

Erev Rosh Hashanah Speech – 5767
By Howard Glicksman

Gut Yontiff and L'Shanah Tovah.

I feel honored with the opportunity to say a few words this Rosh Hashanah.

On behalf of your lay leadership, the Board of Directors, and the Kehillah's staff, I welcome you to the Chapel Hill Kehillah as we gather together to celebrate the beginning of the New Year, 5767.

Welcoming everyone we see who comes to the Kehillah is one of our most precious traditions and is what first attracted my wife Lois and I to the Kehillah in the year 2000. The Kehillah was the only congregation we visited where members greeted us when we entered the door and talked to us when there was an opportunity. I remember coming to High Holiday services that first year and being given a reading even though we were new to the area and not yet members. Although it was a small gesture by the leadership of the Kehillah, it left a lasting impression on us.

I feel that I have been privileged to be part of the Kehillah for the last 6 years. When Lois and I became members, the Kehillah did not have a full time Rabbi nor our own facility. In 2000, we had 126 families as members and 68 students in religious school. We've undergone a lot of change and a lot of growing up these past years. Although we've had a few bumps in our path, we've had an amazing journey in a relatively short period of time.

Today, we have more than 195 families and more than 125 students in religious school. We are a Reconstructionist congregation. We are a significant presence in Chapel Hill with a large facility that includes a sanctuary capable of seating all of us at High Holidays. It is wonderful to be in our own place and not in a hall or church somewhere. We have a great religious school that uses every inch of our facility and a very successful preschool. We have an outstanding, full time staff that includes Rabbi Jen Feldman, our executive director Melissa Segal, our religious school director Marla Dansky, our preschool director Ruth Thomson, and our administrator Audrey Krakovitz. As in the past, this year, we have an excellent group of dedicated lay leaders, Board members, and volunteers who continue to be very active in maintaining the Chapel Hill Kehillah as a great community. An incredible amount of work goes into the day-to-day operation of the Kehillah. It's truly amazing what's done and done well. Special thanks to everyone for their hard work. There aren't enough superlatives to adequately voice our appreciation.

Our community continues to change at a very fast rate. This past year we completed the beautiful Chapel Emanu-El, and we hired new staff members, including our first executive director and our new religious school director. We renewed Rabbi Jen's contract, enabling us to maintain a long-term relationship with her. Although a challenging process, we successfully dealt with city planners and got permission to rent spaces in our parking lot for extra income. We resolved the water problem in the kitchen

and continue to work to control the traffic flow in our parking lot to provide a safe environment. Our preschool is a huge success and we are challenged to find ways to meet the demands. Our Friday night and Saturday morning services are very successful. The prayer books that we're using have been well received, and we finally received the new editions of our Saturday morning Siddur Eit Razon. I could go on and on.

Rosh Hashanah is a time for us to engage in self-examination and reflection on the past year and to think about changes we might want to make in the coming year. We think about our relationships with family, friends, and others in our various communities and consider how we can support and be closer to people and institutions important to us.

I ask that in the next couple of days, you reflect on your relationship with the Chapel Hill Kehillah. I want you to think about how the Chapel Hill Kehillah satisfies your spiritual, education, cultural, and life cycle needs.

How have you taken part in the Kehillah? How has the Kehillah provided what you want from a Jewish community? How can the Kehillah make your life better? How can the Kehillah help you to contribute to your family, the local community, and to the external community we live in? How can you help and support the Kehillah? And how can we continue to make the Kehillah a stronger, better place?

During this new year, the leadership of the Kehillah and the Board are beginning a strategic planning process to consider the future of the Chapel Hill Kehillah.

We have been blessed with significant growth in membership and students in the past few years. It is vital we consciously anticipate and plan for future growth.

Some questions we hope to address are: How can we continually improve our education programs? What facilities and personnel are needed? How do we reach out to unaffiliated Jews in our area? Do we need more comfortable chairs than the ones you're sitting on? What is our role in the Triangle area? And how do we achieve financial stability?

Successful strategic planning builds a shared vision that is values-based. It is an inclusive, participatory process. Strategic planning requires openness to questioning the status quo, and the resulting plan leads to actions.

The Kehillah is a young organization. Now is the time to think strategically about how to make this a great institution for generations to come. During this New Year, please speak to your board members, officers and staff. Tell us what you think we can and should do as we plan for the Kehillah's future. We need your views to build a shared future.

Throughout the year, we'll provide opportunities for your input and keep you abreast of our progress. This process is going to take a while, so be patient. It is too important to rush. We need to give our committees time to work on their strategic planning, which will feed into an overall, comprehensive plan we can use for years to come. This will be an open process, and I'm expecting your involvement.

During my years in North Carolina, I have learned religion is something I have to experience concretely and directly. It is not something I can just observe from a distance. My active involvement has given me a much better sense of Jewish spirituality, and I have broadened my knowledge immensely. The Kehillah has become a caring community where we can experience Jewish life together, learn together, and come to pray together.

Above our doors to the Sanctuary reads: “How good and how pleasant when we gather as a community.” This is so true during Rosh Hashanah. Our community comes together, and we join each other in celebrating the High Holidays. If you have an opportunity tomorrow, I suggest you take a break from whatever service you’re attending and check out other services going on here at the Kehillah. There is so much energy and vibrancy here. I find myself renewed by seeing these living examples of our community coming together to bask in each other’s spirituality.

On behalf of the Board of Directors, officers, and staff of the Kehillah, I thank you for your support and involvement and I wish you and those close to you a sweet New Year. L’Shanah Tovah!