

**Marc Rothstein High Holiday Address
Yom Kippur-September 26, 2012**

It is said that change is good. If that is the case—things here at AEMT have been very good.

As many of you know there were numerous changes in staff over the past year.

Rabbi Phil Bazeley joined us as our Assistant Rabbi in June. As I said at his welcoming Shabbat a few weeks ago, he clearly shares our values and vision. Rabbi Bazeley and his wife Allyson have embraced the AEMT family and we have embraced them. For those who have already met Rabbi Bazeley I'm sure you would agree that he is a special person and we are all looking forward to watching him grow and share his love for Judaism and passion for education with all of us.

Lenny Haas joined us as our Director of Youth Activities. During his interview, Lenny clearly demonstrated his love for Reform Judaism and his desire to share that love with our youth groups. His infectious enthusiasm is felt by all who meet him, and most importantly the kids love him!!

Inna Sheppard joined as our Gan Director. Since she has begun, she has grown enrollment, instituted new programs like Mommy and Me and Shabbat Kitanim, developed new advertising and marketing and has engaged with the teachers to develop new learning opportunities in our Gan. While the demographics and competition have and will most likely continue to be a challenge for us, AEMT remains committed to our GAN program, and we know that Inna is the right person to meet the challenges and continue the tradition of excellence in our Gan

I want to thank all those who participated on search committees this past year. You have truly had a hand in shaping the future of AEMT.

I would also like to welcome Meredith Lubin back to AEMT Religious School as our Education coordinator. She along with Rabbi Bazeley have already begun the year with a bang and I have no doubt that our religious program will remain the pride of AEMT

As Rabbi Miller told you last night, he has been nominated to become the new North American Chair of ARZA. With his selection to this volunteer role, URJ recognized what we have known for a very long time—there is no-one more passionate and steadfast in his love for Israel than Rabbi Miller. It can certainly be demonstrated in his work in making this temple a lover of Israel and became crystal clear with his words last night. Rabbi Miller knows that Israel is critical to our survival as a Jewish people and that Reform Jews are critical to the survival of Israel. We should certainly be proud to have him representing us as ARZA Chair. We should certainly be willing to share him and his love of Israel with the URJ and allow him to be strong advocate of Israel outside the walls of AEMT. And like all of us, allow him to volunteer for something he is passionate for.

As we think about the future and the challenges that lie ahead we've realized how important it is to ensure that there are congregants who will be ready to take on the mantle of leadership. With that in mind, we have developed the Joshua Project. We have invited members of our temple to participate in this program designed to prepare the next generation of leaders. For ten Sundays, we will share in the temple history, understand our own personal connections and learn what it's like to be a Temple Leader. Our hopes are that this project will provide the pipeline for the future.

It is also said—that the more things change—the more they stay the same. This also defines this past year.

While we made many staff changes, the values, principles and standards of AEMT have not changed. We agreed to a well-deserved contract extension for Cantor Ott. Music at AEMT continues to lift our souls each and every day and this extension ensures us that Cantor Ott will continue to share her gift of music with us.

I am thrilled to share with you that Rabbi Miller will continue his relationship with AEMT for the foreseeable future. With the counsel of our Past Presidents, and the approval of our Board and Congregation at last May's congregational meeting, we have come to an agreement for Rabbi Miller to remain our Senior Rabbi beyond his current contract and to become AEMT's first ever Rabbi Emeritus upon his retirement. This agreement enables our future leaders to set our direction, strategy and vision beyond just the next few years, and it ensures that Rabbi Miller will be part of our lives and the life of AEMT for many, many more years to come.

We continue to attract new members that reflect the diversity of our community. Our MAP program for new members is bursting at the seams with our new congregants engaging each other and our clergy and leaders in learning, sharing and growing. I am very confident that our new members will be advancing to become active participants as they continue their relationship with AEMT.

The operating budget of AEMT remains strong, and our operations and programming continue to be fully funded. Our dues are coming back up to the level prior to the economic downturn, but that is not to say that congregants are not continuing to struggle. As always, we commit to making AEMT a home for all, regardless of capability to pay full dues. That is why we are so thankful for your continued commitment to our Annual Appeal and fundraising opportunities at AEMT. We all know the joy that membership to AEMT brings to us. Now more than ever, we need to ensure that any Jewish family can find this joy and have the needed support and strength that our community provides. Your tzedakah, through Annual Appeal and continued financial support of AEMT does just that.

While our operations remain strong, the Promise Campaign has still not met the goal of paying off the mortgage. We have made some progress since last year, and have met with many of you and received new commitments. We are certainly thankful for this. We still, however, have more work to do and we need your help. Please allow us to continue this conversation with you. As I shared with you last year, if the Promise Campaign is not successful, it threatens to undermine all that we have done, and negatively impact our operations and programming.

AEMT remains a vibrant community where we learn, pray and grow together. This is certainly reflected in our program book, which I hope will become a very well used book for you this year. There are so many exciting events coming up this year but there are two events that I wanted to specifically point out.

On October 21st we will be celebrating the extraordinary accomplishments of Deborah Cherniss, President of our wonderful CDC, with the highest honor we can give, the Crown of Torah. Thousands of Middlesex county families have been lifted up in the 12 years of the CDC's existence and it would not be possible without Deborah Cherniss. Please join us to thank Deborah for all she has done for this community. She is truly our own Mitzvah Hero.

