

# Presidential Message

October 2019

Shana Tova!

To me, unlike the calendar new year, our Jewish New Year is not about plans for losing weight, cleaning the garage or saving more money. It's about repentance (teshuvah) and forgiveness (mechilah). The process is not to be taken lightly. I did some reading from a website called "MyJewishLearning.com" and pulled out this paragraph regarding how teshuvah and mechilah work according to our tradition;

"The tradition, however, is quite clear that the offended person is not obliged to offer mechilah if the offender is not sincere in his or her repentance and has not taken concrete steps to correct the wrong done. Maimonides is decisive on this subject: "The offended person is prohibited from being cruel in not offering mechilah, for this is not the way of the seed of Israel. Rather, if the offender has [resolved all material claims and has] asked and begged for forgiveness once, even twice, and if the offended person knows that the other has done repentance for sin and feels remorse for what was done, the offended person should offer the sinner mechilah" (Maimonides, Mishne Torah, "Hilchot Chovel u-Mazzik," 5:10). Mechilah is, thus, an expectation of the offended person but only if the sinner is actually repentant."

Many of our congregants have spoken with me about our past annual meeting. They voiced their displeasure that we did not hold the discussion about Beth-El purchasing half of our building and having both congregations cohabitate. It is something that they would have supported. I am pleased to hear from these members, because it shows that there is a deep concern about the potential for fragmentation of our Jewish community.

When I consume the (dreaded) news, whether on internet or listening to the news when I drive, it seems that I can't go a week without another anti-semitic story hitting my web newsfeed or radio. With this going on locally and in the world, there should be no hesitation to open our doors to our people Israel.

Whatever it is that may be causing hesitation, think of teshuvah and mechilah. I'd like to help heal any rifts and welcome, and be welcomed by other Jewish people. The all-in model of selling our building and cohabitating was my idea. Because benefactors supported Emanu-El to secure our synagogue, selling our building was no longer necessary, but why not open our doors?

What does this look like? At the past Board meeting I informed the Board that if our sanctuary is not being used, I will not charge Temple Beth-El if they want to worship in our space on a Saturday. I can't charge fellow Jews to pray. We also discussed the idea of leasing a customized space to Beth-El as a place for them to hold Shabbat services and other worship activity. The Board approved investigating this possibility.

As I promised at the annual meeting, I will continue to be transparent about relevant Board discussions. Your feedback is important.

Jonathan