TEMPLE MICAH
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FROM RABBI ZEMEL

CHAZAK, CHAZAK, V'NITCHAZEK—LET US BE STRENGTHENED

DEAR FRIENDS,

Retiring has inspired me to think about what I have been doing at Micah these many years. I don't mean the obvious things: leading prayer, officiating at life-cycle moments, teaching, sermonizing, meeting (many meetings), writing Vine letters, and everything else that might go into a rabbinical job description. I am thinking instead about what Micah is — the true essence of our congregation — and how we have created it together.

I love the succinct description that one of you uses to describe Micah to friends: "a smart, messy place with a soul." I view that as a compliment, part aspirational, part reality. We try to be smart. We try to be soulful. Messy? You bet! When you are trying something hard, it is going to be messy.

Things that are hard have few, if any, certainties. And we have done a lot of hard things. I wanted the synagogue to be seen as a place of transcendence, so we worked hard to reshape worship. I wanted Jewish life to be seen as both relevant to the world and personal to the soul, so I worked to forge a conversation among ancient Jewish texts, Enlightenment thinkers and our lives in the twentieth and then twenty-first centuries. I wanted Micah to be a place that offers both a full American Jewish life and a Zionist connection to our ancient homeland, so we strove to create an ambiance that felt culturally inviting while forging partnerships with institutions in Israel and leading almost annual Micah trips to our old-new land.

I tried to avoid the usual assumptions about Jewish education, social justice, personal theology and the challenges of today and consider each on its own terms. We examined each one, broke them down and rebuilt them to fit our needs and our times.

At the May temple board meeting (my last one), I offered parting reflections on what I called Micah culture. I shared a quote from Chuck Tanner, the early 1970s Chicago White Sox manager, who was criticized for having no rules for his team.

"I have 25 players," Tanner said, "and 25 sets of rules."

This wisdom has guided my thinking on what a synagogue should be. I have been reluctant to adopt requirements for b'nai mitzvah, religious school attendance, membership and the like. There are as many paths to discover and embrace Jewish life as there are Jews. Synagogues should honor that.

I also offered the board these words from *Creating Judaism* by Michael Satlow, a professor of Judaic and religious studies at Brown University:

"When read within the sprawling conversation comprised by their literature, the Rabbis offer the possibility of seeing truth in a proposition and its opposite, with everything in between. They offer conceptual maps of creative tensions. This is why rabbis themselves have opposed codifications of belief and even halakhah; the rabbinic tradition leaves one uneasy with single, simple answers." Later, he adds, "I want my religion as complex and messy as the rest of my life."

Our texts provide examples of "truth in a proposition and its opposite." For instance:

- "All is foreseen yet human beings have free will." (Pirke Avot 3:15, Rabbi Akiba)
- "Torah study is the equivalent of all the mitzvot." (Mishna Peah 1:1)

"Not learning but doing is the essential." (Pirke Avot 1:17)

The Jewish experience is vast and varied. It spans more than 3,000 years and includes transformative experiences on nearly every continent. Ours is an exploring, probing and creative culture that eschews easy answers to almost every conceivable question. I sought to build my rabbinate on the notion that the synagogue experience should itself be a manifestation of Judaism's complexity.

My final text for the board came from John Cottingham's book, *On the Meaning of Life*. Cottingham writes that the pursuit of meaning requires "the cultivation of an outlook that is affirming of the power of a goodness, trusting and hopeful, and which is focused on the mystery and wonder of existence." This, he continues, "has been the traditional role of religious systems and practices of spirituality to try to provide a mode of worship capable of being a vehicle for just that package."

During my 42 years at Micah, I sought for goodness, trust, and hope to be the guideposts for what we aspired to be and to center these values in our communal life of prayer and learning.

As I ponder what we have accomplished at Micah, I wonder if my vision

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"Every person shall sit under his grapevine or fig tree with no one to make him afraid."
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LOOKING BACK WITH EXCITEMENT TO OUR FUTURE

By Rielle Miller Gabriel

Adapted from remarks shared at the Annual Membership Meeting on June 1, 2025

As I look back on my final year as president of Temple Micah, what stands out is the absolute honor it has been to work with a committed board to prepare our congregation for our next year of transition. It has been a challenging and very rewarding experience to serve during this unique chapter in our congregation's story.

