

A Rabbinic Perspective *By Rabbi Seymour Rosenbloom*

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As the Year Turns



I can't believe it's June, already. It seems like it was just *Rosh Hashanah*! But here we are, another program year at AJ is winding down towards the rest and rejuvenation of summer.

I want to take this opportunity to acknowledge the achievements of **Sherry Bohm** and **Neil Wise** whose devotion to AJ has helped make it the great congregation that it is. In addition, I want to thank **Deb Strauss** for her distinguished service these past two years as president.

Sherry Bohm came to AJ twenty-five years ago to teach in our pre-school. At the time, the school was small; just a few classes and a handful of students. It was strictly a nursery school. Through the years, under Sherry's leadership, the school grew into the pre-eminent Jewish pre-school in the area, with early drop-off and late care for the growing legion of families with two working parents. It grew not only in numbers, but in offerings. Every year, something new was added: a summer camp, the Sinai program for children with special needs, an infant center, and so much more. Programs in Hebrew immersion, dance, music, yoga, and signing were added one by one. We were one of the first, and remain one of the few Jewish pre-schools that are both state licensed and accredited by NAEYC, the National Association for the Education of Young Children.

Sherry's creativity and resourcefulness are legendary. Thousands of young children have grown as individuals and as Jews because of the dedication she gave to our school. And many families were turned on to a more intense Jewish identification because of her dedication to our school.

Beyond any of her professional skills and talents, Sherry's personality and character have left an indelible impression on us all. Sherry is a woman of sterling character, a true *Ayshet Hayil*, "A Woman of Valor." She is personally observant and a member of an Orthodox community. But her dedication to AJ and its members, this congregation affiliated with the Conservative Movement, has been whole-hearted. Sherry always looked for ways to involve Preschool parents in the larger congregation as members. She rejoiced at our triumphs and was genuinely pained by any problems we faced as individuals and as a synagogue.

Sherry shared some of our most intimate moments with us and brought us strength in times of crisis. And we embraced her and her family as they faced crises through the years, particularly the illness and passing of her beloved son Elan. We are all stronger individuals and families, a stronger community, for having had Sherry as a member of the AJ family.

As you know, Sherry is no longer directing the pre-school. But her legacy looms large in the vibrant institution she has built. It permeates every crevice of the building, the curriculum and the activities. They are her creation and reflect her passion for Judaism and for our children.

Generations of children have a stronger foundation in Judaism because of her. We owe her a debt of appreciation and gratitude and wish her and her wonderful family success and blessing in all future endeavors.

Neil Wise came to AJ ten years ago as our *Pirchei* Advisor. He was fresh out of high school and filled with the *ruach* of a real USYer.

Through the years Neil has grown to be a remarkable pied piper for our youth and a man of creativity and energy for the entire synagogue community. Not only has he been our Youth Director, Neil has taught in our religious school and mentored the Social Action track. In the last several years he has become our "go to" person for special events and has added so much spirit to our *Shabbat* and *Havdalah Rockin' Eves*, *Purim*, and *Simchat Torah*.

The Spring Convention of *HaGeshet* Region of USY was a moment of high fulfillment for Neil. In addition to leading the largest contingent of USYers, he saw the chapter and individual members receive award after award. And he saw one of his disciples, **Corey Beck**, elected Regional President. Neil has often told me that USY, under the presidency of **Julie Frisch** and **Laura Steinberg**, was on fire this year. Indeed it has been. And Neil's inspiring leadership is a key ingredient.

I like to say that Neil has earned the degree of MSM, Master of Sacred Mischief! His playful spirit has been a great addition to our congregational activities, adding fun and spirit for members of all ages to everything that he touches.

I am personally grateful to Neil for all of the creative elements he has added to AJ and for his support. I will miss him greatly and wish him well in his new endeavors. AJ will always count him as one of its own, and I know he will always feel at home at AJ.

Deb Strauss has distinguished herself during the last two years as a president whose love for AJ is second to none. Deb has been involved since her older daughter Sarah was an infant. As president of the AJ PTA, chair of numerous committees, officer and volunteer extraordinaire, she was ready to assume the role of president. With her brilliant smile and gentle way, she has encouraged many to get involved, and shared her passion for Judaism and for AJ. She has led by example, being involved in every event, and often, seeming to do the impossible by being in two places at once.

Deb is only the second woman to serve as president in AJ's history, which is now approaching its 150th year. She has set a high standard for all presidents who will continue to lead us in the future. I know Deb's continued involvement in our great congregation will be a blessing for many years to come.

As we conclude this program year of 5767, 2006–2007, and see the special 150th anniversary on the horizon, we are proud of all of our leaders, both volunteer and staff, who play such an important role in fashioning the texture of congregational life. We are grateful to all who have served the congregation well and are confident that their successors will be equally zealous for Judaism and this great congregation. May we go from strength to strength and anticipate a brilliant future serving the Philadelphia Jewish community.

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