

Moving into a New Year

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For someone who likes comfort and stability as much as I do, I've done a remarkable amount of moving as an adult. In the fifteen years since graduating from college, I've lived in 8 homes in 6 cities. Only two of those cities are in the same region; one of those cities--Jerusalem--isn't even in this country. For the first eight of those years, I moved every year or two.

Only in Pittsburgh did I surpass my various longevity records. My first home there, where I lived for three years, was my longest residence since my childhood home, my longest time in one city, and my longest time in a single zipcode. Those records were broken again when I moved to a house in a different neighborhood (but same city and zip code!), where I lived for a whole four years. Instead of comfort and stability, I've had to uproot myself time and again.

Moving is hard and stressful. First there's deciding what you want to take with you, what should stay behind. There's figuring out what to do with the things being left behind and packing the things that are coming. There's making the arrangements for movers and trucks. Moving from one place to another also means finding a new place to live and figuring out where everything will go once it arrives. Depending on the distance, there might be multiple trips back and forth, which is its own headache, or the stress of making sure every last thing gets packed and loaded otherwise it can't come along. Then, there's unpacking, arranging and rearranging, and all the time not being able to find the thing you need until you've finally unpacked the last box.

For me, there's been the added challenge of getting my cats from one home to another across the country without having to take them myself. Good friends have helped. In my move just a few months ago, I also had to figure out how to manage a cross-country road trip with a two-year-old after an unexpected surgery. And then I spent two months looking for the remote to the FireTV Stick, only to find it in? under? the picture box with my ordination certificate---one of dozens of boxes that went straight from my office onto the truck, so there's no reason the remote from my house should have gotten in there.

Moving is hard and stressful, but it can also be an incredible opportunity to begin anew. A new home looks and feels different. Even when the contents are identical, the furniture doesn't fit exactly the same way. Sometimes what works perfectly in one space doesn't make sense in another. With a different layout of walls and windows, the placement of pictures and art has to change. Pieces that are so familiar can become novel when set up differently. Or, on the other hand, they can feel out-of-place and incompatible with the new environment.

For each of my moves, I had to consider what I wanted to keep and what could be discarded. I had to take an accounting of what I had---both what had accompanied me over the years and what I had acquired more recently---and imagine how it would fit into my new home. I'll admit, with some moves I did that more intentionally; with others, I had less time or interest in that sort of reflection while packing. With each move, I definitely brought things that didn't need to come with me. But in unpacking and figuring out where everything goes---that's when I really had to decide what was worth keeping and what needed to go.

Our High Holy Day season follows a similar trajectory to a move. For those of you who have ever wondered why Yom Kippur, with all of its spiritual cleansing, comes ten days after the new year starts, maybe this analogy will help.

In the month of Elul, the month preceding Rosh HaShanah, we are supposed to take an accounting of our souls, reflecting on what we have inside ourselves and what we do with it. Which of our behaviors and inclinations serves us and should come into the new year with us? Which of them needs to stay behind in the year about to end? We get ourselves ready for the big move into the new year.

S'lichot is like Moving Day, when we need to leave the old place on our journey to the new. We gather with our community for a last bit of accounting and packing before the horn sounds to remind us that we have to get going. We can't sit forever reflecting and contemplating; the time has come to make decisions and go forward towards the new year.

On Rosh HaShanah we celebrate our arrival in the new year, our new home. The horn sounds again to let us know that we're here. And then comes the work of unpacking. As we start anew, we consider and count all that has come with us into the year. Did everything we wanted arrive with us? Did anything break along the way? What do we need to find and acquire? What came with us, that upon another reflection, is now superfluous or doesn't fit? What needs to be discarded?

Though in household moves, we don't typically have a deadline for when those unpacking and arranging decisions need to be completed, in our spiritual move, we do---Yom Kippur. It's an important moment because, now that we've figured out, to the best of our ability, what our souls will look like for the coming year, we need to do a deep clean. We

need to actually get rid of the behaviors and inclinations that are broken or hold us back. We also need to dust off and shine the parts of ourselves that make us proud and lead us to be our best. After all, we've got a major house-warming party coming up in just a few days!

We know that Sukkot, as a harvest festival, celebrates our physical bounty. It's also a time when we're supposed to invite guests, both physical and spiritual, into fragile dwelling-places. Our souls and their contents are fragile, and the move into the new year is hard. So we need to remind ourselves that we're not alone, that others have gone through this same rigorous process, and that we can lean on each other for support. We celebrate and settle in.

This congregation has also been through an extended sort of move---one that's lasted for more than two years. As you planned for Rabbi Kadden's retirement, you did an incredible amount of work to determine the character of your congregation. You reflected on what qualities were important to maintain and highlight. You considered what needed to change or be developed. You were prepared to say "Goodbye" to your rabbi and forge ahead into a new year and a new era for the congregation. And then COVID hit and plans had to change.