On December 25th we will be welcoming David Broza to AEMT. David is an amazing guitarist, singer and song writer from Israel. He has performed around the world including famous concerts at Masada. We will have the privilege to see him perform in the intimacy of our own sanctuary. Those at the Biennial were mesmerized when we saw him perform in front of 5,000 people. I am sure if you ask anybody who was there they would say it was one of the highlights of an unbelievable Biennial. This will truly be a once in lifetime opportunity to share a special musical event together as a congregation. I guarantee you that this major fundraiser will be an event you do not want to miss.

As I have shared with you, we have accomplished much in this past year and have set the stage for new and exciting years ahead for AEMT

As I begin my 2nd year as your President I have been able to personally reflect on this past year and the year ahead.

This past year truly has been one of significance to me. I have had the honor to represent you at the biennial, share in the joys of Shabbat every week, and work with a staff and clergy that has the energy and commitment level that is truly hard to believe. I have marveled at the accomplishments of our children, had to say goodbye but also say hello. I have worked with a Board that understands the honor that it is to serve AEMT. I have been in awe of our volunteers. I have dealt with the routine as well as wondered at the sacred. I have grown spiritually and took stock in what was important in life. I know that this coming year will be filled with all this and more.

But the significance of this past year goes beyond just my experience as President, in truth, it brought into focus what membership at AEMT has meant to me and my family.

Personally, this has been a year of great change. Shari and I sent Adam and Emily off to college this year, and for the first time in 18 years they are not home to celebrate the high holidays with us. But Anshe Emeth remains a constant. This change in my life has allowed me to more fully understand and appreciate what Anshe Emeth has meant and continues to mean.

Rabbi Miller shared 3 words with you on Erev Rosh Hashanah; I would like to share 4 more:

Significance, Strength, Spirituality and Safety.

Like many of you, Shari and I see our experiences at AEMT through our children. It's not surprising since our children's lives have been intertwined with the fabric of AEMT for 18 of the 20 years that we have belonged here.

This became clearer right before Adam and Emily left, when we opened the time capsules that were put together over the course of the first year of their lives. Beyond the TV guides, sports magazines and other memorabilia representing 1994, what struck me was what also included in this time capsule ...this AEMT Service Sheet from October 1 1994, the Shabbat we celebrated Adam and Emily's Baby naming. I now have the perfect companion for the May 25, 2012 service sheet from Graduation Shabbat. In between, they felt Significance, Strength, Spirituality and Safety.

Through this wonderful temple, they felt the *significance* of feeding and sheltering the homeless, traveling to Israel, participating in Mitzvah corps and living the values that were learned here every day

They gained *strength* through sharing a bond with AEMT; making friends that are family, having the Rabbi help through loss and recently making a call to college to check up

They felt the *safety* of this temple by knowing that they would always be treated with respect, never bullied or ostracized

They felt the *spirituality* of singing in the junior choir, leading the service for their B'nai Mitzvah, reading Torah and Blowing shofar on the high holidays and being blessed by the Rabbi on their graduation day

My children's experiences are not unique, just an example of how AEMT changes lives, and this says a lot about AEMT. What other community, then a synagogue, then AEMT, can bring Significance, Strength, Spirituality and Safety?

On behalf of all of our children, I thank all of you for creating a place that allows all of us to experience these types of memories and for giving them the wings to move on to the next chapter of their lives.

So what does the presidency mean to me?

It means that I can give back for all those who've created such a wonderful place. It means that I can share my love and passion for AEMT with others. It means that together we can help build future leaders of AEMT, who will carry forward our values and vision. It means that I can help guide our current leaders to commit that the Significance, Strength, Spirituality and Safety that my family and theirs have experienced will be experienced by all. My goal as president and as a leader continues to be that the connection that my family and I have felt would be possible for every member of our temple

I also realized something else. You don't have to be President to have these same meaningful experiences. All of us have the capability of using our personal memories and connections as a springboard toward long term commitment and meaningful experiences at AEMT.

On this Yom Kippur Day—we should all think about how AEMT has provided significance, safety, strength and spirituality in our lives. What is your own personal story? How can you share this connection with others? What will your connection continue to be? What can we all do to ensure that AEMT continues to bring significance, strength, security and spirituality into the lives of others? There is no more special and meaningful place than the synagogue. I'm proud to say that this community continues to recognize this.

I know that long after I am President and I join the ranks of Past-President that this synagogue will continue to create memories, provide shelter from life's storms, teach Jewish values and forge a bond with all who come through its doors.

So as I conclude my last address as President of this temple, I wanted to share this reading from our Mishkan Tefilah as a commitment that we all make together:

*May the door of this synagogue be wide enough to receive all who hunger for love, all who are lonely for friendship
May it welcome all who have cares to unburden, thanks to express, hopes to nurture
May the door of this synagogue be narrow enough to shut out our pettiness and pride, envy and enmity
May its threshold be no stumbling block to young or straying feet
May it be too high to admit complacency, selfishness and harshness
May this synagogue be, for all who enter, the doorway to a richer and more meaningful life*

Amen

L'Shanah Tovah