

## **A Few Good Changes**

I still get nervous when I think about the first day of school. There was something unsettling and unpredictable about new teachers, new expectations, and new schedules. I always preferred the later months of school, when I felt settled in a comfortable, predictable routine. Even though I am not in school anymore, I guess I have not outgrown that unsettling feeling when I do something for the first time. I still love the comfort of the familiar, and change can be scary and risky.

As we approach the New Year, we face the inevitability of change. We will grow older this year. I will look into the mirror and will discover a few more gray hairs and a few more wrinkles. I will look into Rebekah's empty room and notice that she will spend less time in her room this year and more time at school. I will look into Harvey's soft eyes and see that he too is changing with time. I will look at my new calendar and notice that this year will mark seven years since my father's death.

I suppose that I get downhearted when I realize things are changing. I tend to focus on the changes that I don't want to happen, and remember—I am the one who likes when things stay the same! But I can wish someone a "shana tova" and remember that change can be a good thing.

On Rosh Hashanah, we wish each other "shana tova—a good year." "Shana" means "year" and "tova" means "good." But with just one vowel change, the same letters that form the word "shana" also form the word "shina," which means "change." Each time we wish someone a good year, we are also wishing for a *good change*.

In many ways, our congregation has settled into a fairly regular routine. I am entering my seventh year as the congregation's first permanent Rabbi and feel blessed to have been part of your lives through simchas and sadness. We have a dedicated and lively group of members who regularly attend meaningful and uplifting Shabbat services. Our High Holy Day, festival, and other holiday services and programs provide a warm community for all. Josh Friedman and Rachael North continue to share their music and their voices with us for Shabbat and special holiday celebrations. The members of our Board of Directors put commitment and creativity to work as they ensure that our programs are exciting, our finances are stable, and our future is bright. Our Administrator makes sure things run smoothly, and she truly cares about each and every congregant and guest. Our Sisterhood continues to thrive, supporting our congregation and one another. Our b'nai mitvah students learn to chant Torah, lead services, and teach the congregation in services that are uniquely tailored to each student. The teachers in our religious school continue to share their love for Judaism with their students, and our families continue to renew their

dedication to Jewish learning each and every year. We will continue to do what we do best: provide a warm, friendly, caring Jewish community.

While our routine is comfortable and familiar, we also will experience several *good changes* this year. We are starting off the year with a new cantorial soloist. Alan Scott and I have been collaborating since the spring to plan High Holy Day services that will bring meaning and new spirit to our worship. Alan's first service with us will be Selichot—Saturday night, September 4. Some of the music will sound familiar because you heard it last year, or during your childhood. Some of the music will sound different because the voice is different from what you are used to, or simply because we are trying something new. I am excited to experience this “shina tova” in our Holy Day worship.

Our religious school will experience several *good changes* this year. We have hired two new teachers and look forward to introducing them to the congregation in the fall. One of our teachers is also a song leader who will be leading services with me on Friday nights throughout the year. We are starting a class for our youngest students in Kindergarten, first and second grades. This class will be co-taught by one of our new teachers and by one of our experienced parents, Jen Woodworth. We also will be adding some Friday afternoons to our religious school schedule. After class, parents will stay for a community Shabbat dinner followed by our regular Shabbat service. I can hardly wait to find out what young voices and young families will add to our Shabbat experience!

Our youth groups also will enjoy some *good changes* this year. Our new Youth Advisor, Mac Lindner, will be guiding our middle school and high school students in their social, leadership, and social justice activities. Our teens are gearing up for increased involvement with teens from all over southern California, and I know they will remain as involved as ever in congregational life!

As you know, our board is welcoming three new members this year. Dorie Goldman is now serving as our Vice-President, Athena Turrey is serving as our Programming Chair, and Jan Porush is returning to the board to serve as Corresponding Secretary. These *good changes* are sure to bring new ideas and new energy to our leadership team.

Change, while inevitable, can make us nervous and uncomfortable, but change can also bring excitement and hope for the future. For me a new school year meant learning new things, making new friends and growing up. As adults, changes we experience can mean new experiences, new knowledge, new opportunities, and new and even unexpected joys. Before we know it (even by the end of the Holy Day season), even the new will seem familiar and comfortable!

As we approach this New Year 5776, Harvey, Rebekah, and Ellie join me in wishing you and your loved ones a Shana Tova—a year of goodness, a year of health, and a year of change.