

Shana Tova!

We've come to place in our service where we turn our attention, briefly, from the holy work of prayer to that of giving, of reflecting on how we can support and grow our Shir Tikvah community to do its work here and in the world.

My name is Ray Anshel. I'm a new member of Shir Tikvah's Board and beginning my 10th year as a member of Shir Tikvah; for a period of time I drifted (an Odyssey of sorts) in search of a place I could call my Jewish home. With Rabbi Latz's arrival in 2009, I found that here.

I grew up in an Orthodox Jewish home, attended an Orthodox synagogue, could at one point daven at breakneck speed—all us Washington Heights kids could, even Bar Mitzvahs (there were no Bat Mitzvahs) became a davening competition: who could read more from the Torah, conduct more of a service. We could read and recite, go through the motions but without any real understanding of what was behind the words, behind what we were doing. Today, here at Shir Tikvah, I daven a bit more slowly, but I daven with intention, with greater understanding of what those words and actions mean.

As a kid, I loved going to services, but not for the prayers or the sermon. What I loved was sitting with my grandparents and aunts and uncles. I loved being surrounded by family and friends. I've found that here...again. I don't always come to services to pray. Sometimes it's to be quiet, sometimes it's the music, and often it's just to be in community with one another.

I may seem like an unlikely person to stand here asking for your gift. Doing an "ask" hasn't been part of my professional portfolio (I'm an English teacher). I'm here, though, to tell you a little bit about what Shir Tikvah has given me, how it has enriched my life, and made clear how valuable this thing we call a Jewish home is.

Shir Tikvah is many things:

Shir Tikvah is our Rabbis: They bring their "menschlichkeit," their learning, their passion, their voices, their feistiness, their irreverence, their joy to all we do. Rabbis whose words and actions are bound to each other. Rabbis who delight in a child's outcry in the midst of a service (young children at services was not okay in other places); Rabbis who have deepened this 20th century New Yorker's understanding of what being Jewish can be in the 21st century. Rabbis who live and breathe Shir Tikvah's name. Rabbis who set the tone for all we do and help shape the directions we can travel.

Shir Tikvah is our congregation. Our congregants: a motley band, indeed—orthodox Jews, not so orthodox, Jews who have chosen to become more Jewish, non-Jews who have chosen to become Jewish, Jews of every gender, Jews of every complexion, and those who are not Jewish at all. We are a congregation that celebrates diversity in thought, in prayer, and in ways of being. We are a congregation of like-minded and like-hearted people. A congregation unlike any I've experienced.

Shir Tikvah supports us. Just last week, I sat next to Beth Zemsky at Friday night services. I've seen Beth at temple but had never spoken with her. We didn't speak much that

night either. She and I were there in part because of a Yahrzeit. I listened to her speak about her brother and afterwards put a hand on her shoulder. She listened to me speak of my mother. And felt her hand on my shoulder. Shir Tikvah is about hands on shoulders.

Shir Tikvah: It is the place we go to celebrate and share our joy: we name babies, we celebrate birthdays, and we see our young people become adults. It's a place we gather to mourn, to share our sadness, our grief; it's a place that houses our hopes, our longing; it's a place that bolsters us in times of anger and dismay.

Shir Tikvah gives us new ways of seeing; last year with my adult children and 40+ incredible Shir Tikvah travelers (a microcosm of who we are) I went to Israel. I reveled in the sounds that were not mine, attire that was not mine, food that was not mine (and, oh, so good), rubbed shoulders and took the hands of those who don't look like me. I moved through degrees of cultural, economic, political, and religious difference. And I came back different.

Shir Tikvah is a place of difference, of making a difference. It IS different here. Whether it's in prayer or lifelong learning or acts of justice or in being radically hospitable. How different Shir Tikvah is from those synagogues of bygone days.

Shir Tikvah exists because we want it to exist. It exists because we need it to, so that we can continue to be the example of what a holy community is. Shir Tikvah thrives because of how much we contribute of our time, money, energy, and passion. And- here's the best part-- we get from Shir Tikvah 5-fold what we give. You give a hug, you get embraced by an entire community. You share your voice, and you are accompanied by a choir of voices. When you give to Shir Tikvah, you get a home. A home filled with family: brothers, sisters, grandparents, grandchildren, aunts, uncles, first cousins twice removed. You get love. You get acceptance. You are seen. You are heard.

So, on this Rosh Hashanah, 5779, I invite all of you to join me in giving a High Holy Day gift to Shir Tikvah, so we can continue to evolve and continue to do the work before us. On a table where you came in, there are envelopes: they can hold cash or checks. Or, go to Shir Tikvah.net and donate online. Or if you want a personable touch, John is more than willing to talk with you and receive your donation.

It's good to be here; it's good to be home.

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