

# From the Rabbi's Desk

December 2019

Friends,

The days are getting shorter. In just a few weeks, we will be celebrating Chanukah together. As is our tradition at Temple Emanu-El, we will light our Chanukiot together in the sanctuary. The light will shine brightly. This light, in the depths of winter, symbolizes hope; a hope that began with a story of victory over tyranny. But in reality, then as now, it is sometimes difficult to sort out all of the complicated details. Who is the hero, who is the tyrant? Intertwined within the story of the miracle of Chanukah is a story of Jewish religious extremism. In such a complicated world, where do we find our light of hope?

I find hope in the ways we have found to build and celebrate relationships. This fall, directly after the High Holy Days, we had a communal Simchat Torah celebration at Beth Jacob in Norwich. I am thrilled that the high energy, musically rich, joyful dancing Simchat Torah program that we have been building at Temple Emanu-El was able to be transformed into a community celebration for the second year, this time at Beth Jacob. Rav Julius was instrumental in creating a vision for the evening that built on everything Sherry and I created at Temple Emanu-El and elevated it. All of the rabbis came together with a few lay leaders to collaboratively create a program that brought the whole community together in joy.

I find hope through our recent Artist in Residence program. Rabbi Or and Feliza Zohar returned to Temple Emanu-El for a program that broke new ground. We collaborated with All Souls UU Congregation for a weekend of Building Beloved Community through Sacred Music. We prayed together, studied together, played and sang together, and ate together. We celebrated the historical connection between our congregations and breathed new life into our relationship. The sound of our Interfaith Choir brought tears of joy to the eyes of many. In an informal debrief after our Interfaith Service on Sunday, Rabbi Or commented that the level of collaboration that we engage in at Temple Emanu-El goes far beyond what he has seen anywhere around the country. We are truly living the vision of being a light to the nations. This is Building Beloved Community.

I find hope in our renewed discussions with Beth El. All of you know that for the past three years we have gone through fits and starts with BE. Since they sold their building, both congregations have done deep soul searching. The leadership of both congregations has been earnestly guiding this process for three years, Sean Bendick, Judi Goldberg, and both rabbis worked diligently, and wholeheartedly. It is not an easy process to bring two disparate congregations together. No one should have expected that it would be easy to create an atmosphere where mutual respect, collaboration, and pluralism could win out over fears and anxieties centered around identity and geography. We aren't there yet, but with each iteration, with each discussion, we come closer to meaningful collaboration that benefits and respects both congregations.

I find hope in finding new meaning in our tradition. In December, just before Chanukah, Sherry and I will travel to the URJ Biennial in Chicago. The biennial is our chance to see and hear about the many Reform Jewish innovations from around the country and around the world. Without a doubt, Or and Feliza are innovators that have made a lasting impression in SE CT.

They are one example of a movement that is constantly looking to the future, whether in Israel or the US. The melodies Or and Feliza bring to us are fresh and vibrant but the words and imagery are ancient. We are always striving to find meaningful ways for our Jewish tradition to meet the challenges of modernity.

Thus all of my hope is grounded in our mission because all of these things are in it. I find hope in the active pursuit of Building a Vibrant Community through Reform Judaism.

Happy Chanukah,

Rabbi Marc