

**President Bruce Leshine's Address**  
**Rosh Hashanah Morning**  
**October 3, 2016**

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Shalom, Gut Yontiff. A year ago on Rosh Hashanah, I spoke about Liz and I stumbling upon the centuries-old synagogue on the tiny Greek island of Corfu in the Adriatic Sea, and my discovery of a Jewish community a world away from our world here in Springfield. I wondered about what makes both our community and the community in Corfu Jewish communities. Many would say that Jews all practice the same religion, and that this religion, Judaism, is a set of ideals and the way we should live our lives. So as a result, we are both "Jewish communities." I believe whole-heartedly in that foundational principle. But in thinking about our two communities, I realize that although as Jews our ideals may be constant, our communities are not. The Jewish community on Corfu has changed over time; as is our community here in Springfield changing. And we are embracing these changes at Sinai Temple; we have before us a fantastic opportunity to grow--- spiritually, intellectually, and dynamically, as a vibrant evolving Jewish community.

In 1999, the Central Conference of American Rabbis, in their words, "state[d] a set of Principles that define Reform Judaism in our own time." In its preamble, that 'Statement of Principles' affirmed the central tenets of Judaism - God, Torah and Israel - even as it acknowledged the diversity of Reform Jewish beliefs and practices." The last sentence of the preamble grabbed my attention: "[We] also invite all Reform Jews to engage in a dialogue with the sources of our tradition, responding out of our knowledge, our experience and our faith." This Statement of Principles goes on to express that "We are an inclusive community, opening doors to Jewish life to people of all ages, to varied kinds of families ... who strive to create a Jewish home. We believe that we must not only open doors for those ready to enter our faith, but also to actively encourage those who are seeking a spiritual home to find it in Judaism. We are committed to strengthening the people Israel by supporting individuals and families in the creation of homes rich in Jewish learning and observance. We are committed to strengthening the people Israel by making the synagogue central to Jewish communal life, so that it may elevate the spiritual, intellectual and cultural quality of our lives."

Elevating the spiritual, intellectual and cultural quality of our lives will require us to think broadly, and to open our minds, individually and collectively, to change. One example of such open-minded and very constructive change is Solel. For our children, we are building community in a new way by bringing the children from Sinai Temple and Temple Beth El together in a new educational enterprise. And as we prepare to bring the students of Sinai and Beth El together for Jewish learning, we believe we have a golden opportunity: instead of simply merging our existing schools, we will "break a new path"--- the meaning of Solel--- and create a different way of Jewish learning that suits today and the future. In creating Solel we hope to innovate so that students and their families will experience Jewish learning as a creative, active enterprise. Our vision: That Solel will inspire our students to love Judaism as a source of wisdom and a way of life. Within a pluralistic, caring and inclusive community, our students will learn to think and live Jewishly. With the creation of our new religious school, we are expanding our Jewish community across what were once denominational "boundaries." And we continue to think of ways in which Sinai Temple and Temple Beth El, along with Temple B'nai Torah, the Jewish Community Center, Jewish Federation, Jewish Family Services and other members of our greater Springfield Jewish community can participate together in building a stronger, more exciting and more vibrant Jewish community.

A second change, of course, is our Rabbi Howard Kosovske, now a part of our Sinai Temple family. His wealth of experiences, spanning 45 years on the pulpit in North America, Europe and Asia, are certainly a treasure and will be invaluable to us in the coming year. Together, Rabbi and Cantor Levson make a “spectacular team”, and we look forward to their leading us in prayer, in song, in spirit and kehillah. And both Rabbi and Cantor will be working with our Clergy Planning Group, approved by Sinai’s Long-Range Planning Committee and Board of Directors, to research, investigate, communicate with our own congregation, discuss, and then present findings and recommendations to the Board as to how our clergy may change over the next several years in order for Sinai Temple to best serve our Congregation into the future.

Another change that I look forward to for Sinai Temple over the coming years is for the members of our Congregation becoming more and more active in everything that happens here at Sinai Temple. I believe strongly that our synagogue lives become richer and fuller when members connect with one another and create their own multiple visions of life within Sinai Temple. Let’s not simply rely on the temple president, the rabbi and the board of directors to put together and prescribe our services and our programs, and decide what we do and what we don’t do and how it will be done at Sinai Temple. I would like us to open this box up--- allowing and encouraging our congregants to plan and take part in our services, our events, and varying activities inside and outside of the temple. Whether it’s prayer, learning and education, meditation, book clubs, discussion of religion, world events or politics, planning and hosting a social event, or playing bridge or poker, if one or more of our members wish to do it--- let’s do it. And as long as not prohibited by law, the State’s or God’s, my feeling is that let’s make the temple the place for it. I sincerely believe, and I’m sure most of you share this sentiment, that our Congregation’s interests are far more expansive than merely religious services inside our physical building. And although few would contend that worship is not an integral part of our being Jewish, it also is not necessarily the entirety of it--- there’s a great deal more to being Jewish, so let’s get to it.

In closing, I wish to thank, again, all of you for supporting and demonstrating your faith in Sinai Temple and its future through your contributions to our Celebrate Today Create Tomorrow Campaign. Your generosity compliments your dedication to our Congregation in these changing times for American Jewry and our own local Jewish community. It is only with your continued support--- from your hearts and your soul--- that we are able to plan the best course, maybe a changing course, for Sinai Temple. Of course, change is not necessarily easy. But our growth, both internally and externally, relies in large part on our willingness to change. Our first step is separating the Jewish “way we live our lives” and “but that’s the way we’ve always done it.” The two are not the same. Once we do that, and we realize that it’s alright--- even beneficial--- to explore and maybe modify the way we’ve always done it in order to improve and heighten the way we live our Jewish lives, change takes on a whole new look to it. Indeed, change creates Sinai Temple’s “tomorrow.”

L’Shana Tovah, my friends. And my very best wishes for a sweet New Year for you and all of your families...