



Beth Tikvah B'nai Jeshurun

To the BTBJ Community,

I first entered the BTBJ building as a rabbinical student many years ago. I recall speaking with congregational leaders about positions in the religious school and teaching as part of a Tu B'Shevat Synaplex program on Judaism and the environment. From those early days, to later making the choice to enroll our children in the BTBJ ECC, I never would have thought that I would be writing to you today as the new senior rabbi of this warm, *hamish* and caring community.

I believe that a rabbi is not just a teacher, pastor, or service leader. A good rabbi is also a community organizer and a weaver of relationships. She is someone who understands how to manage spiritual, social, financial, and physical resources so that each member of our community can have access to our kehillah, can experience the joy of our congregation, and can do so with holy purpose and pride.

Growing up in a Jewish neighborhood in Northeast Philadelphia, I was blessed with many models of Jewish communities to learn from. From the Conservative synagogues my family belonged to, to the Reform shuls I used to attend with my friends, I witnessed numerous ways to celebrate and embrace our Jewish identities. And as Jewish families migrated and synagogues closed and merged, I also learned how fragile even the most inspiring communities could be.

As a child I reveled in the way our year was marked by Jewish time. I remember lighting candles with my mother and sister on Friday night and buying new outfits each year for Rosh Hashanah. I remember chopping charoset with a wooden bowl and mezzaluna chopper that had belonged to my great grandmother. And I remember the pride I felt each year as I learned something new to lead during our Passover seders. Judaism was a central part of our daily existence, and I deeply internalized the mitzvot and values that continue to ground and inspire me to make the world a better place. In our home today, my wife, Isabel, and I now strive to instill this same pride in Jewish tradition in our children. We hope they feel the same sense of joy in Jewish time and community, the same desire to be a *mensch*, and the same quest for knowledge and meaning.

My hope is to meet with as many of you as possible in this first year. I invite you to stop by my office, meet me for coffee, or plan a walk together in the Wissahickon. As we begin this next phase at BTBJ together, may we continue to discover new opportunities for Jewish learning, sacred engagement, and increased moments of spiritual connection. And most of all, may we continue to grow together as inheritors of this rich, complex, and beautiful tradition.

Modah ani l'fanecha. I give thanks before you. Thank you to the entire BTBJ community who took such care in determining what you were looking for from your next rabbinic leader. Thank you for showing up and sharing your feedback throughout the search process. And thank you for now instilling your trust in me to lead our kehillah into the future.

I am humbled and I am overjoyed to accept this position. And I look forward to all we will learn, all the ways we will grow, and all that we will accomplish—together.

L'shalom,

Rabbi Roni Handler