

It is my privilege and honour to be up here this morning to give you very special news about a significant milestone for both Aviva Goldberg and for our community. On November 22, 2014, Dr. Goldberg, who has been our rabbi in all but formal title for the 18 years we have existed, will receive ordination in a smicha ceremony in Toronto. Rabbi Debra Brin, whom many of you know already, will conduct the ceremony and bestow the honour, during a Havdallah service to be held in this sanctuary. The term “rabbi” literally means teacher/scholar/religious leader and for many of us, Aviva has served as such for the entire time we’ve been together. The outcome of that ceremony will ensure that we can finally address her precisely as Rabbi Goldberg. More significantly it will acknowledge, publically, the experience, skills and gifts that Aviva brings to the community, both within our shul and to the broader Jewish world.

It is my belief that Aviva has probably done about as much as anyone in leadership to keep a huge contingent of questioning and formerly disaffected and disinterested Jews engaged and in the fold. She has done so by reminding us that while we have a rich tradition, it is one made up of a vibrant heart, an inquiring mind and a diverse, inclusive community. She has done so by living that way, and promoting what my friend Eden calls “assumption-free Judaism.” Like Many of you, I suspect, my own story with returning to the fold began with my first face to face meeting with her:

It was 1999, after months of telephone convos and emails as she was starting to guide our family through my daughter’s bat mitzvah process. Congregation Shir Libenu was then a few years old, and holding High Holy Day services only at Cecil Community Centre downtown. Aviva had suggested, gently, that it was time for our family to transition from the home-based personal observance we were enjoying to more a more communal one. I felt I knew Aviva from the myriad of communications about Jewish life and lore that we were conducting, but we had not clapped eyes on one another yet. I knew that we had lucked out in finding someone so attuned to the particular, ideosyncratic needs and orientations of our family: this included feminists, a Jewishly well-educated but atheist husband, a musician daughter and an sports-loving son, my babe of a fashion=plate Montreal mom who had grown

up Orthodox and Gary's mom from Lithuania, the Yiddishist, and some non-Jews whom we also wanted up on that bimah. I was feeling a bond with Aviva. So when I encountered her in the Cecil sanctuary that day for the first time in person, I did what I still do in these circumstances, and went in for the hug. Now, those of you who know Aviva can possibly imagine her reaction, or her discomfort. That's because her style of displaying affection is one shall we say, of a wee bit more restraint, mainly because of her natural shyness. Nevertheless, because she is a kind and respectful person, who doesn't wish to embarrass, she met me halfway in that hug. But really what she did was pull me in, to a Jewish life again and then into this congregation, where I have been active and engaged in a big way with many of you, for more 14 years. Along the way, some of us have become close, to Aviva and to each other, and we have worked hard to help the "little shul that could and does" move forward, in this our 18<sup>th</sup>, our Chai, year.

It is easily overlooked that what has become, thankfully, commonplace today in liberal and not so liberal shuls – the focus on non-sexist and LGBTQ-inclusive liturgy with women and LGBTQ in leadership roles – was not the norm just two decades ago, except at Shir Libeynu. As most of you know, the congregation started in 1996 when Aviva, her life-partner Dinah, and two other women, decided to hold High Holy Day services at OISE, where in that first year 70 people attended. Before that Aviva had been accepted at the Reconstructionist Rabbinical seminary but, like many new parents, could not leave her young family for an out of town residency. Still for more than 20 years, she has been doing life cycle rituals for Jewish families - and of course Shir Libeynu for the past 18 years. In mid life, she received her PhD with a focus on Jewish women - ritual/liturgy/theology. Dr. Goldberg teaches courses on these subjects as well as on religion at York university. She has also been working for many decades with her colleague and mentor, Rabbi, Deborah Brin, renowned as the first openly gay rabbi in Judaism and now the rabbi of Congregation Nahalat Shalom in Albuquerque, New Mex. Everything will come full circle on November 22, in the late afternoon, when Rabbi Brin performs the smicha, which she wrote is "Hebrew for 'laying on of hands" that we do according to tradition, to confirm the title 'rabbi' on a deserving individual.' We ask you all to mark that date in your calendars now, and to come here and celebrate with us this important step in Aviva's, soon to be Rabbi Aviva's, journey, and ours. Details about this ordination, the ceremony

and the lively reception afterwards that we are planning, are forthcoming. We are starting a fund in honour of her ordination, to support the growing list of programs and services the community has requested and that we need to thrive. And, there will be music of course from Daniela, our chazzan, and possibly some surprise guests. You may even see our new rabbi dance. MAzel Tov, Aviva, and to all of us, and Shana Tov/Gutt Yontiv as well.