Instead of starting anew, you were in a holding pattern, no longer here but not yet there. Cantor Fine did a super-human job of keeping the congregation steady and supported as the sole spiritual leader during a time when people began to realize just how essential spiritual communities are. Then, you hoped to welcome a new rabbi to fill out the clergy team and help guide you in your new beginning. Even that had to be delayed by a year, though Rabbi Tiwy was able to provide much-

needed support. In the past couple of years, there have been other staff transitions that added to the experience of instability. Shelly Antos, Rebecca Kendziora, and Leslie Bright all brought incredible blessing to this community and we miss their gifts.

Like the Israelites who left Egypt for the Promised Land, you have been on a journey through the wilderness, unable to unpack and create a new normal, and having to say “Goodbye” without knowing what’s to come. The process of moving is hard and stressful in the best of circumstances, but it is arduous and depleting when it goes on for years. I have seen the strain and the toll that this long transition has taken on the community and on some of your leaders.

We especially need to recognize a few congregational heroes, who took on immense challenges through this period of transition. First, Aaron Petersen, who became Board President just in time for everything to change, while teaching Intermediate and Advanced Hebrew to our students preparing for B-Mitzvah and leading an Advanced Biblical Hebrew class for adults. From my understanding, he helped shift everything online so the congregation could remain together despite the physical distance. His leadership of the Temple Tech Team has enabled us to continue including folks at home even as many of us have returned to our building. Aaron has given an enormous amount of time to this congregation in other ways too numerous to count. Please join me in thanking him for all that he has given, as well as his family---Anna, Ephraim, and Shiphrah---for sharing him with us.

While I think you should join me in thanking the next group, I need to take a moment of personal privilege to acknowledge the thoughtful, persistent, and devoted Rabbinical Search Task Force, chaired by Jim

Friedman. Jim, along with Herb Levine, Suzanne Leichman, Lenny Reisberg, Mady Plumer, Bonnie Becker, Shelley Rozen, Matt Madlem, Carolyn Elsey, Jordan Harris, Erica Matson, Erete Bloom, Jason Berkowitz, Ephraim Petersen, and Lula Sissel, spent untold hours cataloging the most important aspects of the congregation to present to potential candidates, reviewing resumes and websites, interviewing candidates, navigating changing Covid protocols, calling references, planning visits, and more. I appreciate all the work you did, and I know that it was frustrating, disappointing, and exhausting at times. I am honored that you chose me to lead your congregation and I have been grateful for your support as I settle in.

I also want to thank the staff who have welcomed me and helped me get my bearings in my new home:

- Cantor Fine, who makes sure that I know how things work, helps strengthen my ideas, and rolls with me when I change things up on him.
- Olivia Goodwin, whose insight, support, and creativity make her one of the most valuable members of our team. I know that I will be leaning on her for all sorts of different things.
- Lindsay Owens and Christina Roppolo, whose leadership in the Brotman Early Learning Center enlivens this building on a daily basis. I'm so glad that you are willing to develop the partnership between BELC and Temple and I love seeing Yuval so excited to come to school every day.
- Madi Pimentel Diaz, whose energy and enthusiasm have breathed new life into our Religious Education program and who knows so many different resources in Tacoma.

- And Andy Mauer, who makes sure I have what I need, gives me insight into how things have been done in the past, and is willing to say, “OK, let’s do that.” We also need to acknowledge that she is retiring next month, after 22 years of service to this congregation. Her commitment and experience and willingness to literally roll up her sleeves and get things done have made her an extraordinary asset to this community.

Earlier this month, we also welcomed a new Executive Director, Tricia Borgardt, who is working with Andy to learn how everything works, so she can take over those responsibilities after Andy’s retirement. We have already been having fun thinking about how to help Temple Beth El settle into this new chapter.

Because here we are at Rosh HaShanah. Steady, at least for the time being, with leadership that’s hoping to stay for a while. Finally we have the chance to unpack and settle in. Don’t worry, we don’t have to get everything in place for Yom Kippur---I still have unfinished rooms in my house, although all but a handful of boxes are unpacked. But I will encourage you to start thinking about how things will be arranged in our renewed home, in this new chapter. Share your ideas, your concerns, your questions, your hopes. What have you been missing? What would you like to contribute? What would you like to see change? What do you want this community to look like? And how are you going to help us there?

As we move into the new year, 5783, may we be blessed with the insight to know what we need to keep and what we need to let go of, the courage to make necessary changes, and the generosity of spirit to have compassion for ourselves and others through the stress of change. I wish you all a sweet, happy, and healthy new year. *L’shanah tovah um’tukah!*