This has been a year full of saying good-byes. On our senior staff, we say good-bye to Sharon Tash, who capably led our Machon Micah over a period of tremendous growth. We are also grateful for all that Rabbi Stephanie Crawley has brought us over seven years at Temple Micah. The ways Rabbi Crawley has shaped Temple Micah have become a part of our culture. And I like to think that the ways we have shaped her, will nurture her through her own transition.

And Rabbi Zemel. What more is there to say that has not already been said by others this year, especially at the May 4th gala? I'll briefly share my personal story. Before joining the board six years ago, Rabbi Zemel and I had said nothing more than "Shabbat Shalom" to each other. Despite being deeply committed to Temple Micah, my family's relationship with the clergy team was exclusively with the assistant and associate rabbis. It was not until I was asked to serve as vice president that Rabbi Zemel and I had our first one-on-one in-depth discussion.

Once I started working with Rabbi Zemel regularly, it was then that I understood the impact he has had on all aspects of Micah. It became clear to me that the visionary leadership and collegial atmosphere Rabbi Zemel set for the senior staff nurtured the creative, innovative, and welcoming culture my family had experienced in Young Family Shabbat, Machon Micah, and in the various groups we engaged in - even when Rabbi Zemel himself was not there or was on the sidelines. This is legacy. This is *his* legacy. I hope that our actions - making him our first Rabbi Emeritus - signify the depth of our gratitude.

The next two years will be hard because change is hard. And yet...

Temple Micah will still have half our clergy team. Rabbis Beraha and Slakman will continue to lead us, inspire us, and challenge us to think more deeply. We are also thrilled that our top choice for an interim rabbi, Kari Tuling, will be joining us this summer. Over the next year, our rabbis will still read letters to b'nai mitzvah students from the bimah; they will still host leading Jewish thinkers for discussions; and they will continue to craft meaningful and thoughtful services to guide us all through life's ups and downs. I expect our rabbis will also find new Storefront offerings to engage Jews wherever they are in our city. I'm sure they will continue to bring us new sounds to score our worship. I'm sure our rabbis will work closely with our new Machon leadership, Rabbi Samantha Frank and Mckinley Edelman, to continue innovating our youth and family education. And I feel confident they will offer us things I have not even thought of.

"Once I started working with Rabbi Zemel regularly, it was then that I understood the impact he has had on all aspects of Micah."

In addition, this past year alone, approximately 20 member groups actively gathered, learned, and served our community. Long-time groups such as Hineni, Torah Study, Sacred Dance, and Lunch and Learn continued to bring meaningful connections to members. And newer initiatives such as Drum Circle, Israeli & Palestinian Film Group, and the Climate Change group offered on-ramps to many different Micah members. Our Micah Cooks team

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Our New Machon Leaders

By Martha Ransohoff Adler

Along with all of Temple Micah, Machon Micah is going through changes this year, as Director of Education Sharon Tash retires and Mckinley Edelman (currently Assistant Director of the Machon) is joined by Rabbi Samantha Frank as co-directors of the Machon. Alison Litvin, Assistant Director of Education, will continue to provide critical administrative support.

Congregant Martha Adler interviewed Edelman and Rabbi Frank about what the future holds.

As you look at the coming year for Machon and your new partnership, what excites you the most?

Mckinley Edelman: I'm very excited about my new counterpart, Rabbi Frank! And I'm thrilled to continue getting to know all of our Machon families more.

Rabbi Frank: I'm really excited to lean on Mckinley's deep understanding of the Machon and families as we work together to deepen relationships between the greater Micah community and Machon families - while maintaining our high standard of learning.

How would you describe the legacy of Sharon Tash in regards to the Machon?

Mckinley Edelman: Sharon came in with her profound wealth of knowledge in Jewish history, and created an amazing curriculum, rich in ritual, Jewish history, values, and Israel education. She also leaves a really good working team. She set us up for Rabbi Frank to come right in and join us and we're ready to go.

Rabbi Frank: I agree one hundred percent. When I first became a Jewish educator, people used to say that learning Jewish content in a supplementary educational program [like the Machon] was impossible, so it is better to focus on Jewish values and make religious school fun. But Sharon has proven that Machon can be fun while students can also walk away confident in their Jewish knowledge.

We seem to have very strong teen engagement right now in the Madrichim program (classroom assistants) and R2B (Reason To Be, our 8th-12th grade class on Tuesday evenings). How typical is this in other Reform synagogues?

Rabbi Frank: Let me tell you what's unique about it here. This is deep intellectual engagement, it's not just social. In many synagogues, the popular teen programming consists of lock-ins and parties.

