

## **INSTALLATION SERVICE**

**December 8, 2017**

**Congregation Beth Shalom of Napa Valley**

**Rabbi Niles Goldstein**

Shabbat Shalom.

It's so wonderful to see so many of you at this auspicious occasion—both for me, & for CBS.

It feels like we arrived in Napa just a couple of days ago, doesn't it? I want to start by acknowledging Rabbi Bycel. Your words, as always, were heartfelt, thoughtful, & authentic, & I am deeply appreciative of them. You know, our relationship spans over 25 years, from the time I was a second-year student at the Hebrew Union College in LA, to the present moment. You have *transmogrified* from being my

dean, to being a colleague, a mentor, & now a friend. I am grateful for all you have done, & *continue* to do, for me. Lee, you are a *treasure* to this community, & I thank you for handing over such a healthy, stable, & compassionate congregation. You are loved & respected by so many here at CBS, & I will do my best to honor your legacy. Thanks as well to Donna & Julie for your thoughts & kind words—I enjoy working with both of you very much, & I look forward to more. And to Ellyn & the rest of the CBS board, as well as Beth, Sally, & the other members of the rabbinic search committee, I will *always* be grateful to you for your belief & trust in me. & Gordon, it is such a pleasure to partner with you, to

lead services together & try to lift up the spirits of our community—you are a colleague & a friend (& a fellow trouble-maker). Finally, I want to thank each of you—and there are many—who have worked hard to make this installation such a special evening; I value & appreciate your time, effort, & energy.

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A lot has happened since Carolyn & I took I-80 from Chicago & drove into Napa just over 5 months ago.

We've spent much of the summer & fall getting to know members of this congregation thru coffees, meals, social gatherings, & play-dates with our dog Jake. We've ushered in the new Jewish year with you,

observed the High Holy Days, kicked off our religious and Hebrew schools, gathered for Shabbat, Torah study, adult education. Of course, we've also weathered the *wildfires* with you, sharing the anxiety of evacuation orders, Nixle alerts, & wearing N-95 masks. These experiences have only made us a more bonded & stronger community, & have proven how resilient & interconnected we all are, & what an amazing group of people have chosen to live, love, & look out for one another, here in Napa Valley. I am so happy to be a part of what you are creating.

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As I told the search committee almost a year ago, after two decades in NYC, where I helped to build a

synagogue from scratch & establish myself as an author & teacher, I wanted to step away from the full-time rabbinate for a while & explore other interests. I worked in the interfaith world & in academia; I wrote a new book; I even had a stint as a writer at a PR agency. Still, something was missing from my life.

My midlife detour brought me back to my roots, the great city of Chicago. During my time there, I was able to reconnect with my parents in ways I hadn't done since I was in high school. It was so meaningful to be able to get to know each other, again, as adults — I miss my visits with you in Evanston, & eating Lou Malnati's pizza. But I am so glad you are both with us tonight, & I look forward to seeing much

more of you here in our beautiful corner of the country.

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One night after karate practice, I met a woman at a martini bar in my neighborhood on the north side of town. She was an inch taller than me & from a very different background than my own. But she was beautiful, funny, well-traveled, & thoughtful, & we instantly connected. Carolyn, if someone had told you that one day you'd be living in Napa & engaged to a rabbi, you would have probably thought they were nuts. My love for you grows by the day, & I feel blessed & proud that you have made this exciting journey with me.

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While there was much that was good about Chicago, there were also some serious challenges. I hadn't found the right fit professionally, & I missed working as a teacher & a spiritual guide in the Jewish community. When I first heard of the opportunity at CBS, I called Lee right away. You should know that he sang your praises, & I decided to apply. As the search committee reviewed my credentials, Carolyn & I were traveling thru Portugal & the Douro Valley. We were surrounded by stunning hills & vineyards, & as we drank port & soaked in the scenery, I remember thinking to myself, I could live in a place

like this.... Who would have known that a year later,  
*I would?*

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CBS Napa feels like such a compelling match for someone like me, & I hope that you feel the same. You are such a warm, welcoming, & accepting community; you are truly a congregation of learners, seekers, & strivers. You are critical thinkers, but you are also in touch with your hearts and your souls. While you are committed to universal justice you are also open to exploring the richness of, and diversity within, your own religious tradition. You have *reignited* my passion for Jews & Judaism; you have *reaffirmed* my love of teaching Torah & *my* need for



community, as much as you need it. You have given me a profound gift.

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I am grateful to you for choosing me as your rabbi. My journey from Greenwich Village to Wine Country has been a long & winding one; there are many other places I could have landed, but I am so happy to have found a home with you. I welcome this opportunity to partner with you as we try to build a modern-day Mishkan, a safe haven & spiritual center, right here in Napa Valley. After 23 years in the rabbinate, I know that it will take a lot of hard work: it will take vision, it will take resources; and it will take time & talent. But CBS is already off to such a great start. I *share*

your dream of creating a bigger, better, and more *visible* Jewish presence in Napa, and I will do my very best to help make that dream a reality in the years ahead.

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As T.S. Eliot writes, “Every end is a beginning, & every beginning an end; the end is where we start from.” I can’t think of any community other than CBS with whom I’d want to begin this next chapter in my personal & rabbinic life. I thank each & every one of you—for what you have done, for what I know you will do, and for who you are.

Ken Yehi Ratzon – May it be God’s Will