

Good yuntiv and welcome. It is so nice to see such a wonderful crowd of such wonderful people gathered today. Whether this is your first time here or you are a regular, thank you so much for being here this evening.

My first memory of coming to Nehar Shalom was an evening much like tonight, seven years ago on Rosh Hashanah. I encountered a relatively small high holiday crowd but with the energy of a much larger one. Before moving to JP, I had heard about Nehar Shalom. This growing Jewish community in this neighborhood was part of the reason I chose to make this beautiful, progressive, artsy, and diverse neighborhood my home. However, despite knowing that this community existed, I hardly imagined that it would have the role in my life that it does today. As a young adult, without a lot of need for institutional commitment, I assumed that Nehar Shalom would be a small piece of my local Jewish life. Nehar Shalom, I figured, would be the shul that I might or might not go to for Shabbat services. Other local groups would be places that I would go to fill other needs: to engage in social justice work from a Jewish perspective, to make friends, to deeply engage with Jewish text. This idea of a “patchwork” Jewish community was one that I, and many of my peers, had experienced and created many times before and as part of bustling city, I had no need to imagine that one place could fulfill everything I was looking for in a Jewish community. While I have become and stayed connected to other groups and organizations in the area, I have also found that Nehar Shalom, in addition to a Shabbat prayer community that far exceeded my expectations, has become the place I would go to find pretty much everything I had been looking for in a Jewish community: The opportunity engage in social justice work from a Jewish perspective, to make friends and form community, to deeply engage with Jewish text.

-I have found and nourished deep friendships at Nehar Shalom with people I have met at or see at Nehar Shalom. When my grandfather passed away a couple of years ago, Nehar Shalom was the community that I turned to share my memories of him.

-I have been able to deepen my engagement to social justice work through Nehar Shalom. I am so proud to be part of a religious organization that shows up every month

at the local Black Lives Matter vigil and that proudly displays a 'Black Lives Matter' sign on our lawn. Nehar Shalom's commitment to GBIO as a member organization is crucial to our identity and to our connection to other faith communities working for social change locally.

-I have loved participating in the weekly JP Licks discussion group as well as the Social Justice Beit Midrash and have enjoyed connecting to others through deep, nuanced, and relevant Jewish learning.

What I have found in Nehar Shalom that I did not even think to seek, was a rabbi who I could go to for pastoral counseling and rabbinic advice. Several years ago, when preparing to rid my house of chametz I found myself in an internet wormhole about how to deal with the issue of pet food on Pesach. This was particularly relevant to me, because, my beloved turtle, Tali- who I adopted thanks to an email on the Nehar Shalom listserve- had a varied diet that included some forbidden foods. One source I found said suggested that instead of selling one's pet's food over pesach, one might in fact need to sell the pet itself. These instructions were followed by the common phrase, "please consult your rabbi." At that moment, I realized that I knew exactly where to turn (in case you were wondering, in the midst of the busiest time of the year, Rabbi Victor took the time to assure me that it would be fine to just sell the food without selling the actual pet).

But, on a more serious note, as someone who grew up in a lay lead community, the idea of having someone- let alone someone as kind, thoughtful, and engaging as Rabbi Victor- to turn to when I have a specific need or question has been crucial to my connection to Nehar Shalom as a community, as I know has been true for so many others.

I expect some of you will identify with the story I have told and the many things that Nehar Shalom provides all of us- the prayer community, the connection to social justice work, the opportunity to form friendships and to create community, the opportunity for

deep learning, and the access to such warm and attentive pastoral care and rabbinic guidance. I also expect that many of your stories sound quite different from mine and that you came here for other reasons. Perhaps, you are here tonight for the very first time. We all came here for different reasons and from different places and have our own stories to tell. But we have all made our way here, tonight, on the most important day of the Jewish year. Regardless of what brought you here tonight, I have no doubt that each of us recognizes the uniqueness of a small, homey, neighborhood shul that, despite our size, offers so many opportunities to everyone who walks in the door. Nehar Shalom is the place where we go to connect and to mark time in a communal way as we make our way through each year. Nehar Shalom is literally Rabbi Victor and Mieke's home, but it is also our of our homes and with the growing number of people making this their home, we have many needs.

So much work goes into keeping our shtibl running and one of them is financial. As far as shuls go, our budget is low, but it is extremely necessary. It's what allows us to pay for siddurim and machzorim, to hold our growing family learning program, to have a space to daven, to put up a tent in the backyard over the holidays, to rent the seats that you are sitting in, and to hire a rabbinic intern and a rabbinical student to guide us through the holiest days of the year. I would like you to take a moment to think what you can contribute to help keep our shtibl running. It is part of our ethos never to charge for high holiday tickets and to never turn anyone away, but we do ask you to keep this in mind as you think about the generous donation you might be able to make and to understand that these donations are necessary to keep our shul running.

Another way you can make a commitment to Nehar Shalom is by joining us as a member. Of course, many aspects of our wonderful community are intentionally accessible to all, regardless of whether or not one is a member, however, by becoming a member, you are saying, "hineni/here I am" this is my community and this is my home. The main benefits of being a member is a deep feeling of connection within Nehar Shalom and its extended community. There are also opportunities to share in life cycle events with the community including, births, deaths, bar/bat mitzvahs, and aufrufs.

There are opportunities to learn new skills in a supportive environment such as how to take on roles in a Shabbat service. There are also opportunities for members to serve on leadership committees that guide the growth of our shul including the Chesed Committee and the community building committee. On the all-important internet side of things, you also will weekly email insights from the Rabbi inspired by life and the Torah portion of the week and have access to our member listserve (the aforementioned tool which facilitated my connection to Tali, my beloved turtle). You also help to support the many programs that I mentioned earlier- the family learning program which now has more than twenty families, Thursday morning study group, the Social Justice Beit Midrash, and high holiday costs among so many others.

You can sign up to become a member or make a donation on our website [neharshalom.org](http://neharshalom.org) or by grabbing an envelope in the basket on the table in the entryway. Rabbi Victor or I, or any other member of the steering committee would also love to talk to you about membership and answer any questions that you have.

We hope that, in whatever way you choose to connect, you will consider helping to support this vibrant community as you are doing already by being here tonight. Thank you for being with us this evening. Gmar Chatimah tova.