of today is ignored because of the splendor of the past; when faith becomes an heirloom rather than a living fountain; when religion speaks only in the name of authority rather than with the voice of compassion--its message becomes meaningless.”\(^2\)

We are here today because we believe that religion can be relevant. Elsewhere Heschel writes that if the synagogue is to be relevant, a source of passionate Judaism, it cannot remain the place of moderation, docility and tamed emotions it has become. It must rather be the place where we confront the most profound questions of our existence.\(^3\)

That is the core of everything we do here, and it should always be at the heart of all our endeavors:

When we come to Torah study week after week, or any other Jewish learning to ask questions that are relevant to our lives and delve into teachings that help us find meaning.

When we come to Nishmat Hayyim week after week to meditate and bring awareness to our life striving to be present to life as described by the Psalmist - Every breath praises Yah.

---

\(^1\) Babylonian Talmud, Brachot 34b
\(^2\) God in Search of Man- Opening paragraph
\(^3\) Grateful to B’nai Jeshurun Rabbis, Marcelo Bronstein, Roly Matalon and Felicia Sol for their reflection in these passages in their essay “Jewish Spirituality: Far More than Prayer” [https://www.bj.org/2012/04/jewish-spirituality-far-more-than-prayer/]
When families and children come week after week to Beit Rabban and Mishpachot- Family programming, to struggle joyously with the meaning of raising Jewish children and families in our times.

When we respond to the injustices we face, drawing inspiration from our ancient prophets and bringing old words to life in our activism.

When we come together in joyful prayer, as we seek connection with the Divine we seek connection with our innermost truth so our prayer can guide us in our daily life.

When we care for each other and live out our commitment to Hesed and compassion. When we come together in moments of joy and in moments of pain. When we visit those who are sick and listen to those who need comfort.

The conviction that our tradition, our Torah can wake us up and lift us up to a life of meaning and purpose is the heart of all we do as a community and it is to reconnect to that heart that we return again and again.

Over the years one of the prayers that has inspired me the most in its description of living a meaningful Jewish life is the blessing of Ahava Rabbah, just before the Sh’mah.

In the words of our teacher Rabbi Art Green: “With an abounding love, You love us. Ahavah Rabah may be called the quintessentially Jewish prayer. In boundless love for Israel, God gives the greatest gift imaginable: teachings that will help us to live….We pray that we may have the open and understanding heart to receive these teachings, to make them real by our deeds, and to pass them on to others. This is our response to the love we receive: a commitment to keep learning how to live (bukkey hayyim), to live the life of Torah, and to carry it forward to future generations.⁴

I could not articulate the fundamentals of our work at TBZ better than it is done in the siddur itself:

The blessing of Ahavah Rabah reminds us that the path of love is the search for meaning, deep learning, loving action, commitment to Torah, and love of God.

⁴ Ma’ayan Nigar, weekly shaharit with comments by Rabbi Art Green
“Merciful God, Have compassion upon us. Endow us with understanding and discernment, that we may study Your Torah with devotion. May we heed its words and transmit its precepts; may we follow its instructions and fulfill its teachings in love.”

We have come to this community, in the hopes of finding understanding and discernment in the learning of Torah, finding teachings of Torah that will connect to the compassion that God has for us and to the compassion and love that we share with each other.

By studying and struggling together, by sharing our lives in community, through commitment to finding purpose and meaning in everything we do, we access a Torah that we can love, that we are proud to learn and proud to pass on to our children.

“Enlighten our eyes in Your Torah and make our hearts connect to Your commandments. Grant us singleness of purpose to love and revere You, so that we may never be brought to shame”

Here the Siddur reminds us that the pursuit of Torah must come from a place of Love and from a place of joy.

We seek a Torah that bring light to our eyes, that illuminates the darkness that we encounter and that inspires us to ground our lives in the practices and insights of our heritage.

...and may we never be embarrassed. Because devotion can be embarrassing. But though we may not relish that feeling, we will learn to embrace it. Because to believe in something strongly requires sacrifice, requires paying attention in a way that is provocative. Because devotion means making ourselves and others uncomfortable sometimes.

Because devotion to our Jewish path means remembering that we are here to provoke awe and purpose, to find meaning, to sound a wake up call in times of numbness. We are here to cultivate a sense of gratitude and foster integration. We are here because we can not stop hoping for a better future even when it is dark, very dark out there, because hope lifts us up and because hope itself is a great act of defiance and resistance.

Yom Kippur is a day we celebrate hope. Hope as an act of faith and hope as a practice.

Vetaher Libeinu Le’Ovdecha B’Emet - May Our Heart Be Pure to Serve You in Truth
Spiritual Leadership and the Courage of Hope
Yom Kippur 5779
Rabbi Claudia Kreiman
The greatest challenge of Yom Kippur is that it requires us to have the courage to hope. We are challenged to face ourselves, our friends and families more bare-souled than usual. We are challenged to stand before God’s gates and beg. But more than all, we are challenged to believe that things can be different, that we can be different, that the world can be different. That requires true courage.

In Spanish the word for hope is “esperanza”, which shares the root of the word “wait” – “esperar”. One aspect of hope is the impatience and patience to wait for something to be different. Similarly, in Hebrew the word for hope - tikvah (Like the anthem of Israel: Hatikvah: The Hope). Comes from the root k.v.h, which also means to wait. We wait, we hope.

But hope becomes a practice when you realize that it is not enough to just wait for things to happen... when you transform your waiting into action.

The Unetane Tokef piyut that we are about to sing challenges the notion that hope means just to wait for something better to happen.

\[UT’shuvah, UT’tfilah, UT’z’dakah ma’avirin et ro’a bagezera\]

Return, Prayer, and Justice can avert the severity of the decree.

Through T’shuva, T’filah and Tz’dakah, the liturgy urges us to take responsibility for the hope we have and for the change we can make in our own lives, in the lives of others, in our country and in the entire world. The liturgy reminds us that these holidays are not about miraculous salvations but are rather about taking responsibility and creating meaning for our lives by being full participants in them.

The trust in T’shuva is the hope and belief that we can change, that people can change, that what is, is never the end.

T’filah gives us the possibility to pour out our innermost hopes and sing them out loud.

Tz’dakah gives us hope by knowing that we are committed to building a just society.

My teacher Professor Alice Shalvi, writes: “Teshuva demands honest self-scrutiny and reflection. It is a process between me and my own self. Tefila embodies my relationship with God. Tzedaka regulates
my relationship with my fellow human beings. Together these three elements- the individual, the divine, the societal- constitute our entire existence as believing beings.”

In this time of moral emergency, we come together to provoke awe and find meaning. We come together because we can not stop hoping for a better future even when it is very dark, because hope lifts us up, and because hope is a great act of defiance and resistance.

It is my prayer and blessing for us all that we continue coming together to do these acts of T’shuvah, T’fila and Tzedakah all year round.

Hatima Tova.

---

5 “Beginning Anew” edited by Twersky and Kates.

Vetaher Libeinu Le’Ovdecha B’Emet - May Our Heart Be Pure to Serve You in Truth
Spiritual Leadership and the Courage of Hope
Yom Kippur 5779
Rabbi Claudia Kreiman