

September 16-17, 2012 1 Tishrei 5773
Andrew Joskow, President, Temple Rodef Shalom

ROSH HASHANAH REMARKS – SEPTEMBER 2012

Shanah Tovah!

About one hundred years ago,

In 1914,

The great Yiddish writer, Shalom Aleichem, settled in New York City after a lifetime in Eastern Europe.

Some of you have heard of Shalom Aleichem. Some of you know that he was called the “Jewish Mark Twain.”

Others may not know the name, but you probably DO know him –

You probably know him as the creator of the character Tevye, the Milkman – who, in the 1960s, became the lead figure in the musical “Fiddler on the Roof.”

Although well-known among those in the Jewish Community, Shalom Aleichem had little money when he arrived in New York –

he had fled difficult times in Eastern Europe --- and, to be honest, he had made some really bad stock market investments!

He often survived his days in New York by accepting dinner at a different home each night.

Maybe he would tell a story. And in return – he would get a meal.

My great grandmother, Anna,

after whom I am named, was one of those who served dinner to Shalom Aleichem.

And I can smell the Kugal now!

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This is a family anecdote that I truly love. For me, it speaks of a number of things.

It is a New York story. And I was born in New York.

It is a little piece of History. And I am very much a reader of History.

It's a bit about how people barter, and survive without the use of money. As an economist, that's always an interesting topic -- well, at least to me.

And, of course, it is part of the many family stories we all love to tell.

But it is also a story of community -- a community that came together.

Although the details are left to legend, apparently the meals were provided by a diverse group of people.

With no Facebook or Internet to help out!

Somehow the community was just there.

I have always felt that this personal family story stands the test of time as an example of the power of community.

I can also attest to how the power of community affected a person in a more recent time – almost 100 years later.

A little more than two months ago, both of my parents died suddenly.

In the wake of this tragedy the TRS community was there for me, and it was there for my family. I couldn't be more grateful for the love and comfort that was shown to us.

This experience reinforced for me the power of community.

I hope that many or most of you already feel that Rodef Shalom is a great community.

That you've had some experience that has touched you in some way – whether something grand like a child's Bar or Bat Mitzvah, or the small moment of a hand on a shoulder when someone says – “hi, how are you doing.”

If for some reason, you haven't had that feeling I hope we can change that.

This is a big place --

a place that provides many wonderful things. A place that many people move through easily. But there may be others who do not always have that feeling of ease.

We don't want anyone to feel that way.

And we're working on that.

We are hoping to develop a “greeter” corps that would make the process of entering our building for Friday evening services more welcoming for members and non-members.

Also, our Board of Directors has been working on ways to assure that everyone feels welcome at our Oneg Shabbats -- a place where we so often gather with each other and with visitors.

Can our programming enhance our community? We have many programs for sure. But we hope that there can be more experiences that either move you in some way or simply give you new way to look at life.

For our children,

we are continuing to modify our curriculum to go beyond traditional religious school classes. Programs that are more experiential have been integrated into the curriculum and are being expanded each year.

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A class in Jewish cooking can provide a pride in our heritage that may not always come from a lecture.

And the focus is not just on our children alone.

Just this month, we brought on a part-time community engagement specialist who will help bring experiential programs to adults and families at TRS and facilitate ways for all of us to engage in lifelong Jewish learning.

And we continue to strive to provide ways for members to pursue Jewish values and teachings:

this past year, as an example, a group of members has come together to develop a program to purchase produce in an efficient way from sustainable farms.

We are also going outside our walls to engage with all members of our own TRS community as well as the Jewish community that is unaffiliated with our synagogue.

Two years ago we began video streaming our Shabbat and holiday services to members and non-members. As part of this effort we are now discussing ways to expand beyond our current streaming, to include other events such as adult education offerings.

And for the first time ever, at the George Mason High School in Falls Church, TRS is providing an alternative High Holiday Service that is open not only to our members, but to the public as well.

I see these efforts as using the resources of Temple Rodef Shalom to strengthen the larger Jewish Community. We can and should do this. We all benefit from a stronger and more engaged Jewish community.

And our efforts include going beyond the Jewish community. On three different occasions this past summer, in an effort to continue understanding among faiths, several of our members joined in activities with local Islamic communities. Our visitors were welcomed in all cases.

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These thoughts are just part of what I hope will be our continuing efforts to strengthen our own community, and to reach out to the community at large.

On this Rosh Hashanah, Temple Rodef Shalom is 50 years old.

And we have spent the last year celebrating that event. We have brought people together and engaged with each other – through 50 dinners and Havdalas on one Shabbat;

50 readers of Torah in a single morning;

50,000 mitzvot done by all of us in a single year;

through learning from great scholars and music from great singers. And much much more.

I want to thank the founding and pioneering members who planted the seed that grew into what we now have. And I want to thank my predecessor as President, Barry Holt, who guided us so well as we reached our 50th year.

And we now look forward to the next 50 years.

We have a clergy team that continues to inspire and guide us.

We have teachers who are dedicated to learning.

We have a staff that works with all of us to put our ideas into action.

And we have all of you, our members, who participate, volunteer, and facilitate programs and experiences in so many ways. I thank all of you.

My hope for the next 50 years is that this place will lift up all of our lives in some way, and that TRS can be there when you need us.

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I look forward to being TRS Temple President for the next two years. I am truly honored.

I wish ALL of you a sweet and happy New Year.

Shanah Tovah.