

Installation Service Speech

May 4th, 2018

Shabbat Shalom.

One year down, one to go. I think it's fair to say my first year as President was a busy one; but what a year. I feel like I was dropped directly onto a highway going full speed and never had the chance to use an on ramp to accelerate and merge into traffic. The good news, at least, is that when I landed on the highway I wasn't headed in the wrong direction. Immediately after my installation, we picked up where we had left off and continued the work of the transition.

The "transition": we've been using that word a lot over the past few years. We use the word as if it were something new to us. Without a doubt, the retirement of a Senior Rabbi with 44 years on the pulpit is no small event for a congregation. But in preparing my remarks this evening, I've been thinking a lot about the way this year has gone, and it occurred to me that it is going so well because in some respects we are

always in transition. We are continuously willing to make necessary changes, and it's the reason we've continued to thrive. We're good at it.

In fact, somehow the word has gotten out that Anshe Emeth does "transition" right. Now, *my* phone is ringing on a regular basis as other Temple Presidents want to understand how *we* did it. I tell them to get everyone involved. Make sure you give the congregation a chance to be heard; to encourage everyone to share their vision for the future of the synagogue, not who should be the next rabbi. I tell them to get comfortable with the chaos (even though I admit to them that's virtually impossible), but most important, try to stay calm and remember they are not in it alone. They *know* that a rabbinic transition can be divisive. I tell them it can be an opportunity to bring a congregation closer together when a process of inclusion is followed. For example, our Envisioning Conversations that gave everyone a chance to remind each other what we love about our temple. All of these things served as a pathway to increasing our sense of community, a congregation with shared goals.

Where was this more evident than on this past November 7th, where on a rainy evening, here in our amphitheater, the congregation voted to approve the recommendation that Rabbi Philip Bazeley become the next Senior Rabbi of Anshe Emeth? There were almost 200 of us in that room. There was such warmth and joy. There was even laughter. We stood up and applauded for our new Senior Rabbi. We listened to emotional and beautiful words from Rabbi Miller, and a gracious and humble acceptance from Rabbi Bazeley. It is one of my proudest moments from my first year. All of us were part of the process that led to that wonderful night, and all of us are responsible for its success.

This success propelled us forward as the transition continued. This past February, Rabbi Bazeley and I travelled to the Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, Ohio to interview candidates for our Assistant Rabbi position. Now, did the fact that we are going through a transition hurt our ability to find an amazing new Assistant Rabbi for our congregation? You *might* think that a newly ordained Rabbi would have some concerns about joining a congregation in transition. Did the candidates ask us

about it? Of course they did. But we were able to share with them what a healthy transition looks like, and those that we invited to visit our synagogue for the second round of interviews, saw it up close. By the way, this was not a year where there were more candidates than congregations. It was the other way around – and we still got the Hebrew Union College class president, Rabbi Maya Glasser. I can't wait for you to meet her. She is going to be a great addition to our clergy team and to our congregation. She is smart and engaging, she has a beautiful voice, she is experienced in pastoral care, and she has developed and supervised religious school curriculum. She will be a wonderful, spiritual leader for us, and a strong partner for both Rabbi Bazeley and Cantor Ott.

Bringing in Rabbi Glasser is just one component, although a very important one, to ensure that we have the right team in place as part of our transition. We have also made room in our budget next year to expand our current Youth Director role to be a Director of Youth and

Member Engagement, with a focus on growing our membership by reaching out to a broader population in new and creative ways.

In addition to focusing on having the right staff in place, we are taking important steps to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of lay leadership. Sara Levine, our valuable Board Life Member agreed to chair a newly formed Governance Committee that started to meet this past January. They are looking at how we run Board meetings; how we select, evaluate, and train Board members; and how we define roles and responsibilities for our lay leaders. And I include myself in this training because even if my life depended on it, I can't seem to make a motion correctly. In addition, to keep our Board strong for years to come, this past Sunday we completed another year of our annual Joshua Project Leadership Development Program. This is one of the many ways we not only seek out potential future leaders for our congregation, but give them insight as to how and why we do things. I still love being part of this program, engaging in lively conversation and learning from my

classmates. If you get a call to join the program in the future, I hope that you say yes.

