

We sift through resumé's, getting the general feel for our candidates, looking at how their experience and their passions manifest through their education and work. We read their personal statements, learning about their lives and their motivations. We are searching for skills and encounters that overlaps with our congregational needs and visions for the future. This search is as much an exercise in congregational self-awareness as it is in candidate assessment. Like finding a partner in a relationship, we know that there are many people with whom we could forge a future, but only select few who will inspire us and coax us into being our best selves. Our committee is committed to finding the individual who can best partner with us and lead us.

All this brings me back to my search process, when BHSS and I found each other. Recently, I shared my personal statement with one of the chairs of the search committee. They pointed out that the only people who really got to see that statement were those who were on the Rabbinic search. So, today, I humbly submit to you the personal statement with which I asked BHSS to consider me as your rabbi. In our time of transition, rereading my statement re-commits me to BHSS, to the rabbi I hope to be, and to who we can be in the future. I hope it does the same for you.

*If you are not a better person tomorrow than you are today, what need have you for a tomorrow?*

— Reb Nachman of Breslov

I believe that Judaism is about relationships. It is about our responsibilities to our families and to our community, and about how we behave towards others in the world. I believe that interpersonal kindness embodies Jewish ideals and teaching. One of the wisest Jewish thinkers of the past century, Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel said, “When I was young, I admired clever people. Now that I am old, I admire kind people.”

In Salt Lake City, for years Irwin led morning minyan and began our Shabbat services. He and I would chat before others arrived—he told me about his bum knee, his daughters, and about his bowling league. Together we celebrated my 35th birthday and then his 75th. Through years of weekday and Shabbat mornings, I noticed his chanting slowed and that perhaps his memory was not all it had been. Last year when I saw him between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, something was different. He told me his sister had passed away. When I asked her name, Irwin could not recall. I knew something was wrong. A few days later, after talking to his daughters, I told Irwin we needed to consult with his doctor. When his doctor did not answer, I drove Irwin to the emergency room. His daughters told me they could not convince him to go to the hospital, and they thanked me for taking him. I was there when his cancer was diagnosed. It was years of talking and praying together that made me realize when something was not right and allowed Irwin to trust me enough to take him to the hospital. I miss Irwin every day—each time I pray the morning blessings I miss him, and I missed him the day my daughter was born. Our relationship helped give meaning to my life and to my Judaism.

We started out not knowing each other much at all, and our relationship deepened over time. It is my hope to deepen relationships with each person I encounter. It is not unusual for me to walk over to people during a *Mi Sheberach*, a prayer to God for healing, with a box of tissues or to hold a hand during Mourner's *Kaddish*. Those who attend synagogue should also connect with one another, not just with me. So as we welcome the Shabbat in *Lecha Dodi*, I encourage people to introduce themselves and wish one another a *Shabbat shalom*. When we study together, we engage each person at the table, not only the ancient text and rabbinic interpretations. The interpersonal is integral to all that we do. That is what will continue to draw people towards synagogues and Judaism.

I like to know the name of every person who comes through the door of the synagogue—Jewish or not, member or not. I do not always remember every name the first time around; what I do remember are the stories people tell me of what is happening in their lives. I find that when I reach out to people, talk to them and learn about them, others do the same. As a rabbi, I try to be a *dugma'it*, an example, to my congregation of how to

interact. I do not always do it perfectly, but I have succeeded in creating lasting relationships with people who were not always initially comfortable in the synagogue.

One particular Friday night, I was considering *Parashat VaYeshev*, the section of Genesis about Joseph and his brothers. This was my Bat Mitzvah portion, and I have always been confounded by Joseph's behavior towards his brothers, both when he shares his self-aggrandizing dreams with them and when he meets and tests them in Egypt. This year I expressed my frustration with his selfishness to the congregation in an open discussion. I was humbled and enlightened by the insight brought by two congregants. The first shared that, having been through the hardship of prison, she could understand Joseph's inability to forgive his brothers after his imprisonment. The second talked about what it was like to have been bullied in his childhood and how he has always identified with Joseph. I continue to have profound gratitude to those congregants for sharing their traumatic experiences. They provided us with new ways of understanding Joseph, and they helped us all to recognize that we as a congregation must be doing something right when even the most vulnerable among us are comfortable enough to challenge their rabbi and share their stories.

In *Pirkei Avot* 5:6 Ben Bag Bag says, "*Hafoch ba vehafoch ba dekula ba,*" turn the Torah over and over for everything is in it. We read the Torah every year, not because it changes, but because we do. Each time we meet a new person, the Torah influences that relationship, and the relationship changes the way we understand the text. They are inextricable. The experience of discussing the Joseph story in this context brought me closer to my congregants, to the text, and to a better understanding of people more generally. I believe that it also brought those sharing and those witnessing into a holy place, closer to each other and closer to God. We could not have had this exchange in any place but a synagogue, where we delve into Jewish text and know one another well enough to share ourselves.

As a rabbi, my responsibility is always to my congregation, but it is also to the community at large. When there was concern over the Latter-Day Saint Church posthumously baptizing deceased Jews, I could have dismissed it thinking, "We don't believe in posthumous ordinances. It doesn't matter." But if we are to respect those of other faith traditions, we must discuss those acts that disturb us and invite conversation. To that end, I reached out to the Church to talk about why this behavior was troubling. In both my personal and professional life, I think it is true that a good friend calls, even when she doesn't need something. I continue to work with the LDS Church and its membership. There is an ongoing conversation between intellectuals in the LDS and Jewish communities. The LDS group is from Brigham Young University and most of our Jewish representation comes from Los Angeles.

As the local rabbi, I have brought the practical, boots-on-the-ground perspective to the conversation. I have also participated in the Liberal Clergy Group and the Millcreek Bridging Group. I have learned about other faith traditions, made dear friends, and had a support system composed of various clergy. Because of this interfaith work, I have been able to advocate effectively for the LGBTQ community, hate crime legislation, action against homelessness, and—most recently—against the violence in Charlottesville, Virginia, and the hate groups who perpetrated it. When we build relationships in quiet times, we can work together in times of need and concern.

The contemporary synagogue includes prayer, spirituality, social action, study, leadership, and engagement; and as a rabbi and a Jew, I am also devoted to these pursuits. I see the synagogue as a place where we can practice being our best selves, which we can only do together, in relationships with one another and with God. I include myself in that practice, which is at the center of my understanding of Judaism and my vision for the community I hope to serve.