

Erev Rosh Hashanah 2019

Good evening; it is an honor to speak to you tonight as Board president.

Welcome to 5780. For some of us, the 80s are back!

Thank you to our hosts at St Joan of Arc. Thank you, *todah rabah*, to our rabbis for leading us through the Days of Awe, from tonight through to the sound of the *shofar* ten days from now. Thank you to our staff for all the work that preceded these days and all the work that will come after them. Thank you to our choir, to our musicians, and to our torah chanters. Thank you to our ushers, to our *shomrim*, to our childcare team, to the apple-stackers and the honey-pushers, to those volunteers who help provide the logistics and the structure for our worship.

And welcome to you, you who have assembled here, members and guests.

הִנֵּה מָה טוֹב וְיָמָה נְעִים שְׁבֵט אַחִים גַּם יַחַד

Hine ma tov umanaim, shevet achim gam ya-chad.

A song many of us learned in Tot Shabbat, as kids or as parents; it is ever true when Jews come together. Psalm 133, *Hine ma tov umanaim, shevet achim gam ya-chad*, what a joy it is to be gathered here in unity.

Last year, I reminded you that Shir Tikvah is wherever we gather, so add this to the list of our places. I also spoke about the challenges of the place where we are often found, 1360 Minnehaha Parkway. Because of those challenges, the Board has been exploring options. We spent the last 12 months engaged in deep exploration of a shared campus with First Universalist. Thank you to those who donated their time and money to push this idea as far as it could go; as announced at the beginning of this month, I say with some sadness that the period of discernment has come to an end—we have reached a mutual decision with First Universalist that we cannot proceed down the co-location path; remodeling that space to meet both congregations' needs is not financially feasible.

We have not, however, been left empty-handed. First, we have deepened our understanding of our own needs and our potential as a congregation. Second, we have begun the work of reconsidering our youth education program, work which will continue. Third, we have made real connections to First Universalist, a community of fellow travelers on the roads of service, kindness, and justice. Fourth, we have reconfirmed just how deeply talented and sweetly generous this community is. Dozens of Shir Tikvah members stepped up to do the work of exploring co-location, from *alef* to *taf*, from *A* is for Abbie (Shain) to *Z* is for (Joel) Zimmerman. Thank you.

The board will continue the work of wrestling with the gap between our facility at 1360 Minnehaha and our commitments to sustainability and radical hospitality. I'm so grateful to our 18 excellent board members for their service in this and other leadership projects.

As I think about all the things that Shir Tikvah does, I'm awe-struck and inspired. Our Caring Community team arranging for meals and *shiva* support. Our brilliant Sanctuary team. Our child-teachers, our *Torah*-tutors, our *shofar*-blowers, garden-weeders, banjo-strummers, program-stuffers, door-openers, *oneg* host-ers, Purim-speilers, candle-lighters, carrot-choppers, bagel-sellers, sopranos, mezzo-sopranos, contraltos, tenors, baritones, basses, thank you all for making Shir Tikvah sing the holy song it sings.

If you're keeping count, I've said "thank you" about a dozen times so far. I've thanked a lot of the people here tonight who fill the many roles I've mentioned. Have I thanked you? Did I inadvertently miss you, or did you miss us?

One of the marvelous things about a synagogue community, and this one in particular, is the fact that it is a container that is fashioned exclusively from the things it contains. A synagogue community is a container that is fashioned exclusively from the things it contains.

Imagine that the act of stacking your groceries at the end of the check-out line also miraculously created—around and from your groceries—a bag, perhaps a canvas tote from MPR. Imagine further that each time you performed this act of grocery stacking, the miracle would happen again. A bag would appear! And imagine still further that without your groceries stacked in just such a way at the end of the check-out line, there would be no bags in this world.

(If I've lost you in the metaphor, let me at least remind you on the topic of groceries, that our youth group, STiFTY, will be leading a food drive on Yom Kippur. Please bring some shelf stable goods next week, in an actual paper bag.)

Another attempt at a metaphor: Imagine that the act of opening the faucet created from the running stream the very cup which held the water. And that without the water, there would be no cup. Such as it is with Shir Tikvah. Shir Tikvah exists *only* because you make it exist, you being a part of Shir Tikvah is what calls Shir Tikvah into existence. And Shir Tikvah is *only* what you commit to making it and *only* what you commit to making it each time you gather with others from and of Shir Tikvah.