Tonight we install another dedicated group of volunteers that *did* say “Yes”. To my fellow Board members, I welcome you back for another year, and I welcome our newest additions, Laura Leibowitz and Andrea Schon. I also want to thank Robert Stern and Charles Brandwein as they end their terms, and I hope to see you continue your participation on one or more of our many committees. I’ve enjoyed working with all of you and being a part of this Board. This has been a year like no other. We are dealing with issues and situations that are unfamiliar to us. Yet the patience shown by you, the support that I have felt is something that I appreciate more than you can ever know. I thank you (and your families) and look forward to the coming year.

I also want to take a moment to recognize our temple youth. Our Anshe Emeth Temple Youth, our AETY Board. Rabbi Bazeley made a comment that has stuck with me. He said the adults in this congregation are *asked* to be leaders of the temple, but *you*, our temple youth, you

volunteer. You seek out and run for your positions. I am inspired by you: you are our future. It gives all of us hope to see you embrace the importance of Tikkun Olam (to repair the world). I hope that as you learn and grow in your positions you never lose this drive; that you never let life get in the way. Personally, I can't wait to see all that you will accomplish in the coming year. We are here for you, and I know that I can speak for the entire Board when I say that we look forward to working with you. Thank you, and Mazel Tov on your new positions.

So, I've talked a lot about the plans for the coming year, but as we near the end of this year, it is important that we reflect on what we have achieved and what we value. One of the ways that we do this, and a big part of our transition, is by celebrating. We celebrated with Rabbi Miller and his family at the Congregational Breakfast – his grandchildren *sang* to us. His daughters, his wife, their best friends showed us a different, more personal side of Rabbi Miller. It was a beautiful, meaningful morning of community, a fitting tribute to our Senior Rabbi. In addition, we have enjoyed the return of Assistant Rabbis of years past to talk

about their time with Rabbi Miller and with us. Also, this past month, over 100 of us went to a Yankee game together and saw Rabbi Miller on the big screen. The day would have been perfect had they not lost in extra innings and had I not almost been killed by a fly ball – but that’s another story... And we have more to come. This coming Monday, we will honor Rabbi Miller at the 32nd Annual Anshe Emeth Golf Outing at the Battleground Country Club, and on Friday, May 11th, Rabbi Rebecca Epstein will return to join us for Shabbat. And of course, the big celebration weekend of June 8th-10th. You have the invitation. Please come and celebrate with us as we thank Rabbi Miller, and welcome him as our first Rabbi Emeritus.

As I begin my second year, I look forward to my time with Rabbi Bazeley. He has been such a wonderful mentor and friend to me. I’m 50, and he’s in his 30’s, so I’m not sure how I feel about *him* mentoring *me*, but it seems to be working. I look forward to my remaining time on the Bima, enjoying the beautiful music provided by Cantor Ott, the choir, and the Awesome Family Band. And I am grateful to Heather and

the temple staff who I can always count on to make sure I have everything that I need to do the job right. I also want to thank David White, our current Youth Director, and wish him well as he moves on to bigger and better things. David: thank you for all of your hard work and for watching over our most valuable asset. Most importantly, I have to thank my family. They have supported me and, more accurately, have tolerated me over the past year. I love all of you so very much.

To Rabbi Miller: it still hasn't fully registered that you won't be at my side next year. Like many presidents before me, I'll miss your tidbits about the history of the temple and your sage advice. But I take comfort in knowing that your words from your Yom Kippur sermon will continue to guide us as we continue our transition. The 11th commandment, "Don't change anything," followed by the 12th commandment, "Change everything." I also take comfort in the fact that we will all continue to be in this together, which I know bodes well for more successful transitions to come.

Kein Yahe Ratzon; so may it be written. Shabbat Shalom.