Mckinley Edelman: We've adapted our teen program to what the teens have told us they're looking for. From school to sports, drama, and music, they have a lot on their plates. But they still want to think about what it means to be Jewish today. So we provide that container for them.

Rabbi Frank: At R2B we can have conversations about Jewish values and current events because Micah's teens are so mature. They learn that Judaism isn't just about living the Jewish calendar: it's also that there's a Jewish response to everything we're reading about in the news.

Mckinley Edelman: There are some teens who only want to become madrichim (classroom helpers). They don't want to learn anymore in a classroom setting. They want to teach. They want to engage. They want to make some money. They want to gain leadership experience.

What do you see as the biggest challenge for you with the Machon this coming year?

Mckinley Edelman: Our biggest challenge is space, both physical and existential. We have always been a haimish community, and it's important for us to maintain that feeling. The Machon has more than doubled in size over the last 5 years. Last year we had about 240 students in PreK-7th grade and nearly 30 8th-12th graders enrolled in the Machon. This growth is so wonderful, but it also potentially impacts our families feeling 'known' in this community. So we have lots of plans to help build relationships. We want every parent to feel known by us and seen by the community, to know that they belong here.

Rabbi Frank: Another goal is helping to support the whole family, whether that's deep and inspiring parent education, or family education (for parents and children to do together), or helping families feel confident in the Jewish rituals that they're doing at home.

If one goal is to help create Jewish life outside of Micah, not just at Micah, how do you achieve this?

Mckinley Edelman: The beautiful answer is Jewish joy. The focus is: what are you already doing in your life that you don't realize is attached to Judaism? We jokingly call it the Shabbat cookie model. Every Friday, my daughter Mollie (4) and son Izzy (2) know we go and get a cookie because it's almost Shabbat. In our house we also light candles, recite Kiddush, and have dinner together. But above all they know Friday is Shabbat cookie day. And that's what we want the feeling to be: the joy that comes with Shabbat. We want to help families create their own path toward Jewish joy.

Rabbi Frank: We want to help families have confidence with both the actual rituals and understanding where they come from. What have we inherited, and how does it fit in my family's life today? What might we let go of or add? When we bring families together to have these conversations, the connections shine.

In the first book [*A Time to Speak*, 2019] of Rabbi Zemel's sermons, there's a sermon called Shabbat, in which he urges people to liberate themselves from the "rules." I remember leading a seder for my family after being at Micah for a few years, and feeling that I could create my own joyous ritual. What has been important to me has been to be liberated from thinking that there's just one way to do a ritual.

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Mckinley Edelman: Exactly!

Rabbi Frank: I do want to answer what makes this "not your mother's Sunday school." It's a really short answer: It's fun.

Mckinley Edelman: Absolutely. The goal is for kids to walk out of Machon with questions about Judaism. And that they walk into Temple Micah when they're back from college and they think 'Oh, I love this place!'

What do you love about being a Jewish educator?

Rabbi Frank: I think of being a Jewish educator as being an activator. How can we spark questions? How can we spark curiosity? Plus, the kids are so fun and so smart, and just great to be around.

Mckinley Edelman: I love Judaism, and I'm so enthusiastic about it that I think it forces kids to get on board with me. I love watching them when they realize that dots are connecting from things we've been talking about in Biblical periods all the way up to Mahmoud Khalil. I'm sure every educator thinks their students are smart, but Temple Micah has the most exceptional student body and really wonderful parents.

What is something about you that I haven't asked that you want people to know?

Rabbi Frank: Something fun about me is that I ran a marathon last year, which was amazing. Also: I grew up here, in Silver Spring, so I'm excited to be back.

Mckinley Edelman: My absolute favorite thing right now is dance parties with my kids after breakfast before school drop off. I strongly suggest everyone add this to their morning routine. My daughter's #1 song choice right now is *Pink Pony Club* by Chappell Roan.

What excites me most about what I've learned in this conversation is to see the two of you – who are clearly very, very different people, with very different personalities, very different approaches, and very different skill sets – be so excited to capitalize on your own differences and your similarities. I know you'll have a great year *with the Machon!* ◆

Rabbi Zemel FROM PAGE 1 ▶

and my reflections in this letter cohere with the experiences that you, who are reading this, have felt. I hope that in some way they do.

I am retiring during a difficult period for many people in our nation and in our congregation. In December 1776, during a dark time in the American Revolution, Thomas Paine wrote, "These are the times that try men's souls." We are now living in such a time. Our core values as Americans and as Jews are being challenged and shredded. A creeping totalitarianism threatens our democracy. Temple Micah can be our rock against the storm, the ballast that enables us to support each other, engage the world, and maintain a culture based on goodness, trust and hope.

