



High Holy Days 2015-5776
Greetings from Congregation Shir Libeynu

Congregation Shir Libeynu, the little *shul* that could, **did**, over the past remarkable year in our community's history! We celebrated High Holy Day services, Shabbat mornings, Kabbalat evenings and many holidays together. Our bar/bat mitzvah program launched with a series of classes, social events and *Tzedekah* activities for our first cohort of keen students. Our adult education series and alternative contemplative chanting sessions proved popular with many in and outside the community. As the first GLBTQ-inclusive Jewish congregation in Toronto, we led the way in World Pride last spring, with our involvement in a series of multi-faith events and our advocacy for queer rights, as well as our annual service. We supported groups such as Women of the Wall, the Daniel Pearl Foundation, Rainbow Railroad and Heart to Heart. Most notably, we rejoiced last November 22 at the [ordination](#) of our all-but-in-formal-title Rabbi Aviva Goldberg.

So it with delight that we look forward to the 2015/5776 High Holy Days (Sept. 13-15, 22-23). Please join us again this year for deep, joyous and participatory services with Rabbi Goldberg and *Chazzan* Daniela Gesundheit leading us. All will take place at the congregational building of First Unitarian Toronto (St. Clair W. and Avenue Rd.) We have started registration for memberships (which include tickets to all services). As in years past, there is no charge for children to the age of 13, who will once again benefit from a host of wonderful programs and special services: **New this year is a Rosh Hashanah morning family service, especially for those with young children, and led by Rabbi Goldberg.**

As an unaffiliated congregation without support from major foundations or federations, your membership [fees](#) and donations pay for all that we offer at High Holy Days and during the year: staffing, rentals, administration, kiddushes and other free meals, children's programs and all other costs. Being a member of Shir Libeynu places you within a *haymische*, progressive community and gives you access to spiritual services, cultural and educational programs and a circle of caring, creative people dedicated to a meaningful Jewish life.

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Greetings from Rabbi Aviva Goldberg

Contemporary scholar, activist and mystic Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel wrote that in our modern society we have lost the power of true celebration.

We seek to be amused or entertained; a passive state of being. "Celebration," he said, "is giving attention to the transcendent meaning of one's action." It is an active state; an act of reverence and appreciation. As we, the community of Congregation Shir Libeynu, come together for these High Holy days, let us find this true meaning of celebration.

During these Days of Awe, when we are enjoined to engage with the themes of *teshuva* (repentance), *tefilla* (prayer) and *zedakah* (justice), let us remember the profound words of Heschel that it is indifference and apathy to the sublime wonders of living that is the actual root and meaning of sin. May this New Year 5776 bring each of us health and happiness and may we renew our commitment to restoring and repairing our personal relationships with family and friends and with the world in which we live.

Wishing you all a Shana Tova, Aviva

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Greetings from Chazzan Daniela Gesundheit

To the members, friends, and families of our Shir Libeynu community,

I remember in grade seven I decided to join my shul's choir. It was a professional choir and all of the singers were paid (not to mention at least fifteen years my senior), but I somehow convinced the musical director to let me participate.

At the first rehearsal, we began with a version of the *Aleynu*. I turned to the page in the siddur that I had turned to countless times, even though I had it memorized, and was surprised to see everyone around me pull out folders with sheet music, the words spelled out phonetically in English, and the melody set to western musical notation. It seems strange to say now, but at that point in my life, I could not comprehend how these prayers that were so close to my heart, that I had known for as long as I could remember, could be reduced to notes on a page, to be sight-read by anyone. When we sang the prayers in the daily services at school, or during the High Holy Days, or on Shabbat, they had a magic to them, an effervescence that felt unquantifiable.

At this first rehearsal, the melody and the words of the *Aleynu* were the same as they were in *shul* - so what had changed? Why did my heart sink instead of sing when I heard the prayer being recited without feeling, mechanically?

I learned in that moment that prayer is reflexive; it becomes sacred by way of the people who tend to it, and it in turn transforms those people who participate in it. One need not understand the literal meaning of the words of a prayer to be transformed by it, but that transformation does require intention, or *kavanah*. Rabbi Lawrence A. Hoffman writes, "Music thus acts to convert individuals into a group where they can experience together the message of the alternative world being established in their prayers." Each service at *Shir Libeynu*, (which appropriately translates to "song of our hearts") presents us with a new opportunity to gather together and sing the prayers with our full presence and attention, to illuminate the words in the *siddurim* and sing a new world into existence.

I look forward to joining Rabbi Goldberg on the *bimah* for the High Holy Days as we, along with our community, say goodbye to a year of profound joys and challenges, and usher in a new year that I wish will be sweet and fulfilling for each of you and your friends and families.

L'Shana Tova,

Daniela Gesundheit

To view our High Holy Days schedule, membership and ticket price list, and limited income guidelines and criteria, please visit our High Holy Days information [page](#).