

Beginnings

At the time of year when leaves drop from trees and our air starts to get chilly again, we Jews think about beginnings.

Of course, during the season of the Days of Awe, we ponder the year we have just spent, the lives we've led, and the traditions we are keeping. Even more, though, we "think forward," because the purpose of reflection and introspection is to build a better and more meaningful life, a life more worthy of its preciousness, marked by more giving, respect, love, meaning, positive action, honesty, compassion, joy, and connection.

For me, this is a special beginning, as I embark on a two-year journey as president of this sacred community. It is a privilege and an honor of the highest kind. And I have high hopes for what we can accomplish together over these next two years.

Already, we have started a concerted marketing effort that we hope, within a year or two, will begin to yield more awareness of Bet Am Shalom throughout the region. We have selected, hired and begun orientation activities for a new Executive Director, Vicky Farhi, who will start in at the end of September, as our beloved Robin Rattner retires after 24 years of exceptional service. We've begun stitching together our inquiry, outreach, and new member efforts to create a better and smoother transition to a sense of "belonging" for people who come here.

We are continuing our immediate past-president Robert Weintraub's vital work in forging a stronger financial future for our shul through the work of the Financial Affairs Committee. We are growing and fine-tuning offerings for younger families. We have brought in a new Shorashim coordinator (Alexandra Capelin, daughter of our own Don and Beth) to support that flagship program. We are sending speakers about Tikkun Olam and our groundbreaking efforts in immigration to the upcoming Reconstructing Judaism convention this November in Philadelphia. We are doing additional innovative work in our Torah La'am Hebrew School under Abby Reiken's leadership.

I cannot take credit for these auspicious beginnings, of course. The credit belongs to our staff and to you, who bring it all, day after day, to this amazing place.

Soon we plan to develop and launch a process in which our community can begin systematically to consider our long-range future – discussing who we want to be, what the challenges are, and how we want to get there. Demographics are shifting in Westchester and it's vital to get in front of changing times, to look at the world, and make choices that are right for us so that we can build the future we want.

We have a very special and rich brand of Jewish practice here at Bet Am. What works for another community may not be right for us. To have the future we want for us and our children, we need to talk, engage, plan, challenge ourselves, and build. Long-term visioning could not happen without the foresight and leadership of our extraordinary clergy, Rabbi Les Bronstein and Cantor Benjie Ellen Schiller, who will be celebrating 30 years with our community this coming year. They are thinking deeply and with extraordinary insight about our future, and they are

totally committed to this project. More on this will be coming in the months after the High Holy Days.

I hope that you will be part of these ventures, volunteering where and when you can. I also hope that you will continue to do what we have always done best – praying, laughing, singing, talking, eating, playing, showing up for one another in time of need, baking, studying, donating, creating, serving others, and just hanging out together. Please reach out to me any time you think there is something I should hear. But please roll up your sleeves with me too. We need you. The more we give one another and the world, the more we each have.

I wish you and all those you love a sweet year, a year of blessing, a year of beginnings.

Shana Tovah –
Ilene