I want to offer a word of thanks to my senior staff colleagues: Rabbis Josh Beraha, Stephanie Crawley, Healy Slakman and Samantha Frank, Executive Director Beth Werlin and Education Director Sharon Tash. You are an extraordinary group. How much fun we have had doing hard things, including rethinking High Holy Day worship, Shabbat prayer, b'nai mitzvah education and Jewish learning in general — all while extending Jewish life beyond the walls of Micah. I will miss each one of you individually and I will miss all of you collectively.

This is my final Vine letter as senior rabbi of our great community. Every day at Micah has been an honor and a privilege. This community helped to shape the life of my family and left a deep impression on my soul. I am retiring with no real regrets. I like to think that I gave Micah my very best.

As I said at the gala in May, Louise and I will take our leave from Micah for about a year as we settle into the next phase of our lives and I take the new title of rabbi emeritus. You can look for us sometime in the summer of 2026 as we embark on the next steps of our Micah adventure. This congregation will always be integral to us.

Louise and I thank each of you for the many blessings the Micah community has bestowed upon our lives.

Blessed are you, Adonai our God, who has brought me to this moment.

Shalom,

Rabbi Daniel G. Zemel

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- under new leadership - kept our bellies full of delicious food, and Beytenu kept our spirits up hosting monthly cross-generational events and hosting another round of successful Kabbalat Shabbat dinner services.

What this year has demonstrated more than ever is that Temple Micah is the Micah we know and love because of all that we - each of us - do for, and with, our community.

For all these reasons, we can also look with excitement to these next two years.

We are not a congregation that shies away from new things or change. In fact, our unofficial motto "If it's not broken, break it" practically compels us to take on the challenge of change. We will continue to push the boundaries of American Judaism while still holding on to what keeps us connected to generations past. As we search for our next senior rabbi - whether one of our own or someone new - I encourage us to take this opportunity to see the possibilities for what might be, not just what was. How can we - all of us - continue to explore a new Jewish narrative, one that helps us with our Jewish identity in today's contexts? How can we keep centering the Human Project in our worship experience? How can congregants and clergy partner together to co-create our Jewish lives and engage the world beyond Micah? And how can we create space for tough conversations, especially when such spaces are disappearing all around us.

As I pass the baton to our next board leaders, including our new President Roberta Aronson and Vice President Emily Tamkin, I have great confidence that Temple Micah will step up to the challenges ahead and continue to be a visionary congregation.

OPENING EYES, EARS, AND SOULS AT TEMPLE MICAH

A conversation with Rabbi Healy Slakman and Music Director Philip Mayer

By Steven R. Weisman

If music is "proof of the existence of God," as Kurt Vonnegut Jr. said, music has long been central to the worship experience at Temple Micah. Rabbi Healy Slakman's arrival two years ago as Director of Spiritual Arts ushered in bold innovations, building on Micah's beloved music traditions.

It would be hard not to have noticed the introduction of new musical instruments: from a French horn, an accordion and an electric guitar to a variety of ancient Middle Eastern or Persian string instruments like a hammer dulcimer, an oud, a kanun, and a kamancheh. There's a bamboo flute called a ney and a Norwegian fiddle called a hardingfele, played by a renowned visiting musician.

Temple Micah music now ranges from the beloved, majestic European tunes of the nineteenth century, to the Klezmer tradition, to the poignant and rhythmic Sephardic and Middle Eastern sounds from throughout the Mediterranean—where, after all, Jews have lived for millennia.

I recently sat down with Rabbi Slakman and Philip Mayer, who joined Temple Micah as Music Director last year—probably the only percussionist to serve in that job at any Reform synagogue. Here are edited excerpts of that conversation.

How would you describe what you are trying to do with the music at Temple Micah?

Rabbi Slakman: I am inspired by the ethos of Rabbi Zemel, of creating and engaging with our Jewish inheritance as something that is alive and dynamic. Something that continues to speak to us and change with us in each new season. And something that does not only rely on assumptions of the past. The fact that Temple Micah has a strong and vibrant worship music culture doesn't mean everything can or should stay the same. Yes, there is music that will always carry a sense of nostalgic reverence for us. And this solid foundation gives a rich and compelling base to build upon. Great, innovative art that stirs us and demands our attention never emerges from a vacuum—it grows upon and in conversation with the great art that came before it. I think we need to have our eyes, ears, and souls open to what may inspire us.

