

Rabbi Lewis' Message for Summer, 2012

It hardly seems like eighteen years. When I first walked through the doors of this congregation, I had no idea how long I might be here. I met with the Search Committee. From the beginning, we were honest and direct with each other.

“We won’t hire you if you insist on doing adult education programs during the Oneg Shabbat, because that is the only time of the week we get to see each other and catch up,” they said. That sounded okay to me.

“And promise us that you won’t talk about *gematria* (the relationship between Hebrew letters and numbers) from the pulpit,” they said. Okay, no problem.

“And when the weather is bad, we cancel services because we don’t want people to risk their lives getting here. And if the weather is bad by you and okay by us, don’t come,” they said. I could live with that, I thought.

And finally they said, “If we hire you and things don’t work out, we’d like to just shake hands and walk away from the table.” I felt the same way. From the very first, I sensed that I might find a home at the Jewish Center and I was right.

You might think that after eighteen years, things could become routine and predictable, but that hasn’t been the case. Even though we are small, we are always “growing” in ways other than size. This past Sunday was a good example. It was the final day for teachers to be in class (and out on the front lawn with baby goats) with students. We said goodbye to Cantor Elana Rosen-Brown with a rousing rendition of *Kehillah Kedoshah* (thank you, Debbie Fesinstine for helping us to learn this song). We had a visit from Rabbi Yitzhak Winer, a scribe from Staten Island who brought us a light-weight Torah for our inspection and subsequent purchase. After a lovely lunch (thank you, Sharon Herson), we studied about the shofar with Cantor Daniel Pincus and even learned to blow a few notes. We did this in memory of our *ba'al tekiyah* Eric Edelstein who surely would have been proud of our attempts. I didn’t know when I walked through the doors eighteen years ago that I would find a community that liked to learn and grow.

I didn’t know I would find a community that functioned as a community in the truest sense of the word, a place that believed in taking care of each other and taking care of the synagogue. I used to say that membership came with a mop (that was in the days when the Simcha Room flooded regularly). Everyone pitches in when they see that they are needed.

When a congregation does what it is supposed to do, the rabbi gets to do what the rabbi is supposed to do. Because you do what you do, I get to do what I am trained to do. We work hand in hand. A newspaper reporter asked me recently if I thought that our finding each other was a result of Divine Providence. I said, “No, just good old-fashioned luck.”

Many thanks for a wonderful eighteen years.

L’chaim!

Rabbi Ellen Lewis