

Thirty Years

This season we mark Bet Am Shalom's 30-year relationship with our beloved Rabbi Lester Bronstein and Cantor Benjie Ellen Schiller. We had a fabulous gala, ***The People Are the Song***, on March 9 where we laughed and sang and danced and ate and drank and celebrated in unison, singing that uplifting song that we have enjoyed in a vast variety of themes and variations over three decades.

On April 12-13, we will have the chance to celebrate in another equally Bet Am-ish way, studying, singing and learning together with guest scholars, delving deeply into what it means to live in a world like ours, be part of a people like ours, and pursue lives of meaning and purpose.

Like all anniversaries, this is a time to look both backwards and forwards – to acknowledge how far we have come, and to smile as we realize how rich the road ahead continues to be.

I want to thank every person reading this and many more who have contributed to this season's celebrations. Thank you first of all to the anniversary chairs, our staff and all the volunteers. We are especially grateful to everyone who contributed to our fundraiser, which had unprecedented success. You – every generous donor and every person who gave his or her time, talent and treasure – uplift us, you sustain us, you help build our future. I am grateful to all in the Bet Am family who have contributed in so many ways over these 30 years and more, to building this beloved community that we call home.

Most of all, I want to acknowledge Les and Benjie, whom we celebrate with love. They personify our special Song and they have exemplified our spirit, peoplehood and the music of our hearts and souls for three decades.

Benjie and Les also have fostered the threads of meaning that link us all to one another in a kind of beautiful spiderweb. When I looked around the room on March 9, I saw hundreds of lifetimes of connection filling that giant room. In our connections to our clergy and one another, our friendships and committees and meetings and prayer and social action and school and song and youth activities and more, we have created a unique melody that resonates within us and weaves all of us to one another. For this, I am so grateful to Benjie and Les, along with our leaders and congregants of the past, present and future.

Anniversaries like this indeed are a time to look back, thinking about all of the joys and sorrows we've shared on our journey, but even more, they spur us to look forward to the future that we have committed to building for ourselves. I have a lot of faith in our community. If anyone can create a liberal Jewish future for ourselves and generations to come, it is Bet Am. This is an extraordinary place and I'm so honored to be part of it in concert with you.

On March 9, we marked the awesomeness of our celebration with a *Shehechayanu* blessing, and I repeat it here in English: *Thank you, Eternal One, for preserving us, and propping us up, and through miracle after miracle, sustaining us as a community, to reach this wondrous time.*

Ilene Semiatin, President