Philip, how did a percussionist become interested in sacred music at Temple Micah?

Philip Mayer: I would basically describe myself as a freelance drummer. I started playing rock and jazz—that's what I went to music school for—and quickly got into all different kinds of music from all over the world. I had an extended stay in Israel, where I studied Middle Eastern percussion, and that became a gateway into classical music from Turkey, Egypt, Greece, Syria, and all over the Eastern Mediterranean. In New York I was making my living in performance and teaching; I worked in synagogues as a hired freelance musician for over a decade, which is how I met Rabbi Slakman back in 2017. We played together every month until she moved here to join Temple Micah. I was first exposed to Temple Micah when I came down to play at her installation. Never in a million years did I think that I would become the music director of a synagogue in Washington, DC! Now, approaching one year in, I'm beyond thrilled to be doing this work which brings a lot of beauty and meaning to my life.

Might some think you are abandoning tradition?

Philip Mayer: I would argue that we're engaging directly with a tradition that's very much alive. The organ, for example, wasn't always part of the liturgical music of the Jewish people, but in the nineteenth century (and even before), Jews in Europe seeking to modernize their worship to reflect the culture and practices of the time and place began incorporating the organ into their services. I'm sure many people thought they were abandoning tradition by doing so, but from our perspective today, I would consider the organ's usage in Europe as very much a part of the evolution of Jewish music tradition. Here in Washington in 2025, I think we're engaging with a living tradition in a very similar way.

Rabbi Slakman: And we remain committed to identifying and uplifting the core traditions and processes that define us. At the same time, we're bringing in different sounds to see how they resonate—some from outside the boundaries of what's traditionally been heard in Jewish spaces, and others, like the accordion, that were once common. We're interested not only in exploring new textures, but also in rediscovering and experimenting with how traditional ones might be applied in fresh ways that speak to this moment. For each service, we ask ourselves, "What's going on this week?"—and we let the answer shape our musical choices. After Trump was elected, for example, we turned to Leonard Cohen's *Anthem* to speak to the emotional weight of that moment. That same night, Philip created a custom arrangement that wove together *The New Colossus* and *Oseh Shalom*. It was our way of responding to the moment.

Philip Mayer: That means that I'm writing the sheet music for the specific, ever changing mix of instruments we have in the sanctuary from week to week. I may compose a new

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intro or write specific harmony parts for our choir. Sometimes I'll bring songs into conversation with each other—like blending "Turn, Turn, Turn" in the style of Nina Simone mixed with "Turning of the World." We can put a liturgical text with whatever secular piece of our choice that resonates for that Shabbat and have it played by the instruments we have, whether it be cello or French horn or hammer dulcimer.

There seems to be less folk music of the Debbie Friedman variety and more of a Sephardic tone.

Rabbi Slakman: We talk a lot about, "What does American Judaism sound like?" The truth is, there's no single answer—because the American Jewish experience is wide-ranging, multi-ethnic, and evolving. I think the sound of American Judaism should reflect this richness. While folk music holds a quintessential place in American musical identity, it doesn't speak to every American Jewish story. Sephardic Jews have long been part of the American Jewish fabric, yet their musical traditions have rarely found space in the progressive or Reform world. At Temple Micah, we've only just begun to confront that. Yes, we've introduced a few Sephardic piyyutim—liturgical poems set to melody—into our High Holiday services. But more broadly, we've also started experimenting with shifting the rhythmic texture of some familiar Ashkenazi and folk melodies, making space for new layers of sound that expand who and what gets heard in Jewish worship. And I wonder about how that might impact who feels represented and empowered by the American Jewish story.

Philip Mayer: It's worth noting the incredible diversity of Sephardic music. From one end, it could sound like the most classical Ottoman Turkish style music or song. Sephardic Jews landed all over the Mediterranean, so it could be North African or sounds from Spain, the Ladino music that is much more akin to Western classical music. Some of the instruments that I play are rooted in traditions that are more North African and eastern Mediterranean. But there's a lot of crossover. For example, the song *Shiru l'Adonai* ["Sing to God"] was written in Europe but on a very Sephardic rhythmic framework.

You mentioned Louis Lewandowski (1821-1894), composer of a lot of music familiar to Reform congregations.

