

Comments at the 25th Anniversary Celebration
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When Lori and I celebrated our 25th wedding anniversary (nearly 11 years ago) I knew what every husband knows: Buy an anniversary gift for your wife. When I presented the gift, for which Lori was very appreciative, I asked why it is *chok v'lo ya'avov* / a matter of the highest level of importance that a husband buy his wife a gift, but that sense of obligation does not seem to work in the other direction. And, without missing a beat, Lori responded that wives get gifts for putting up with their husbands for an ongoing and extended period of time (which explains, as well, why the gifts at each successive milestone need to be bigger).

And so, as grateful as I and we are for this lovely Shabbat tribute, it seems to me that this should be a tribute as well for you, since you have put up with me for 25 years! Seriously, the *shidduch* between me and our congregation has been a rich and meaningful one in both directions. It has been a relationship which, like any relationship, has taken turns and twists which may not have been anticipated but have been successfully navigated over the years.

I know that there will be some things said about us over Shabbat. It was important to Lori and me that the focus of this weekend be that of a community celebration, a celebration of what has taken place to bring us to this moment, and a celebration as we look forward together into the future. Indeed, Yehuda Kurtzer, here with us as our scholar for Shabbat, is not only a brilliant thinker and a compelling speaker, but he is a person who spends most of his time thinking about the future of the Jewish Communities of North America and of Israel. I am deeply grateful to him for coming and very excited, as well, to spend this weekend focusing on our future, that of TBH-BE and that of the larger Jewish Community. But I take this moment to share just a few thoughts, beginning with Chanukkah.

We all know the story of Chanukkah. Chanukkah, of course is the celebration of the victory of the Maccabees over the Syrian Greeks in the second century before the Common Era. We also know the story of how, following the re-purification of the defiled Temple, as the lights were to be lit, only a day's worth of oil could be found. It would take eight days for more oil to be brought. The one day's worth of oil was lit and, miraculously continued to burn for eight days.

What you may not know, however, is that Chanukkah, at least according to the Talmud, was celebrated in a way by none other than Adam HaRishon, Adam in the Garden of Eden. Here is the story (BT Avoda Zara 8a):

When Adam saw the days getting shorter, he said: Woe is me. Perhaps it is because I have sinned, the world around me is getting darker and is returning to its original chaos (*tohu vavohu*). This increasing darkness, then, is the kind of death to which I have been sentenced by God. And so, Adam instituted a self-imposed eight-day fast, (presumably to avert the decree of darkness). But when the winter solstice arrived, the days began to get longer and Adam said,

“This, then, is the way of the world,” and he established, at that point, an eight-day festival of lights.

Adam, of course knew nothing of Maccabees or Menorahs, but he did know some other things:

1. He knew what every person since has understood: that darkness is frightening.
2. He knew that when there is darkness in the world, chaos and confusion are nearby.
3. But, in the end, he realized that darkness is followed by light, that order can be restored following chaos of darkness and that this is *minhag ha-olam* / this is life.

This is life/ this is the way of the world: there is darkness and there is light and, a world of darkness is frightening. But knowing that light will follow darkness gave Adam hope. And learning about darkness and light, about confusion and order, about despair and the hope which follows have been among the most important lessons that we have learned over the past 25 years.

As I look out at all of you, I remember the first time I stood before the congregation on the High Holidays 25 years ago. I saw an expanse of strangers...and I was terrified. Today, I look at all of you, not only collectively but individually, I think of the lessons we have learned together and the path we have walked together.

We have lived together, at times, in darkness, we have confronted the chaos and confusion of life. We have learned that no matter how thick the darkness might be, there is light which will dispel the darkness. And we have learned that there will be times when we will not be able to avoid the darkness. But we have also learned that the darkness will not overtake and consume us so long as we walk together. That is what the Psalmist (Ps. 23) meant when he said,

Gam ki elech bi gai tzalmavt, lo eera ki ata imadi / Even when I walk through the darkness, in the valley of the shadow of death, I will not fear because You are with me.

The presence of another person, like the presence of God is a blessing, a support and a source of strength, a reminder that we are not alone. And we have been there for each other.

As we celebrate our 25th year, there is much on which we might reminisce. What we have accomplished over the last 25 years is an awareness of the power of the presence of another person, the power of community. We can think today of all of the wonderful things we have accomplished programmatically and educationally, under the auspices of our synagogue. All of it takes on even greater value, added value, when those encounters have fostered relationships, friendships, support and care for the other. Lori and I feel truly blessed to have walked together with you for a quarter of a century and look forward to continuing our journey together. At the same time, however, as we celebrate together, we think about the future.

Some of you know that I love American History. In closing, therefore, I share a story which occurred in Philadelphia nearly 230 years ago, a story recounted by James Madison, a story about the future:

While the members (of the Constitutional Convention), presided over by George Washington, were signing the Constitution (on Sept. 17, 1787), Benjamin Franklin, looked toward the President's chair, on the back of which a half-sun had been painted. (On that monumental and momentous day on which the new Constitution was being adopted) Franklin remarked to a few

of those seated nearby that painters find it difficult to distinguish in their art a difference between a rising and a setting sun. Franklin continued:

I have said often, and often in the course of this session, and in the vicissitudes of my hopes and fears....looked at that (half-sun, painted on the President's chair) without being able to tell whether (that sun) is rising or setting; but now at length, I have the happiness to know, that it is a rising and not a setting sun.

As we gather together to celebrate twenty five years together, I believe that the sun is still rising at TBHBE. I believe that the best is yet to come. I have great faith that, in the future, we shall continue to bask in the light of a new day. Despite the changes occurring and the challenges before us as a community, I am confident that we shall rise, with the sun, as we move forward. And, I look forward to being here with you, as we continue our journey together.