

## President's Yom Kippur Sermon – David Levine – 2019

Shana Tova, Good Morning.

I have been a member of 3 Synagogues in my lifetime. My earliest memories are from attending Hebrew school in Shaare Zedek in West New York, NJ. This beautiful orthodox synagogue is now a condemned building and is in ruin. My sister Tami tells me that the Levine family name is painted on a leaf on a crumbling tree of Life there.

Sadly, I don't remember it and my sons will never see it.

In 1969, my parents Muriel and Al joined Congregation Sons of Israel in Leonia NJ. In 2011, after 84 years, Congregation Sons of Israel sold their building and merged with Gesher Shalom in Fort Lee. The Levine family has multiple brass leaves on the tree of life of Congregation Sons of Israel.

A few years ago, I went to Gesher Shalom. Lisa and I were shown the tree of life from Sons of Israel. It's now displayed in a back hallway there.

In 2003, Lisa and I joined Anshe Emeth. Anshe Emeth is now our temple; our community and I hope that we can help ensure that Anshe Emeth will be here for all the generations to come.

**“Anshe Emeth is a spiritual, vibrant and welcoming community that inspires us to lead a fuller, Jewish life.”**

Hopefully you recognize this as the Anshe Emeth Vision Statement.

In October 1859, 160 years ago, here in New Brunswick a group of families got together to form a temple, a community. If you are like me and were comatose during your American History classes, imagine that 1859 is 2 years before the American Civil War! Take a moment to think about that.

First on Peace Street then to Albany Street and then in 1930 the sanctuary we stand in today was built.

I can't imagine that the founding families could fathom that Anshe Emeth would still be a vibrant and strong community here in New Brunswick in 2019 and yet we are.

Each and every subsequent generation of Anshe Emeth has had clergy, lay leaders and members that have made sure that Anshe Emeth still stands strongly.

Currently there are only 4 Reform Jewish Congregations left in Middlesex County.

Today's temples are in jeopardy for many reasons. Financial, declining membership, and not addressing the Jewish community's needs are just a few of the issues.

5 Years ago, Anshe Emeth launched the L'Hibanot campaign. One of the goals of the campaign was to eliminate the temple's outstanding mortgage. The L'Hibanot campaign came very close to achieving the goal, but we fell short for various reasons.

I am excited to tell you that we have the opportunity, as we enter our 160<sup>th</sup> year, to eliminate the temple's mortgage and become debt free.

We have been given a very generous and amazing pledge of \$500,000 by an anonymous donor. \$250,000 has already been paid, with the stipulation the we, the Anshe Emeth community, will raise an additional match of \$250,000.

Over the past few months, temple leadership has met with various foundations and temple members including our current Board of Trustees. These meetings were very successful and we now need just another \$100,000 for this match campaign.

With your pledge supporting the match challenge, we can be the responsible stewards of Anshe Emeth ensuring a debt free future and increasing the temple's endowment fund.

I know we WILL BURN the mortgage this spring.

Join Lisa and me by pledging to burn our temple's mortgage. This will be our community's "Thank You" to ourselves, our future and the anonymous donor.

To continue with Anshe Emeth's Mission Statement. It says:

**"To build an inclusive community where Torah guides us to engage in lifelong learning, repair our community and the world, embrace our heritage and the rhythms of Reform Jewish life, cherish our relationship with God and affirm our love for the land and people of Israel"**

**Let's talk about "To build an inclusive community"**

Our sanctuary and buildings were renovated during the Legacy Campaign. Many changes and updates were made to the building and sanctuary to help the physically challenged, but more can be done to make it more accessible. For example, simply lowering the mezuzot on doorposts to make them more accessible.

A few years ago, Rabbi Miller announced that he and the Anshe Emeth Clergy would officiate Jewish Same sex marriages. Last year Rabbi Bazeley said in his sermon to the congregation that he would officiate Jewish marriage ceremonies for Interfaith Couples. These two ideas kick-started our road to inclusiveness.

This past September at the Board of Trustee retreat we invited Scott Fried to teach us. Scott is an author, a speaker, youth educator and an adjunct professor at Colby College.

The Board of Trustee's came ready to learn.

Scott taught and gave us some tools to put us on the path to be welcoming and inclusive to the LGBTQ community.

- We learned the language of an inclusive community.
- We learned that we must announce we are a welcoming inclusive community.
- "Write them on the door frames of your house and upon your gates". Hopefully you noticed stickers and signs on our doors welcoming the LGBTQ community. These symbols of inclusion will be used in all our temple's future communications.
- We learned that being inclusive is a Jewish value.

Keshet is a Jewish Organization that strives to create space in which all Queer Jewish youth can feel seen and valued. Here are their 7 guidelines for an Inclusive Jewish Community which is a template to guide us.

1. Kavod: Judaism teaches us to treat ourselves and others with respect.
2. Shalom Bayit: For many of us and especially our children, Anshe Emeth is their 2nd home. We all need to feel safe and respected here.
3. B'tzelem Elohim: We are all created in the image of God. True inclusion is built upon this.
4. Kol Yisrael Arevim Bazeih: All Israel is responsible for one another. Each of us must create a community of which we can be proud.
5. Sh'mirat Halashon: We must take care of how we use language. Words can tear down, or words can heal.
6. V'ahavta L'reiacha Kamocha: "Love your neighbor as yourself"
7. Al Tisfrosch Min Hatsibur: Don't separate yourself from community. If you feel isolated or detached reach out.

My son stood on this very Bima in front of you, his Temple family, and spoke about how he felt safe and welcome here as a gay teen.

Let's make sure that All are welcome and safe here at Anshe Emeth.

In the next few weeks, I will be inviting each of the temple's committee chairs to first meeting of the Inclusion and Diversity Committee. Following that first meeting I will

announce an open meeting inviting all of you to come and join us to create and implement Inclusion opportunities. I hope you will participate.

This coming Friday we have a Congregational Shabbat dinner celebrating the 160<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Anshe Emeth. This will be followed by the dedication and naming of the Barbara Kagan Littman Social Hall. It will be a truly special evening and I look forward to celebrating with you.

Thank you Rabbi Bazeley, Rabbi Miller and Rabbi Glasser - your wisdom is inspiring. Cantor Ott, I look forward to celebrating this retirement year with you. You have been such an essential part of my family's Anshe Emeth journey. Matt Vogel and Inna Shepard, thank you for the care you give to our youth.

Thank you to Heather Kibel and the entire Anshe Emeth staff for all your dedication.

Thank you to Our Anshe Emeth Board of Trustees who are so committed to Anshe Emeth's future. Thank you to Lisa, Noah and Caleb for your patience and support and thank you to my Anshe Emeth family for allowing me the privilege of being Anshe Emeth's president.

*G'mar Chatima Tovah*