Rabbi Slakman: Lewandowski, a nineteenth-century German Jew who played a pivotal role in modernizing Jewish liturgical music, is a classical composer from the Reform movement canon. For the past few months we have been singing his setting of *Tzadik KaTamar*—"A righteous person shall flourish like a palm tree"—every week on Shabbat. And in Lewandowski's spirit of contemporary consideration and advancement, instead of performing it in the traditional, grand, classical Reform style, we offer it quietly, often with acoustic guitar, to experiment with a folky aesthetic that resonates with us today. Similarly, when we want a piece to carry a more Sephardic form, we might take a traditional Ashkenazi folk tune and shift the rhythm by adding a darbuka, a Middle Eastern drum. It's still our familiar melody, but the feel changes a bit. We're constantly experimenting—fusing traditions, reimagining sounds—and discovering what resonates most deeply with our community.

How does the choir get involved?

Rabbi Slakman: Vocal music and congregational participation are central pillars of Temple Micah's worship life. So when we experiment, it's essential that the choir is part of the process. At the same time, we're interested in challenging assumptions—pushing the boundaries of the classical four-part choral structure of soprano, alto, tenor, and bass—and considering how different approaches to group singing might enhance or deepen our worship experience. We're also continually exploring new ways for lay musicians and musically inclined congregants to plug in and contribute—because the sound of our community should be shaped by the community itself.

What about your role in educating young people?

Rabbi Slakman: We have big ambitions for the coming years. And this year, our youth choir sang alongside professional musicians playing instruments like the hammered dulcimer, kamancheh, and electric guitar—experiences that were, I believe, both memorable and exciting, and which hopefully sparked curiosity and creativity.

Philip also led a Middle Eastern percussion workshop for our Machon Micah students, giving them hands-on exposure to new rhythms and traditions as well as opening up conversations about what makes something Jewish—which I think is just incredibly cool. He also extended that offering to the wider community through an evening elective for all ages. These experiences are part of our larger commitment: to experiment with worship culture, to open doors to new musical languages, and make space for more people—including our youngest members—to experience, think about, talk about, and shape the ever evolving project that is Temple Micah. In the coming year and beyond, we're excited to deepen the connection between the artistic and musical explorations that inform our Shabbat and holiday worship and the learning that takes place in Machon Micah.

So what can we expect in the new era post-Danny Zemel?

Philip Mayer: Heavy metal? [Laughter]

Rabbi Slakman: I think we're just at the beginning of our experimentation, and we plan to keep going. We're hoping to bring artists and creative scholars into our community for longer, more intentional periods of time to observe us, learn with us, inspire us, and help shape the way we think about worship and music — not just for a weekend or a single service, but through ongoing conversation and intentional collaboration. Another thing we're really excited about is offering more musical, cultural, and artistic events outside of worship—concerts, lectures, and gatherings that deepen intellectual engagement, spark thought, and invite curiosity. ◆

TOGETHER, WE SHAPED A VISION OF COVENANTAL PARTNERSHIP

By Rabbi Stephanie Crawley

Dear Friends,

In the second week of my second year of rabbinical school at Hebrew Union College, I was assigned an essay. Written in the 1970s, *The Rabbi as Symbolic Exemplar* presented a vision of what rabbinic leadership should look like:

- The rabbi lives his Jewish life to be a model for his congregation.
- The rabbi does not grow as *part* of the community; he is a symbol *for* them.
- The rabbi is a stand-in for *all* rabbis, granted ultimate authority *above* the community, not *among* them.
- The rabbi stands alone in his congregation, and the rabbi's family "never really belongs."

I want to offer, as my final *Vine* column, a different vision of a rabbi and her role. And this is a vision that you, Temple Micah, have partnered with me in shaping.

First, it should be said that *The Rabbi as Symbolic Exemplar*, of course, does not, or cannot, imagine a woman rabbi. Much has been and will continue to be written about just how women in general have shaped and altered the idea of who a rabbi can be and should aspire to be.

What do I believe? Nearly two years ago, I wrote down this idea: "The rabbi's relationship with the congregation should be one of covenant. It is a covenant of mutual care."

What do I mean by this? Covenants require mutual responsibility, and so covenants are partnerships where both parties are needed and valued. A covenant is able to acknowledge power imbalances (a rabbi cultivates the spiritual welfare of the community, the board is responsible for the rabbi's livelihood), and then ensure that both parties are cared for. Covenants maintain boundaries (I do this, you do that) but both partners are bound up in a common goal.

