

Speech from Karen Charnow Lior
President of the Board of Directors
Yom Kippur
High Holy Days 2021/5782

Good Yontuf, Shana Tova.

It is lovely that we are all here together at Congregation Shir Libeynu for these Yom Kippur services. At this time of the year, we look back, we reflect, we look forward and dream, envision, resolve to do better next year.

As President, and on behalf of the board, I'd like to take some time to talk about what we have accomplished this year. And I'll speak how we could do even more in the coming year, the vision and the dream.

First, heartfelt thanks to all the volunteers who organized, communicated, connected, read, sang, played, sermonized, told stories, chanted and translated Torah, and contributed in so many other ways. You make what we try to do a reality. And Shelly Glazer reminded us, "we are the boat, we are the sea, I sail in you, you sail in me." Shir Libeynu is the boat we sail in together.

In the past year, despite the pandemic, we held monthly Shabbat services, engaging High Holy Day services, and many special events. After the holidays we turned our attention to finding a permanent, new spiritual leader. We feel very fortunate to have found Cantor Cheryl Wunch.

We are confident that Cantor Wunch will be able to both honour our legacy and bring us new and innovative ideas. She has already connected with many of you to learn your ideas and thoughts about our congregation. She brought us meaningful services, and inspiring learning opportunities. She represented us in standing up against injustice and offering support as allies. She is already inspiring us to move forward with fresh ideas and renewed energy.

We expanded our education programs to include an adult B'Mitzvah class, in addition to the youth B'Mitzvah class and an adult Hebrew class. Our pre-B'mitzvah youth have the opportunity to join the school of the Danforth Jewish

Centre. We've worked closely with them this past year and intend to continue this important partnership.

We organized and sponsored meaningful education events through our Speaker Series. Grateful thanks to Eden, Shoshana and Cantor Wunch for giving us opportunities to learn about LGBTQ+ Jews and leadership, the protection of nature in Israel, racial equity and inclusion in Jewish spaces, a leadership program for Jewish and Palestinian youth, the profound insights of Dr. Mira Sucharov and Tema Smith, and the personal, musical journey of Paula Wolfson.

Cantor Wunch and the board worked hard to respond thoughtfully, compassionately and quickly to tragic events that unfolded this past year. Sadly, there are too many to list so I will give you just a few examples.

When the bodies of 215 children were discovered on the site of the Kamloops Indian Residential School, our congregation supported the powerful statements from the Hamilton and Toronto Rabbis. The statement made it clear that, and I quote, "words are not sufficient to atone for the abuse of our First Nations at the hands of Canada." It called on the Canadian government to implement all the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

We stood with the London Jewish Community in speaking out against anti-Muslim hate when Salman Afzaal, Madiah Salman, Yumna Salman and the family's grandmother, out for an evening walk, were murdered in a senseless and horrific act of premeditated violence and hate.

We organized a conversation with No Silence on Race, and responded to their challenge to Jewish organizations to be more intentional in doing anti-racism work. In our letter to them we articulated how we will respond to their challenge.

We are developing an updated website to better reflect who we are and what we do. We hope it will encourage new people to join our community. The new website will include a Land Acknowledgement written specifically for Shir Libeynu. We plan is to launch the new website in late September. Thank you to

Harriet Eisenkraft for creating the website we have now because it is the basis for the new one.

Everything I have described--and there are things I left out to keep my remarks shorter, although I know they aren't really short, happened because a small group of people made them happen. To quote Margaret Mead: "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has." But that small group needs your help and support, especially those of you who have not volunteered before, or for a long time.

We need your ideas and energy to keep Shir Libeynu vibrant, relevant and strong. Each of you has unique gifts and or skills to contribute. We need members to serve on the board, to help with our anti-racism and social justice work, to help us with communications, including editing our newsletter and taking photos. Many of you have said you long to return to meeting in person, so we need a venue committee. We are close to outgrowing the chapel at the JCC and we need a place for High Holiday services and other special events.

We desperately need resources. The pandemic has taken a toll on us as it has on many other congregations. We want to bring back the members we lost, and we want to grow. Your memberships and the ticket sales are our only source of revenue. We rely on that income for everything we do, salaries, recordings, presentations, honorariums, everything.

Our Torah is falling apart and we desperately need a one. Perhaps one of you, or a number of you, will step forward to lead a fundraising campaign to replace our aging scroll. A congregant asked this year if they could borrow our Torah for their child's B'Mitzvah at a cottage out of town, and we had to say no; it is too fragile to travel. That was a hard choice and one we hope we don't have to repeat.

On this Yom Kippur day, when we reflect and review and think about what we will try to do differently in the coming days, months and years, I am asking you to think about how you value this community of Shir Libeynu and what contribution you can make. We want to hear from you. In the next few months we want to plan small group conversations to understand how you envision

the future of Shir Libeynu. Ruth Dworin noted the importance of responding rather than reacting. Please respond thoughtfully.

This year is our 25th anniversary. We are Toronto's longest-running, intentionally LGBTQ+-inclusive synagogue. We welcome everyone, including traditional, non-traditional, and interfaith individuals, couples and families. Wouldn't it be great to celebrate with a new Torah and an expanded and revitalized circle of volunteers? We would also like to start gathering in person, outdoors. If you have a large backyard or deck and would be willing to host a Shabbat pot luck or Havdalah, please let us know. Reach out to Cantor Wunch, to me, or to any other board member or volunteer to talk to us about what you would like to do to support our community.

We have a terrific community. Together we have gotten through the pandemic and looked after each other. One of the amazing things we have witnessed since the beginning of the pandemic is the incredible ability of people, organizations and institutions to adapt. We are remarkably resilient. We ebb and flow as needed to fit time and purpose. Shir Libeynu is proud of our small but significant part in the tide of originality and resourcefulness. We want to continue to be able to do all that we've done in the past year, and more, to build back with renewed purpose.

In the words of Langston Hughes:

Then the hand seeks other hands to help,
A community of hands to help-
Thus the dream becomes not one person's dream alone,
But a community dream,
Not my dream alone, but our dream.
Not my world alone,
But your world and my world,
Belonging to all the hands that build.

Shana Tova and G'mar chatimah tova. A good signature, a better year.

Karen Charnow Lior