

INSTALLATION ADDRESS

Marc Rothstein

5/13/11

Shabbat Shalom

Just about a year ago, during one of our many special Shabbat Services, I was sitting on this bimah, surrounded by our past presidents. While I knew that there was still a year to go until I would have the honor of serving as President, this feeling of excitement, mixed with anxiousness and utter terror came over me. How exciting it would be to take on such an important role. What an honor it would be to step into the shoes of our past presidents. But, how will I live up to their expectations and the expectations of our current leaders and temple members? How will I be able to tackle the issues of today like they tackled the issues of the past? Then a song started in my head “ *I’m standing on the shoulders of the ones who came before me*” my utter terror and concerns were replaced with a confidence and calmness as I knew that I would have all of these Past Presidents helping to guide and support me as I begin my term as your president. Thank you to all of our past presidents whose shoulders I now proudly stand on.

Mazel Tov to all of the newly installed Board Members and Officers as well as those whose terms continue, You have been blessed with the opportunity to take on the sacred task of helping to lead AEMT and we are blessed to have you . On behalf of all of us, todah Rabah and Yasher Koach to all of you.

Mazel Tov also to our AETY Board. Our youth group continues to be the pride and joy of AEMT and we should all be proud of the leaders that our youth have elected. Debbie Friedman sang “and the old shall dream dreams and the youth shall see visions”. I can’t think of a better group to turn our dreams into their visions.

There are others who have guided me as I approached this day and it would only be right to acknowledge those who have made today a reality.

I was very lucky to have served my 4 years as Vice President during the K/Cohn era. Susan and Debbie have helped tremendously in preparing me for what is ahead. Without them, I would not have the confidence that I feel today.

I only hope that I can prepare Mike and Regie as well as Susan and Debbie have prepared me. I am a relative new comer to the AEMT family compared to Susan and Debbie, but what I learned from them is that while it is important to learn lessons from our past it is just as important to look to the future. They both have a real love and immense pride in this temple. Susan, I admire your energy and passion. You taught me to strive for excellence in everything that you do and to always carry out temple activities at the highest level possible, as this is a reflection on AEMT. Debbie I admire your passion for learning and the calmness and fairness in how you handled your presidency. Debbie you taught me that no problem is so large that it can’t be handled with compassion and to never forget that

the Torah is really where you should get your guidance on how to lead. You also taught me that when important events are happening you should solicit the help of your Immediate Past President. I have learned in my years in corporate America that you never actually leave, you just come back as a consultant.

So Debbie, I'm bringing you back as a consultant and I'll pay you double what we were paying you as president. Now that your term is over ---Debbie this is Joe, Joe this is Debbie.

I am also standing on the shoulders of the assistant rabbis that I have had the privilege to work with. Rabbis Paskoff, Dubowe, Gold, Kogan and Fellman have each in their own way helped me to grow both spiritually and emotionally.

Over the last couple of years I have truly been blessed to be able to work with Rabbi Epstein. I had the pleasure of chairing the search committee that selected Rabbi Epstein so I knew early on how special she was. And since it's worked out so well I'll take full credit for the selection. Over the last two years I have worked with her on Va'ad Torah. I have seen her passion for education, love for the children of our congregation, and the respect she has for and from the teachers. Our Religious School is as strong as I can remember and this is due to Rabbi Epstein's tireless work. I have been inspired by both her words and her actions and I look forward to continuing to work with her in the future.

I'm not sure how any of us would be able to do anything without Heather Kibel. I imagine now I will be eating lots of dinners and spending lots of time on the phone with Heather. Heather is passionate and hardworking and truly has made volunteering at this temple a pleasure. I would like to therefore echo the phrase I hear all the time, "We are so lucky to have Heather."

As you can tell from my references, I love Jewish music and over the last 13 years Cantor Ott, made that love even stronger. She continues to make the religious services at AEMT special with meaningful and exciting music that makes every service unique. Cantor Ott always goes the extra mile to find opportunities for our youth and adults to immerse themselves in Jewish music, and this becomes the entry point of involvement for many of our members. I really believe that this plants the seed for our youth and adults to become leaders. I know it did for my family and me and for that I will be forever grateful.

Rabbi Miller—words really can't express what you have meant to me. Your love, guidance and teaching really are the reasons I am standing here today. It is also the reason Shari, Adam and Emily are where they are today. I don't know what our lives would be like if not for you. You have taught us to look beyond ourselves and to reach outside our comfort zone. You have been our guide, summer activity planner, inspirational leader, traveling companion, college counselor, cheerleader, confidante and most importantly friend. You have provided me with the tools to take on this role as President. I look forward to continuing to grow and learn under your guidance

Of course none of this would be possible without my family and friends.

While my grandparents are no longer here I know that they are kvelling in seeing their grandson take on this role. In honor of all my grandparents each Friday night I will have with me two very special things to remind me of their love-- my grandfather's gold watch, and this siddur which we dedicated to Grandma Ruth in honor of her 95th birthday.

My Mom and Dad took from their parents and planted in me the love of Judaism and the importance of leadership and education. But most importantly they continue to teach me that there is nothing as precious as family. When my dad was just about my age he was installed as president of our synagogue in Connecticut. He taught me the importance of being a leader and also showed me that you could excel in that and still have time for your family. Thanks to both of you I have every confidence that I will do the same.

To my in-laws Iris and Steve, thank you for your love and support all of these years. While I know that it was tough when we moved away to the boonies of NJ, thank you for always being there when we need you.

Thank you to all my friends and family who are here with me today. They say you are judged by the company you keep so it goes without saying that I should be judged very favorably.

There is no more important reason for why I wanted to be a temple leader and become president than Adam and Emily. I love you and I am so proud of you. You are role models and have already made a significant mark on this world.

