

May 5, 2019 | 30 Nissan 5779
Shir Tikvah Annual Meeting
Rabbi Report
ב'ה

Rabbi Arielle Lekach-Rosenberg

This week's Torah Portion outlines the mitzvot involved with the Omer offering. On the second day of Pesach we are commanded to bring an offering of barley in the Temple and the Torah further instructs us to count 49 days from the offering until the day before Shavuot. We continue this tradition in a special form until today: starting on the second day of Pesach, we count each of the 49 days until the day before Shavuot, marking each day with a blessing. We walk a path from the exodus from Egypt all the way to Sinai.

When counting the omer, we stay mindful of every day. We see each day for itself and simultaneously, as part of a chain of days. We stay aware of what makes each day special. And we remind ourselves each day of counting that we do this לשם יחוד קודשא בריך הוא ושכינתיה - for the sake of the unification of aspects of the Divine.

This kavannah reminds us that we don't just count the Omer to get from Pesach to Shavuot, we don't just count to create order in the face of the wilderness, but rather, that our counting is in service. We beckon our consciousness into deeper awareness and attentiveness. Don't miss this moment! We are counting to bring deeper unity to all of Creation, l'shem yihud kudsha brikh hu u'shkhintei, one aspect at a time. We summon a divine order and meaning out of the void of the everyday, out of the wilderness of time.

How wonderful, then to have this chance to come together and be counted, to come together and recount the successes and challenges of the last year, and to vision and affirm new possibilities for the coming year.

Coming to the end of a second year of life-giving work at Shir Tikvah, I am doing a lot of reflecting and recounting, taking stock of the successes and struggles of the last two years and setting intentions for the years to come. I am beyond grateful to work with an incredible rabbinic team, Shir Tikvah staff, board and congregants and am thrilled to have signed a new contract that allows me to dream all the way to 2025. It is a privilege to get to imagine myself here, in this wise bunch, this courageous bunch, this incorrigible, curious, complicated bunch of Jews into the future. Thank you.

In the last year, we've seen our shabbat music ensemble grow by more than a minyan. Working with an amazing team, we created a Rad, Queer Purim spiel that brought 300 people to Shir Tikvah for an intergenerational Purim spiel that took on housing justice, gentrification and redemptive visions of activism. Six members of our community traveled together to New York to learn with Joey Weisenberg, as many people travelled to various parts of the midwest to participate in Shabbat Shira and Hava Nashira song leadership training programs. Our choir challenged itself over the High Holy Days to sing contemporary Hebrew love songs and at

Shabbat Shira to proclaim the words of Dr. Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. Our Sanctuary committee grew to over 100 volunteers, staffing volunteer shifts all week long, planning multiple orientations and a successful volunteer appreciation party just last week, participating actively in the South Minneapolis Sanctuary Cluster and the broader ISAIAH network of Sanctuary congregations. I participated around the leadership table of the Minnesota PPC campaign with incredible ST members Abbie Shain, Dave Snyder and Elizabeth Tannen and was glad to march and organize with many other Shir Tikvah members. It has been an honor to be here, to learn with you, to dig in and I can't wait for more.

In the year to come, I look forward to engaging even more lay leadership in Torah leyning and as musicians in our services, to creating more spaces for feedback and dreaming about our ritual life. I look forward to learning spaces that are deep in Torah and expansive with music. I look forward to continuing to twine our davening life and our racial justice work.

Noam and I hope to welcome a newcomer to our family at the beginning of July and I have been working with our amazing staff and lay leaders to make sure that community work is not disturbed by my absence. I look forward to rejoining the community for High Holy Days and to introducing our newcomer to the community. Noam and I are in love with the kids who grow up here: their freedom and curiosity, their ease and love of Judaism, their sense of home at Shir Tikvah. We couldn't imagine a better place to raise young Jewish weirdos than here.

So grateful to be in this work with you. May we continue to reach towards each other through the struggles, לשם יחוד קודשא בריך הוא ושכינתיה.