Importantly, covenants are based on trust and respect. In my seven years at Temple Micah, I have experienced deep respect: You have engaged in the creation and sharing of ideas with me. When I showed up as the rabbi for your family's b'nai mitzvah, funeral, or shiva, not a single person complained the newest or youngest rabbi was the one present. And this is not because of my title, but because of the trust you had in the relationship we were building together. This respect has enabled me to rely on much more than the printed piece of paper that says I am a rabbi; know that it is my *soul*, my personhood, that matters more than my credentials.

> "Temple Micah has profoundly altered my vision of what it should mean to be a rabbi. I've let go of the "rabbi as symbolic exemplar" model."

Through these relationships and conversations, I was able to find belonging at Temple Micah, for me and my family. And this enabled me to accept (something not always easy for me) the love and care that was given back to me - in both moments of deep struggle and wonderful celebration. Micah rejoiced alongside Jesse and me as we married, and stood in solidarity with us as we navigated a challenging immigration system. You delighted in Ruthie's growth alongside us, and filled her library with enriching and quirky books.

As all of us navigated the Tree of Life attack, the pandemic, painful assaults on our democracies here and in Israel, and October 7th, I felt the freedom to stand among and be held *by* our community. I was given permission to cry alongside you. And in turn, Temple Micah trusted me to hold the line, to ensure that I held up my end of the covenant - to lead, guide, and teach, as we walked together.

Temple Micah has profoundly altered my vision of what it should mean to be a rabbi. I've let go of the "rabbi as symbolic exemplar" model, and found space to become the rabbi that only I can be. It is, perhaps, the idea of "rabbi as covenantal colleague." You have given me permission to struggle, question, and express pain. And I hope, by doing these things out loud, I've been able to create spaces where we can all show up, soul forward. By asking my own questions, by admitting my own heartbreak, by struggling and failing out loud, I hope I've created opportunities for you to do the same.

And so, you have bestowed an enormous gift. As I walk into my new community in Toronto, you have taught me that the life of a rabbi does not need to be a lonely one, separate from and above the community she serves. Instead, the life of a rabbi should be one of immense beauty and deep sharing, where she grows alongside of and because of the community. The life of a rabbi is one of discovering together what can be built through covenantal partnership and care.

With deep admiration, appreciation, and care, Temple Micah, for these last seven years as your rabbi, your partner, and your friend,

Rabbi Stephanie Crawley

TZEDAKAH

BUILDING IMPROVEMENT FUND

Robert Mayer

IN HONOR OF
Rabbi Samantha Frank, who oversaw the conversion of Tina Kamerow, our daughter-in-law, by Doug Kamerow and Celia Shapiro

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EJ Baum, by Brian and Erin Wolf, Stuart and Frances Schwartz
Rebecca Styles, my twin sister, by Fran Dauth
Joseph Weinrebe, by Leslie and Stephen Melman
Ruth and David Goldberg, my mother and father, by Nancy Raskin
Susan S. Blumenfeld, by Norman Blumenfeld
Robert Guyer, by Rabbi Esther Lederman
Dan Lutenegger, by Richard Fitz and Kathy Spiegel, Stuart and Frances Schwartz

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE ▶

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This list reflects donations received February 1, 2025–May 31, 2025. Every effort has been made to ensure its accuracy, but if there are any errors or omissions please accept our apologies. For corrections or clarifications, please contact Rhiannon Walsh in the temple office. Thank you.

MAZAL TOV

Mazal Tov to Elyse Greenwald and Matthew Kaplan on the birth of their child, Evelyn Dyna Kaplan

Mazal Tov to Eli Blum and Caitlin Watson on the birth of their child, Asa Alec Dawson Blum, grandchild of Jared Blum and Kate Kiggins

CONDOLENCES

The Temple Micah Community extends its deepest condolences to:

Fran Dauth, on the death of her sister, Rebecca Styles

Mark Weinheimer, on the death of his brother, Harry Weinheimer

David Bardin, on the death of his brother, Hillel Bardin

Lora Ferguson, on the death of her husband, Frank Ferguson

Jan Greenberg, on the death of her mother, Joan Kupferberg

Jocelyn Guyer, on the death of her father, Robert Guyer

Sue Baum, on the death of her grandson, EJ (Edwin Jay) Baum

Benjamin Gitterman, on the death of his brother, Edward Jay Gitterman

Elisabeth Bumiller, on the death of her mother, Gunhild Rose

Skip Halpern, on the death of his brother, Richard Halpern

Jeff Davis, on the death of his father, Charles Leonard Davis

Dorian Friedman, on the death of her father, Dr. Robert Friedman

May their memories be for a blessing.

