

## Rabbi's Message Summer 2023

Dear Friends

While congregations larger than the Jewish Center of Northwest Jersey always employ paid staff to get things done, our community is different. Our community relies on the unrelenting enthusiasm of individual members to give of themselves to make things happen. And this, without a doubt, is one of the primary reasons I love being your rabbi so much.

We are more than just a place of worship; we are a place of community, where friends come together to connect, support each other, and build relationships. As a result, our shared sense of belonging, community, and self-sufficiency – not to mention our shared sense of values – fosters a willingness among us to contribute our time and skills for the betterment of all.

From a more specifically religious point of view, the selflessness that so many in our community demonstrate couldn't be more Jewish. Whether the offerings of volunteerism from amongst us come in the form of gardening, maintenance, teaching, technical assistance, grantwriting, board involvement, cooking and serving, cleaning, worship assistance and coordination, memorializing, social gathering, tikkun olam organizing, communal security, caring for the sick and bereaved, or so many other ways, the Jewish Center of Northwest Jersey doesn't hire out the responsibilities of gemilut chasadim (acts of lovingkindness). We take responsibility and do them ourselves. I love us for this.

Over the past eight years that I've served as your rabbi, we have always been blessed with talented cantors, whether the professional leadership of Cantors Labow and Lazar or the student leadership of Rayn and Shayna. As much as we savor the remarkable beauty of our cantors' musical gifts, we are individually inspired to offer up our own gifts of musical worship. Ours is a singing community – whether or not we can hold a tune. Here, sincerity and enthusiasm matter more than performance. . . which leads me to the primary point of my message this month

With fewer and fewer students training to become cantors at Hebrew Union College, it is increasingly difficult to find a student to serve small congregations like ours. Unfortunately, after two wonderful years with Student Cantor Shayna, we will be without a dedicated cantor next year. Is this cause for spiritual alarm? Of course not. In our congregation, we thrive because we live alongside each other with intention and heartfelt engagement.

I am thrilled that Kevin Story, the pianist extraordinaire whom we have come to love for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur worship these past four years, will be with us once again for the holidays this coming year. While we have the business of worship covered, we still need you.

I am excited to expand our established model of community leadership by adding new cantorial opportunities. Share your gifts – you all have them – by taking on a more visible role in our musical worship. No one needs to sing publicly without first receiving support and training to do so. For some, that may mean nothing more than having the sheet music ahead of time. For others, it will require practice sessions. We are not a congregation of passive receivers. We are a family of active contributors.

Moving into the summer months, I begin the process of preparing for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur of 5784. As part of that process, I will pay special attention to the music of our worship. If you are interested in helping us and finding that musical joy yourself, please be in touch with me at

RabbiDubin@gmail.com. Though I already stated it above, it bears repeating: I promise you will receive as much (or as little) support as you need or want.

Above all, let us join together and sing.

L'Shalom, and Todah MeRosh ("thank you in advance")

Rabbi Dubin