Rabbi Debra Rappaport

Last Wednesday I attended an interfaith clergy workshop entitled "Moving from Anxiety to Optimal Wellbeing," sponsored by JFCS and the mental health program (including Laurie Kramer and Julie Jacobs). The speaker, Dr. L. Read Sulik, is a pediatrician and child and adolescent psychiatrist who focuses on treating Anxiety disorders.

It's not news to anyone here that we live in a time of huge and growing anxiety – whether from public issues ... "dot dot dot", the incessant bombardment of news, or personal stressors like work, family, or our innate wiring. Here at Shir Tikvah, big changes are underway – and we know that change, even the really good kind, can be stressful. So I want to share some of what I learned from Dr. Sulik, and how it can be helpful to us at this moment in the life of Shir Tikvah.

Dr. Sulik explained how the arousal that leads to anxiety affects us physically, emotionally and cognitively. With sustained anxiety, our functioning suffers; our relationships suffer; our sense of meaning and purpose suffers; and we become prone to avoiding or controlling types of behaviors. Just at a time when more collaboration and more creativity are called for, systemic anxiety – individually and collectively – can impede not only our sense of wellbeing but also the crucial work to be done.

Fortunately, Dr. Sulik is sharing practical responses for cultivating well-being. First, he teaches, we need to practice scanning our bodies, our minds, and our actions, for stress signals and learn to recognize them real-time. Then we do a positivity scan: I'd like to invite you along as I go through the positivity scan. Please notice the following feelings, how they've arisen in the past hour: Joy, gratitude, serenity, interest/curiosity, hope, pride, amusement, inspiration, awe, and love. Any surprises? The antidote to excessive anxiety, according to Dr Sulik, is to train ourselves to notice and recognize these positive feelings on a regular basis. This creates a literal physiological shift in our sense of well-being, displacing the anxiety so that it may no longer reside within us.

Not surprisingly, our Jewish ancestors have been developing and teaching these practices for centuries. What we call *mussar*, or *tikkun-middot*, has been making its way back into Jewish life in general, and Shir Tikvah specifically. A *middah* is a measure, a quality. Julie Dean describes it as the levers on the sound board of our lives. By practicing *tikkun middot*, we learn how to use our own "sound board" to adjust the volume of various qualities so that the overall mix enhances the quality of our relationships.

In the past few years, the vocabulary and practices of *tikkun middot* have entered our lifelong learning – including through Wise Aging workshops, last year's Omer Mussar and Leadership Mussar groups, this year's classroom time with the Confirmation class, and Shabbat mornings with sixth grade parents and students. Each of these groups learned first about how to recognize a *behirah* moment, a moment of choice when we don't have to act according to our habitual or instinctual response. People's eyes light up when they encounter practices for wellbeing of self and relationships within Judaism.

The quality that corresponds most directly to Dr. Sulik's positivity scan is called *hakarot ha-tov*, recognizing the good. *Pirke Avot* (4:1) teaches: **אִיזְהוּ עָשִׂיר, הַשֵּׂמֵחַ בְּחַלְקוֹ** Who is rich? One who rejoices in what they have. Both the psychiatrists and the rabbis know, that just hearing, just learning, isn't enough. We need opportunities to practice, and *chavruta* (spiritual learning partners) who will support us, and whom we will support, in the practices.

In the spirit of recognizing the good, and especially given that it's Sunday morning, I want to call out the 20 teachers who show up Sundays and/or Wednesdays, and the 220 students -including as *madrichim* and *ozrim* (student aides,) who are here regularly. Our students and teachers, with regular weekly practice, create a learning environment for young people who live into our values of radical hospitality, lifelong learning, justice, and soulful prayer. I emphatically say practice, because Lord knows there is always room for improvement. I want to acknowledge the work of Forrest Yesnes, who consistently steers this massive ship, with essential support from our Inclusion & Wellness coordinator Raena Davison. We practice intentional community, day in, day out. This matters because we care about raising children, and supporting humans, who are resilient and have the tools to thrive in a stressful world. Thank you to all of you who are here, helping to recognize the good!

