

## **Rabbi Fredi Cooper: In Appreciation**



It is hard to believe that it is three years now since we welcomed **Rabbi Fredi Cooper** as our Associate Rabbi for Religious Education. And now, on the second day of *Shavuot*, June 7, 2003, we will have a service of appreciation to her as she leaves the professional staff of our congregation.

Of course, Rabbi Cooper was no stranger in our midst when she assumed her position. She, Heshie, Julie and Emily have been part of our congregational family for over twenty-five years. Both daughters were *Bat Mitzvah* and Confirmed in our Sanctuary. And we have shared many joyous and sad moments in their family lives here at AJ.

But three years ago, there was a major transformation in her role in the congregation. No longer just a congregant, she became a rabbi of the congregation. How appropriate that her first rabbinic position would be here at AJ, for it was at AJ that she found the inspiration to become a rabbi.

It took a great deal of courage and dedication to follow such a major life-changing course. After a successful career as a child psychologist, going back to school, and starting near the beginning, was a major act of commitment and faith. It was not easy. But she excelled. While in rabbinical school, she earned the respect of her fellow students, and her instructors. Her reputation at the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College and in the Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association (RRA) far exceeds the length of time she has been a rabbi. She was honored recently by being elected national secretary of the RRA, less than three years following ordination!

During her three years as our Associate Rabbi, Rabbi Cooper has distinguished herself in every area of congregational service. She has led the development of our religious school to become one of the most successful in the region. She infused the school personality with her personal warmth and love for the children. She has been readily available to parents with sincere concern. Under her leadership, we earned the status

of a United Synagogue "Framework for Excellence" school. The Social Action Track that revolutionized our high school program; *Mishnah Impossible*; AJ Café; *Shabbat B'Yahad*; School *Shabbatonim*; Celia's Sunday Bagels, all became part of our vocabulary of pride at AJ. Under her leadership, the curriculum was restructured and focused, the hours and days of instruction were changed, and the training for *Torah* reading became part of the core studies.

In her role as a rabbi, Rabbi Cooper brought a new voice to the pulpit, and opened *Shabbat* morning teaching to a different perspective that has touched many. She innovated an Adult *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* program, *Rosh Hodesh* women's group, and holiday workshops. Adult education has gained stellar vitality.

In all of this she has worked with Debbie Miner, who will be her successor as director of our religious school, a distinguished group of teachers, and countless devoted volunteers whose ideas, energy and hard work contributed to the success of Rabbi Cooper's innovations.

For me personally, it has been a pleasure and honor to work with Rabbi Cooper. She has been a colleague of distinction in every sense of the word. I value her advice and counsel, and am proud of the work we have done together. She is a woman of uncommon character and courage. Her love of Judaism is an inspiration. Her life is an inspiration.

I will miss her presence in our building, but I know that we will continue to be valued colleagues to each other always.

To paraphrase the prophet Malachi, we can say of Rabbi Cooper that "The *Torah* of truth was on her lips... and we have been blessed to seek its wisdom from her."

I look forward to seeing you on the second day of *Shavuot*, June 7, 2003, when we express our Appreciation to Rabbi Cooper on the festive day which celebrates the Giving of the *Torah*, the foundation of Judaism, and all rabbinic teaching.

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