

From Aleph to Taf, Sharon Wechter Creates Education Joy Anshai Torah Welcomes new Director of Religious School

by Deb Silverthorn



With new backpacks, pens, and notebooks in order as school is set to begin, Congregation Anshai Torah is excited to introduce Sharon Wechter, the congregation's new Director of Religious School.

"Anshai Torah welcomes Sharon and her immense experience and incredible energy as we begin this journey together," said Congregation Anshai Torah's Rabbi Michael Kushnick. "She

has a commitment to Jewish education that permeates everything she does; and our students and families are going to benefit with special Jewish learning opportunities that are thought-provoking and creative."

Sharon has taught at Houston's Emery Weiner Day School, served as Jewish Chaplain at Williams College and Director of the Board of Jewish Education in Bridgeport, CT in addition to being the Education Director for synagogues in Connecticut, Massachusetts, Maryland and Texas. This Houston native, who was raised in El Paso, says Texas is definitely home.

"I'm so excited to be here and so impressed by the enthusiasm of the teachers, the concern and commitment of the parents and congregants, and the teamwork of Anshai Torah's entire staff," said Sharon. "The love for Yiddishkeit, for learning, for prayer and for each and everyone in this community is obvious and I thrive on such beauty. This is a very special place."

Sharon is the daughter of Max Wechter and Doris Forman Pryzant, both of blessed memory. They were Zionist, Federation supporting, observant Jews at El Paso's Congregation B'nai Zion. Sharon's sister, Rosanne Wechter, lives in Houston and step-siblings Connie Dufner and Dr. Charles Pryzant, with whom she is close, live in Dallas.

Married to author and teacher Rabbi Seymour Rossel, the couple has four children — Benjamin Maimin, Rabbi Rachel Maimin, Debbie Rossel Bradford, and Rabbi Amy Rossel Ross. Sharon enjoys time kvelling over grandchildren Briana and Leona Ross and Eliana Bradford, her dog Yofi, and exhaling through yoga practice.

Sharon earned a B.S. from New York University, a M.S.W. from Wurzweiler School of Social Work of Yeshiva University and a M.A. in Religious Education from Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in New

York City. With her heart deep in creative arts, family education, and Jewish connections, she has written curricula for national organizations, including Hadassah and Jewish Funds for Justice and MAZON. A musician for much of her life, she sings, plays guitar and piano and has produced a CD of original Jewish music, *Journey of a Soul*.

Years after beginning her career as a music therapist and clinical social worker, as a young mother she volunteered in the religious school of her family's synagogue. It wasn't long before she realized how much she enjoyed teaching and, with a three-hour commute twice a week for four years, she earned her second master's degree.

"I went from volunteering as a substitute to Education Director in a year. I loved teaching and sharing all things Jewish, Zionist, and almost always with a creative flair," said Sharon, who is working with Rabbi Kushnick on the curriculum with which she hopes to infuse music, art, writing, and social action concerns in all of CAT's classrooms. She has created curricula that include cooking and needlework, and exploring sacred texts through the arts and a curriculum called "Exploring Jewish Values through Harry Potter."

"We need to listen to the children, teens, and parents; and I mean from our youngest that are learning the basics to our Hebrew High students who are figuring out their own Jewish identity and what being a Jew means to them. Of course, it's about the academics but also about the relationship to God and our People, values and so much more. We have to communicate to know each other and to share and build stronger relationships for ourselves," said Sharon, whose family learning programs she hopes will include siblings, parents, grandparents, extended families as well as the students and families of the congregation's Jewish Day School attendees.

"We want to make learning relevant to every student with regard to language, mitzvot, Torah, and our history to make it pertinent and integrate emotional connections because that's how you help Jews become engaged."

Sharon is now entrenched in her CAT office – bookshelves filling, and the excitement of the new year spirit. Engage indeed.

Sharon Wechter can be reached at 972-473-7718 or email RSDirector@anshaitorah.org. For more information about Anshai Torah's Religious School, visit our website at www.anshaitorah.org.