

President's Perspective... A Recap of Words from Rosh Hashanah

Nearly 18 years ago, a group of innovative visionaries convened in an effort to create the entity we now know as Congregation Anshai Torah. To all who were part of that process, and part of the subsequent evolution of our shul, *thank you* for your vision, your dreams, and your ability to turn those dreams into our reality, making Anshai Torah what it is today, a home to nearly 550 families. You are the heart and soul of this shul and we are all beautifully nourished under the exceptional spiritual leadership of both Rabbi Weinberg and Rabbi Kushnick.

The state of Anshai Torah is good. We have been in a continuous growth phase at remarkable pace and we have a lot for which to be proud. Our Preschool, under the directorship of Rachel Nicholas, provides a premier nurturing and educational environment for our youngest members. We said a fond farewell to our beloved Bob, and Jason Cathcart took over the helm of our Religious School. Jason brings enthusiasm and creativity to our school, and along with our updated education curriculum, in response to **your** feedback, and the support of our Rabbis and Parent Advocacy Group, our children are receiving the very best religious school education. Our programs ensure a continuum of Jewish experiences from preschool through high school. We are confident that our students are well prepared as they venture off to college campuses, secure in their Jewish identity.

Highlights from last year include our Spring Fair of West Plano, deliveries of Shalach Manot, and the introduction of our Chavurah program, a thriving initiative bringing together families and friends in small intimate groups. We also had several Israel Advocacy programs which inspired and informed us about the challenges that Israel faces and the support Israel needs from us. Our signature Arnie Sweet Scholar-in-Residence program brought Rabbi Sharon Brous, an important voice in the conservative movement. We learned together and were inspired by her words, her energy, and her passion. This year, we continue to make a mark on the Dallas Jewish Community with this program by bringing the renowned Holocaust scholar Dr. Deborah Lipstadt to share her story. It will most assuredly be an outstanding program.

How fortunate that, through the generosity of so many, we are where we are. Over the last 6 years, we have continued to beautify this holy place. The first phase of our Windows campaign is complete; the multi-colored reflections of Jacobs ladder on our bima truly enhance this magnificent space. Next year, we hope to complete the windows with the stained glass depictions of the 12 Tribes of Israel.

Our Chai Membership program has continued to grow, ensuring that all who wish to become part of our family, regardless of financial ability, can do so. Thank you to the participants of this program for your generosity. The

Illustrated Torah program has been reinvigorated as a way for us to commemorate life-cycle events. Take a moment to admire this beautiful pictorial Torah on display in the entry.

The Tikkun Olam committee began the year with a successful diaper drive for JFS, supporting the needs of our community. On Kol Nidre, we again collected food donations for Operation Isaiah, and also collectively showed our support for the Dallas Police through our Back-the-Blue initiative. Our twice-daily minyanim insure that all who need to say Kaddish for a loved one can do so. What a mitzvah. Together, there is no limit to how we can make a difference in the world.

This month, we can all show our love and appreciation for Kol Rina by supporting the Diamonds and Dice celebration. Please consider sponsorship and attendance. It will be a fantastic event.

And of course, our thriving and active auxiliaries cram the calendar with a variety of programming designed to include the spectrum of demographics in our shul. All of this happens within a balanced budget and fiscal responsibility. We are busy.

Over the last two years, our Strategic Plan Committee identified and assessed our needs as a growing shul. Over the next few years, we will be focusing on exactly how to meet those needs, to create a sustainable shul and most important, to create a legacy for future generations at Anshai Torah. The initial findings of the Strategic Plan task forces have provided us a roadmap moving forward.

One important finding is that we anticipate continued and significant growth over the next several years and need to plan accordingly. This is based on the growth of Collin County, our own membership trends, and feedback from you about your commitment to Anshai. Thank you for participating in the congregational survey last spring. Your opinions are invaluable, and we want you to know **we hear you.**

We hear your desire for more meaningful services and have responded with the addition of the new High Holiday Mahzor. This prayer book will enrich your religious and spiritual experiences during this and every High Holiday season. **We hear** your need for more opportunities to learn. This year, a re-imagined adult education program will provide us with the highest quality of speakers and interesting topics, designed to fit in to our busy schedules. We will offer an impressive set of classes for adults on religion, ritual, Hebrew language, and Israel, and a variety of Melton classes. In addition, we will have multiple young adult activities, through the Geshet program.

We hear your need for improved communication and connection. We must invest in technical platforms and staff to enable us to effectively leverage all types of communications so each of you feels connected to our

expanding home. It is very important that we maintain our small shul feel and a sense of intimacy even as we grow. We are aware that we must engage our members in targeted ways, with specific onboarding experiences for new members, and outreach to all members.

The heart and soul of our shul are our members and, at the center of all of this activity are our extraordinary volunteers. None of this happens without you. The volunteers, along with our Board of Directors, our inspiring and dedicated Rabbis, Weinberg and Kushnick, Harvey, Jim, and Connie and our entire staff, form a sacred partnership. No one person can move an organization in any direction. We work together toward a shared goal, recognizing the importance of the people on whose shoulders we stand. We work to create a legacy that will outlast us with optimism, hopes, and dreams. Join one of our many committees, attend our programs, and spend Shabbat with your Anshai family. We need you. We need your voices. We need your dreams.

Anshai Torah represents the best of Conservative Judaism in North Dallas, providing Jewish continuity through all cycles of life. And it is home. I can't help but reminisce about the first Rosh Hashanah my family spent here. It was 2010 and we were new to Texas, still grieving the loss of my dad. It was through that healing and the love we received that we realized we had found a home. Six years have passed. My father would be so happy to know the significance that Anshai holds in our lives and what you all mean to us. My heart is full.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to serve as your President. On behalf of our Board of Directors, Jeff and I, along with Ross, Melissa, and Erica, wish you all a Shana Tovah U'metukah. May you have a beautiful, sweet, and meaningful new year and be inscribed for a year filled with health and goodness.

Marcy