At AEMT we push our youth to be extraordinary. And both of you are just that; absolutely extraordinary. That is what is guiding me today. To ensure that all of our youth have these same opportunities to be just like the 2 of you.

My life changed on July 1, 1984. That's when I met Shari. She taught me to embrace and to love being a Reform Jew; which I converted to from conservative (unfortunately Shari agreed to convert from Yankee fan to Mets fan—I got the better of that one). Shari was the one who jumped in with both feet when we joined AEMT. In fact for years I was known as "Shari's husband". Thank you for being ok with being "Marc's wife". I certainly could not have done this without you. Thank you for being there for me; for listening and for giving advice; for being my rock and for most importantly, being the love of my life.

I am so honored and humbled to be here today. I thank all of you for giving me the opportunity to serve as president of this wonderful temple; a place that has certainly given me more than I could ever give back. But I certainly will try over the next couple of years.

So, what do I want to do now that I'm here?

The recently nominated President of the URJ Rabbi Richard Jacobs was quoted as saying:

“Only meaningful congregations will matter. People won’t join just because their grandparents did. We have to matter every day.”

I couldn’t have said it better myself. AEMT has to matter not just for people to join but for people to stay. The decisions that our board and officers make have to matter, be meaningful to our congregation and reflect our core values.

I believe that we are ahead of many congregations and that AEMT continues to be meaningful and matter to so many of our congregants. While many congregations are struggling we continue to grow with new and exciting programming.

But we can’t afford to stand pat, we must continue to matter and bring meaning.

It makes me laugh when I see companies continually reaching out for new customers by offering everything under the sun. But current customers are usually forgotten and assumed that they won’t leave. We can’t do this at AEMT.

While we obviously need to continue to reach out to prospective new members we must not do that in a way that dilutes our meaning and core values. We can’t forget those members that we already have. Members who have committed to AEMT for many years and who have in their own way contributed to our success; members who have stayed, because AEMT brings meaning to their lives and reflects their core values.

I truly believe that members stay and are involved if they feel engaged and have a real connection.

So I challenge the board:

We must continue to provide meaningful programming. We must reach out to members and engage them in meaningful temple activities.

We must ensure that decisions and actions by the board are transparent. We must continue to be inclusive. We need to listen. We need to reach out to those who are on the fringes and bring them in. We have to understand that while we will continue to be fiscally responsible we have to be guided by how financial decisions affect our members. Our decisions need to always be based on issues that are meaningful and matter and they need to always be rooted in the core values of AEMT. We need all of our members to understand the importance of being part of this community.

Recently I had the opportunity to attend the URJ Consultation on Conscience. This forum on Social Justice made me understand more than ever the impact that we have far beyond the four walls of AEMT.

While we continue to be Social Action oriented with our wonderful CDC, hosting the homeless, the Passover food drive to name just a few we need to do more, and as

President I will push our committees to look for ways that we can take it to the next level.

AEMT truly matters to our community at large and the meaning this brings to both our congregants and our community every day is immeasurable.

But without continuing to have a committed, engaged, vital membership we will not be able to continue our work. I could not imagine the negative impact on our community.

We need to engage our congregants in this conversation. So I say to all our congregants. Join our committees, participate in social action and learning, and find the places that get you excited. Get involved. Let us know—why are you here? What keeps you here? What can we do and what can you do to matter and bring more meaning. If you don't let us know, then we will reach out to you. Our board represents all of you and if it's meaningful to you than it matters to us. All of you are capable of leading---please help us lead.

The leaders and congregants of the past have enabled us to be here today. Now that responsibility is passed to us.

We need to ensure the security of AEMT both in the short term but to also build a foundation for the future.

And that foundation begins with our YOUTH

While schools continue to cut back on the meaningful clubs and extra-curricular activities that matter to so many of our youth, AEMT needs to fill the gap by continuing to provide those meaningful activities and experiences. Ask our youth...does AEMT matter? I would hope they would say yes. Ask the parents who see their children making lifelong friends and participating in Jewish Camping, Mitzvah Corp and EIE, and who continue their education far beyond Bar/Bat Mitzvah. Is AEMT bringing meaning to your child's life? Does AEMT matter? Ask the homeless on the streets of NY who are fed and clothed each year during our Midnight Run, or Rush Holt who heard our youth advocate for health care and disability rights: does AEMT matter?

These meaningful activities are what keep our youth engaged at AEMT and are building our future!! If it's meaningful and matters they will come!!

Without continuing to have an engaged, committed, vital membership none of this is possible. We all must support our youth in every way and to continue to provide them with all of the tools and resources necessary. We need to make sure that the formal education of our youth and the youth activities are seamless and provide a solid foundation for our youth to continue to be the leaders and advocates that they are. We are lucky to have Chase Foster guiding our youth and helping them to continue to dream. Let's make sure that we do all we can to make their dreams a reality.

I know that what I am about to embark on is a marathon not a sprint. I am asking all of you to join me on this marathon. Not by cheering on the sideline but by running beside me. I will lead but I need you to push me to maintain that lead. I will mark out the course but I need you to make sure I don't veer off that course. I will set the pace, but I need you to challenge me to keep that pace.

And when I might tire or slow down I need you to nourish me so that I can keep going. I need you to make those uphill climbs into a downhill sprint. There is nobody I'd rather be running with.

AEMT is a shining light to our community and we can't let that light dim. Deuteronomy 26:11 says "And you shall enjoy, together with the [family of the] Levite and the stranger in your midst, all the bounty that the Eternal your God has bestowed upon you and your household"

We have been blessed with a bounty now let's make sure that we share and maintain this bounty so that generations in the future will proudly sing *"I'm standing on the shoulders of the ones who came before me"*