

Gut yontif! Welcome to Nehar Shalom. I am so glad to see each of you here tonight; the night when our walls expand just a little bit to welcome everyone in.

I spoke here on this night a few years ago, then as a member of the steering committee which recently become a Board of Directors through a community development process. That night, I spoke of our little shtibl that could. About the walls that whisper “I think I can, I think I can”; until everyone fits inside. I spoke of our cast of characters, whom I adore, who make up this eclectic community with love and care. I acknowledged that we are a family affair, not just the actual family of Rabbi Victor and Mieke that make this place run, but each of us, whether we come every week or once a year. We are lovers of torah and justice, we are a place where folks from all walks of life, and I do mean all, are welcome and wanted. This is a place we each get to make our own because it was founded on openness and care. We pride ourselves here on this welcoming and wanting of all people, which feels very special given that many of us have often not felt embraced for who we are in some other Jewish spaces. There is something I cannot quite put into words that greets you when you walk in the door and holds you while you are here - even if it is because on nights like tonight, there is actually no where to move.

As many of you are aware, our community is in the midst of transition. Come this July, our founders, Rabbi Victor and Mieke, will be retiring. A well earned retirement, as for the past 15 years they have given so much of themselves so that these doors stay open, welcoming each of us in any and every moment. They have literally given of house and home so this community has a place to come together. Mieke has in essence been a volunteer executive director; handling everything from the books and bills to hebrew school registration, to making sure kiddush is bought and prepared every week and greeting everyone on shabbat; all while working a demanding full time job outside of the shul. Rabbi Victor cares for each and every member of this community with loving attentiveness, leads us in prayer and social justice work, and runs our education programs. Rabbi Victor and Mieke have tirelessly created a container for us to make connections, for our joy and grief to be held, for torah to be learned, and for justice to be pursued. Rabbi Victor and Mieke, THANK YOU.

It is now our turn to carry this container forward, with exciting opportunities for growth meeting us along the way.

This shtibl is a special place; a place that lives its values; where our traditions and our liturgy meet our commitment to pursuing justice. A place where generations come together, where children learn with their caregivers. A place that feels warm when you walk in the door and where you won't make it more than ten feet without being greeted. A place full of love and sweetness where we come together in joyous celebration of holidays and simchas, and where we grieve together personal and communal losses. A place we now have an opportunity to work together to grow even further. To dream, to expand, to sustain. This community that, for me and so many others, has become so central to my life, that has soothed, held, and loved me as much as I deeply love it; where I have met so many people that have become so important to me.

For this amazing community to continue being the unconditional shelter and resource it is for so many, we need every one of you to contribute in some way - whether your financial resources, your time, or both.

Of course, this ask is for those of who feel able, who may have the precious resources of time or money that we need in order to continue to thrive as a community. We are committed at Nehar Shalom to remaining an open-door community – nothing will ever be a barrier to access, and you are welcome exactly as you are, no questions asked. To keep those doors open however, we do need those who feel able to chip in, to participate, to donate in the ways you can.

In preparation for this July we must each contribute to keeping this place running. In order for this community to be here, we need you and we want you. You are what makes the Nehar Shalom community this beautiful place to be held. We need you for practical things, big and small; note – one, not all of these things - to organize kiddush, to be on a ritual committee, to carry out our values of inclusion through assessment and modification, to set up chairs, to schlep books, to make meals for those in need, to plan parties, to leyn torah, to lead davenning, to represent us in our interfaith work, to sign up for sanctuary shifts and lobby at the statehouse with GBIO. We need you on our real estate and chesed and fundraising committees. We need you to help us move into our new home, when we find it. We need you to tell us, what ways you would like to give and what you would like to see happen here. I promise, you will meet some wonderful people

along the way and have the satisfaction of contributing to the continuity of this community that we all hold so dear.

We understand that time is precious, life is busy and pulls us in a thousand different directions and what you may need is for this place to just be here for you. In order for us to be continue to thrive and be here for you in the ways we have been and progress in the ways that we dream of, we will need dollars. With all of the exciting possibilities that come with a new space and new leadership, comes the cost of making it all happen. As you look at your philanthropic priorities this year, I hope you will consider including this community to sustain this great work.

We are the little shtibl that could and we will continue to chug our way up the mountain, belief in ourselves being a big part of what gets us there. We will always have room for one more and greet you warmly at the door. Please help us keep that door open and continue to develop what is inside it. As we enter this new year and each of us does the work of determining where we are orienting ourselves and our energies, I hope that Nehar Shalom is a place you turn toward. We will be here with a whole lotta love and care.

Gmar chatimah tova!