

REMARKS FOR ROSH HASHANAH 5776

Shana Tovah! I am Luke Weisberg, your congregational President. I'm pleased to welcome everyone, and offer thanks to each of you for being here. We can't do communal prayer without a community. It's good to see your faces!

We also can't do communal prayer without a space – thanks to our friends here at First U for hosting us. And of course, without our clergy, our staff, the choir and musicians – we would be...well...a little lost. Thanks for offering your guidance and sharing your insights and gifts. Special acknowledgment to our Rabbis Michael Latz and Debra Rappaport, and Wendy Goldberg for guiding us through our new (and beautiful!) machzor.

Since we're just beginning a two-year relationship -- you (the congregation) and me -- I thought I'd share a few pertinent details as we get to know each other better.

First, I'm married to the beautiful, talented, and wonderful Janet Weisberg. Some of you may know Janet from the membership committee; or maybe you've enjoyed her most-special homemade Challah. Janet and I have two sons who have grown up here at Shir Tikvah: Asher, a 17-year-old musician, shofar blower, and high school senior; and Sam who is at Emerson College in Boston pursuing theatre.

Second, I have no trouble crying in public. So, plan for that now.

Third, I have a 'day job'! I have a consulting business working in the employment & training and community development arenas. We do a lot of planning, research, writing, and strategy work for public and nonprofit organizations. During the next few years, I'll bring some of my professional skills to this job too. We have a few big things ahead for us here at Shir Tikvah – and I'll likely be engaging with you about strategy, direction, and how we track our forward steps as a *kehillah kedosha* (a holy community).

I'm delighted to be serving as President of the Board of Trustees. I am a little humbled, appreciative, and excited to help us keep moving forward. My engagement in Shir Tikvah over 15 years now helps me become my best self. Our congregational life helps me show up – as a Jew – to fix that which needs fixing. So, that's why I'm delighted! This community helps me grow, fix, learn, do, and be more than I could ever grow, fix, learn, do and be on my own. And, leading your Board of Trustees for the next two years, we have a lot to tend to as we grow, fix, learn, do, and be/become *together*.

Growth is, in fact a big theme for us because we are a growing congregation...and it drives virtually every item on our internal congregational "to do" list. Some of those items include: making sure we keep our talented staff and provide them with enough support to meet our expectations; continuing to strengthen our education programs for youth and adults; ensuring that our physical space allows us to fulfill our vision; ensuring we have predictable revenue to make this all happen; and of course, answering the eternal question central to our congregational experience: "Where can we park?"

The Board is bringing these and other items forward for discussion and action in the next few years. We've begun now on a shift in our financial life that I want to highlight because it is in keeping with some of the themes of the high holidays. In our liturgy tonight, tomorrow, and on Yom Kippur we'll speak about striving for *shlema* – wholeness in our lives. We want our approach to synagogue finance to be as whole, complete, and holistic as we strive for in our spiritual lives. To that end, a policy change made by the Board this past spring will shift how we budget for our work; and, how we ask you to make your financial commitments to Shir Tikvah. We need longer-term, more predictable revenue; and over the next few years, we will be working to meet with each household to talk with you about our gap in revenue, your past generosity, and your ability to give in the future. This is a big, exciting, and important shift that will help us get on stronger financial footing as we move forward. And by the way, don't worry, we won't stop asking you for money! I promise.

So, a few words about how we'll manage this work together. Specifically, three words: gentle, patient, and persistent.

I am a skilled self-flagelator. I can be my own worst critic. I'm certain none of you have EVER had this experience. I'm beginning this Rosh Hashanah with a *kavanah* – an intention – to be gentle with myself and with those around me. I invite us all, as a community during these high holidays and every day thereafter, to be gentle with ourselves and those around us. As we pursue our congregational vision together, let's follow the words of great prophet Otis Redding: Try a little tenderness.

With regard to patience and persistence, they go hand in hand. I can be more patient when I am also being persistent – moving toward a goal...and my persistence most certainly requires patience. Our Torah stories, our history as Jews, and even our Shir Tikvah story reflect these themes.

As a congregation, we have shown our patience and persistence through our own growth; our searching (successfully!) for Rabbinic leadership; developing a vision statement and lifelong learning pathway; and in pursuing Tikkun Olam through work on climate change, gun violence, and of course, marriage equality. We have proven to ourselves that we can be patient, persistent, and gentle.

We'll be needing these skills this year as we step up our work together to tackle race bias in our wider community, and continue our work to include many who have, for so long, been left out of our communal Jewish life.

So...much to do – and always better when we do it together. Your Board of Trustees has your back. Use these high holidays to be gentle, patient, and persistent with yourself. And, think about how you'll be part of our congregational efforts to bring our best selves forward. As we grow, fix, learn, do and be *together*, our collective impact will be nothing short of brilliant! Our preparation, our grounding for that work, begins now.