Rabbi Michael Latz

This June I celebrate my 10th year as a rabbi of Shir Tikvah. Mah Norah HaMakom Hazeh! How awesome is this place! How grateful to join to my voice with yours in song and in hope. Grateful, for a decade working with John Humleker as he retires. Grateful to my rabbinic colleagues- my God, how do two leaders possess such an abundance of vision, skill, and knowledge? Radical Amazement! Grateful for the babies we've named, the B'nei Mitzvah we've celebrate, the chuppahs we've danced beneath, the love we've shared as we've buried our loved ones. Grateful for amazing presidents: Jane Newman, Jane Binder, Ray Levi, Luke Weisberg, Bruce Manning. Grateful for the boards and leaders and staff we've served with. Grateful to watch my children grow up in this holy community, grateful for the ways you've supported Michael and me. Grateful. Grateful. Grateful.

Who are we, this motley band of former slaves creating a Jewish community in South Minneapolis?

We are Shir Tikvah. Song of Hope. We sing. We hope. These two holy activities- singing and hoping- they are more than just a fabulous name for our congregation as we celebrate our 31 years together in fellowship, seeking to be God's partners, living Torah, praying our hearts out, loving each other and the world, fiercely. Song and Hope- these are sacred acts, they describe who we are, what we do. Rebbe Nachman taught, "A holy melody has the power to bring one to the level of prophecy. Music is the foundation of true attachment to God."

We've sung hope this past year as we've engaged in robust spiritual discernment about our three congregational priorities: our facilities and co-location, how to live into our racial justice commitments, and how to deepen our encounter with Torah- with holy syllables that shape our lives and we pray, our world, predicated upon the words we uttered this past Shabbes, "v'ahavta l'reycha kamocho"- to love our neighbor as ourselves. We have wrestled with the practical and logistical questions of co-location, while holding the deepest question: How and where can our vision of singing hope thrive? What will it mean to show the world two different communities coming together to share one campus, to live holy and wholly as Jews, to be partners in a neighborhood aching for love and justice?

Co-location is probably the wrong word for our song of hope with First U; Perhaps through our song and prayers and our hope, a new melody will rise up, new language will emerge to describe the power of this spiritual project. We ask ourselves: How will two powerful congregations united under one roof transform their member's souls, live out our Jewish commitments of mitzvot and Torah, and make a claim in the neighborhood: We aren't here just to disrupt traffic on Fridays and Saturday and Sundays; we dream that the building at 3400 Dupont to be holy place, where conversations about life and purpose and meaning make the walls harmonize; where neighbors of all faith and no faith and questioning faith and wounded faith can step inside and talk about the issues that are on their heart; where, possibly, a pre-school supports the working parents in the neighborhood; where Torah and Talmud are poured over in our beit midrash- our house of study-

as we seek ancient wisdom to contemporary questions; where in this innovation laboratory space, the energy of two distinct faith communities engage the best of our traditions to deepen our healing justice impact, our racial justice work, our grand vision of building a neighborhood, a city, a state, a nation, a world, where people unite together to do the work of the world, to love each other fiercely, to soak up Torah, to hold each other in our anguish, to lift each other soaring into the sky with our joy, to move together into a song of hope that we sing more loudly, more robustly, more patiently, more tenderly, more lovingly than ever before; to practice, daily, our profound gratitude for the radical amazement of being alive.

We are Shir Tikvah. We Sing Hope. It is who we are. It was what we do. It is why we exist. We have spent this past year and will spend the coming year, together, as rabbis and staff and brilliant lay leaders- Bruce, your visionary leadership is a marvel- and faithful congregants, I pray we continue to offer up our broken hearts and our broken world a Torah of love and of hope and of defiance against despair through the melodies that infuse the universe with the Divine Presence. Keep singing hope.