We do the embracing and we are the embraced, all at once.

We welcome because you smile and introduce, we sing because you lend your voice, we march because you want to and you've brought a Sharpie and someone else has brought poster-board, we comfort because you asked about a loved one, we celebrate because you brought food, we support our staff who enable Shir Tikvah's creation with salaries and health care and parental leaves and professional development because you stretched to pay what you could, we learn because you hear the insights and questions of another and you offer your own, we have school scholarships because you pay for another person, we keep our home tidy because you put the compost in the bin, we practice our faith and remember our departed because we share our prayers and our stories. To borrow from the Viennese Jewish philosopher Martin Buber, by our actions we create the divine, we create Shir Tikvah, in the spaces between us.

In August, we held a Board retreat and one of the things we did was tell an aspect of our own Shir Tikvah stories. As I share with you some elements of the Board's stories, keep a tally. Which ones resonate with you personally, or matter to you that they resonate for someone else here today?

- Shir Tikvah is one of the few institutions I can believe in today. It consistently reflects the values and direction I want in the world.
- Shir Tikvah is a collective of beautiful people and I can't believe how fortunate and how unlikely it is that I found this place and that it sustains me in the way that it does.
- Shir Tikvah teaches us to be Jews by ritual and what it means to show up in the world as a Jew, for joy, for sadness.
- I want to be here in this place that regenerates me.
- Shir Tikvah holds events that I didn't even know I needed.
- I like my bubble and Shir Tikvah is my bubble.
- Shir Tikvah explores and models leadership in all spaces that differs from the larger world and has given me a hunger for justice work grounded in my Jewish practice.
- I felt Jewish but I wanted to feel more Jewish. I wanted my kids to feel more Jewish and Shir Tikvah removed obstacles to participation.
- I am welcome here to be myself.

- I am welcome here to be myself, as a married heterosexual cisgendered woman with two kids and my husband's last name.
- Shir Tikvah taught me how to receive love and care and concern, and it gave me a place to share with others the love and care and concern that I can offer.
- Shir Tikvah is a place of hope.

These are not simply stories, they are acts of creation. Acts of creation of this community. They are the weaving of the very fibers that make us who we are. The emotions we feel as we craft Shir Tikvah as we do come to us from an old place in our tradition. The Talmud teaches us, in Aramaic, *Kol yisroel arevim zebazeh*: All of Israel is responsible for one another.

All of Israel is responsible for one another. The instruction comes at the end of a passage on moral behavior and righteousness, out of a debate on punishment and responsibility. But the rabbis, being rabbis, do not leave their interpretation in a place of narrowness. *Kol yisroel arevim zebazeh*, all of Israel is responsible for one another, has come to mean that all of the Jewish community at large is responsible for all of the Jewish community in specific.

And that, I propose, is the magic that calls forward Shir Tikvah from this collection of beautiful people. Each and every time we come together, this magic is repeated, enriched and shaped by the people who come together at that particular moment. Some 31 years ago, intrepid Jews conjured a new congregation with a new vision for an ancient faith. For 31 years since then, we have all been working to make real that vision by living it, by showing up and being a voice in prayer, a shoulder to cry on, a hand to help, a smile to offer, a teacher and a student and a mourner and a marcher, a maker of the *minyan*.

Let me propose that as you love the Shir Tikvah you have made, you should get more involved in its ongoing creation, whatever 'more' might and could mean for you this year. Our synagogue by-laws have one proposal as to how. At Article III, Section 4, we have collectively agreed, we have covenanted, that membership here, and I quote, "involves three distinct commitments: a financial commitment, a volunteer service commitment to the congregation, and a commitment to grow in understanding of Torah through study and acts of loving kindness and social justice." And unlike the Talmud, with its centuries of debate between Hillel and Shammai, our by-laws do not have a minority report. Creating this community means *tzedekah*, *tzedek*, *hesed* and *torah*: financial support, justice work, acts of loving kindness, and study.

That these are our by-laws, our synagogue's founding document, is no surprise because they are also part of the by-laws of the Jewish people: *kol yisroel arevim zebazeh*. I invite you this year to get involved, get more involved, step up, step up higher, make stronger and greater the connections that make Shir Tikvah all that it is and all that it can be.

Thank you for creating the community that we make that also holds us, the *shir tikvah* (the "song of hope") we sing together.

Great work lies ahead for us in the year to come!

Shanah tova and todah rabah.