FINDING THE WORDS: BRIEF REFLECTIONS ON MY SON BECOMING BAR MITZVAH

By Rabbi Josh Beraha

I've officiated close to a hundred b'nai mitzvah and attended hundreds more. But last month, I found myself on the other side—as the parent of the bar mitzvah.

I don't usually use *The Vine* to reflect on personal moments, but I ask your indulgence for this one. Since that morning, I've been sitting with a tension: the urge to put the experience into words, and the sense that doing so might reduce it. And yet, we are a people who reach for words—not to explain everything away, but to make meaning.

I offer these reflections not only because the moment mattered to me, but because Jewish ritual often carries a universal emotional charge. Perhaps in what I describe, you'll glimpse something of your own story—as a parent, a child, or a witness to rituals of transition. My hope is that by naming what moved me, we might better understand the emotional contours of such moments—and feel a little less alone as we move through them.

A few words echoed for me that morning—words from Rabbi Zemel that have stayed with me over the years. He once said, quite simply: "The bar mitzvah boy is always thirteen."

At first glance, it's obvious. But the more I sat with it, the more those seven words opened up space for reflection.

On one level, they are a reminder of sameness. Every week, another thirteen-year-old steps forward to chant ancient words. My son wasn't exceptional in this regard; he was just next. One link in a long, unbroken chain, dating back to the 1st century C.E. when the rabbis declared thirteen to be the age of responsibility. And that is the humbling, centering power of this ritual: to teach a young person that they are part of something larger than themselves, not the center of the world, but lovingly embedded in a tradition that stretches far beyond them.

On another level, "the bar mitzvah boy is always thirteen" reminds me that thirteen is a threshold—a time of transition. Flashes of childhood mesh with deep, urgent questions about the world. And as a parent, you start to recognize your child's personhood, separate from you. That's what got me the most, I think. Watching my son become someone new, and somehow still the same.

One moment of his bar mitzvah stood out above the rest: the hakafah—the slow walk around the sanctuary with the Torah. My son carried it in his arms, Nani's hand was in mine, our daughters were there with us, and together we made our way through the congregation.

It felt less like walking and more like floating. All around us—so many people!—were eyes full of warmth. We looked back, meeting their gaze, returning their smiles. These were the people who helped "create" our son, I thought.

The hakafah became a living ritual of interconnection that morning as I caught sight of face after face—my childhood friends' parents, our old babysitter, teachers, neighbors, friends from every chapter of our lives. I wanted to stop and say to each one: "We're here because of *you*."

But there wasn't time. Only the walk. And perhaps that's what made it holy—because holiness isn't in explaining, but in being carried by moment.

So, as much as I want to make sense of this moving morning—and to give voice to something that might resonate with others—maybe I should stop trying to put words to it altogether. Instead, I'll let the heart of these reflections echo what I expressed in the last issue of *The Vine*: the importance of showing up, noticing the faces of those in our community, and pushing back against the disconnectedness fostered by new technologies that pull us away from intimate, communal moments like the hakafah. Maybe the message is simply about returning the gaze of those in our community, about breathing the same air as we participate in life cycle rituals together.

In a recent book I found relevant–*The Extinction of Experience: Being Human in a Disembodied World*, by journalist Christine Rosen–I discovered the words of the French mystic, Simone Weil, who wrote, "Attention is the rarest and purest form of generosity." Is that what we're all doing when we turn to each other during the hakafah, and during our time at Micah in general—offering one another our attention? Not through screens or words, but simply by being there? I think yes.

In a world with so much to distract us, to pull us out of time, this kind of attention is not just generous, but holy. In just coming to the building, we have the opportunity to silently say *I am here* and *I see you*.

If my son came away from his bar mitzvah with any of this knowledge—of what it means to be formed by community, and attached to something greater than himself—then words aren't necessary after all, and if they are, they can be a short, cryptic sentence that calls out to be interpreted.

And maybe I should have known this all along: rituals speak without speech, reminding us that holiness is found not in explanation, but in the nearness of others. It always comes back to Buber.

Thinking about all of this, I now see another interpretation of "the bar mitzvah boy is always thirteen." It's not about the age itself, but about what thirteen represents—a fleeting moment we can't hold onto. Time passes. But each time a young person carries the Torah, the ritual remembers what we might forget. It invites us to stay present, and to let the act of togetherness speak where words fall short.