

Outgoing President's remarks at the AGM – October 21, 2021/16 Cheshvan 5782

In last week's Torah portion, we read of an already mature and settled man being challenged to take his wife and leave their homeland, their extended family and their comfort zone in order to set out on an unknown venture. This week's Torah portion finds this couple settled in their newer surroundings, having achieved some measure of success, having learned to receive and welcome guests in their tent which, tradition tells us, was open on all sides, and being advised that their legacy will continue through the birth of their son and his descendants.

"Hello Judah", the conversation started a little over two years ago. "We'd like to talk to you about taking on the Presidency of Kehillat Beth Israel". After trying to say no too many times, I blinked and offered the following terms and conditions:

- 1) "As you know, Margo and I enjoy spending the summer Shabbatot and weekends at our cottage, therefore I am not available to be in shul from approximately the middle of May until a week or two before Rosh Hashanah."
- 2) "I've also spent many years in the smaller Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur services, and really don't want to be sitting on the Bimah in the main Sanctuary and therefore unable to participate in those services."

Little did I expect immediate agreement to these seemingly deal breaker demands, but what is more remarkable is that in many ways the old saying of "be careful of what you wish for, for it may come true" indeed came to be true.

At our Annual General Meeting two years ago, which took place during the festival of Sukkot, I related a teaching that I had just learned from Rabbi Steve Wernick of Beth Tzedec Congregation in Toronto. He spoke of the Sukkah and some of its meanings amongst which was the reasoning for some open walls. The walls are open or transparent so that those inside could see people outside and invite them in to their community; much like Abraham and Sarah's tent. He continued however and taught that the reverse was also true, so that the people outside could see what those inside were doing and thus choose to become part of that community as well.

I cannot help but reflect on this teaching as the pandemic gave us all the opportunity to be both inviting and invited with perhaps no greater example than this past Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur with many of us experiencing a literal open tent. The spirit and lessons of our ancestors and the meaning of the Sukkah indeed allowed me to "fish my wish" but in the most positive and beautiful way, rather than the false obstacles I put up.

There are many individuals to thank for helping us navigate these last 18 months and for bringing new ideas and ways of engaging to our shul community. I have already expressed my gratitude to our Board of Directors, the office and maintenance staff and our Clergy for how they all provided guidance and were instrumental in navigating us through these unusual times. But equally, the credit goes to all of you, our members and sustainers, for supporting our efforts. You have accepted our new ways of engaging; you have encouraged and inspired us all with your kind and thoughtful notes and expressions

of thanks and appreciation and to again use the phrase I've taken from Rabbi Kenter.....we are grateful for all of your contributions whether they be of your time, your talents or your treasure.

It has truly been a privilege to serve as your President these past two years and I owe a debt of gratitude to each of you, with a special nod to Helen Zipes and Rabbi Kenter for engaging me in that initial conversation and accepting my seemingly onerous conditions. And in the tradition of "Acharon, Acharon, Chaviv", saving the most beloved for last, I could never have embarked on this journey without the encouragement, love and support of my beloved, my wife Margo.

Like our ancestors, I am confident that the work we have all started will only continue and grow under the leadership of our next President, Victor Rabinovitch and our Board of Directors, staff and clergy.

Sincerely,

Judah Silverman
Immediate Past President