

Thank You for Helping Me Grow

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As a rabbi, I spend a lot of time thinking about learning. We encourage our students to learn, to ask questions, and to continue exploring Judaism. We celebrate their growth, even though it is sometimes hard to notice it when it is happening. Many times, you only recognize it when you pause and look back. As I prepare to leave TBE and move back home, I have been doing a lot of looking back, a lot of reflection. What I realized is that these past few years have taught me far more than I could have ever expected.

When I arrived at TBE, I was a brand-new rabbi, moving across the country to start my rabbinical career. I knew no one, and even though I thought I knew what I was signing up for, I definitely did not know what the next three years would hold, and that I had so much more to learn.

In my installation speech, I talked about wanting to be your partner on your Jewish journey. I said, "I want to be there." I want to be there during happy times and sad times. I want to be there to teach, to learn, to celebrate, to support. I want to be there for your family in every way that I can. Looking back, I realized that captured what I hoped my rabbinate would be. I imagined classes, programs, holidays, and lifecycle events. I imagined helping people connect more deeply with Judaism. I imagined building relationships with congregants. What I didn't imagine was how much I would grow, learn, and develop while being there for you all.

I came here ready to help serve a community, to create programs, create experiences, and create an environment that congregants will want to be in. In reality, the community helped serve me. You all welcomed a brand-new rabbi, gave me room to grow, learn, make mistakes, and find my voice. Every conversation, every committee meeting, every pastoral visit, every class, every religious school morning became part of that process. I learned what it means to be a rabbi not from textbooks, but from sitting with people through real life.

I learned that being a rabbi is about relationships. Showing up, listening, celebrating with people, and being with people through all their ups and downs. When you think about synagogue moments, many people think of the big moments, holidays, b'nei mitzvah, and other important milestones. These moments are important, but the quieter moments are just as important. The hallway conversation after services, the student who asked an unexpected question, and the moments when someone trusted me enough to share what was happening in their life. Community is not built in one big moment; it is built through hundreds of small moments that slowly create trust and belonging.

At my installation, I spoke about The Kehillah Project as something that was still on the horizon. At that point, it was a vision, a hope for what Jewish youth education at TBE would look like, centered on community, curiosity, and meaningful engagement. Looking back, building The Kehillah Project became one of the greatest joys of my time at TBE. Every Sunday, our families and students come together to pray, learn, and be in community, celebrating holidays, doing social action programming, or just learning together in the classroom.

I am so proud of the program that we created, but also proud of how it came to be. Our Religious School Working Group put in countless hours researching programs, speaking to our families, and sharing what they hoped for the program. Our teachers have brought creativity and care, showing up

for their students and helping create engaging classrooms. Our students and families have shown up with curiosity and enthusiasm, excited about creating holiday programming, going on field trips, and spending time with each other.

The Kehillah Project is a reminder of what happens when a community dreams and learns together. Meaningful Jewish education isn't something we deliver; it's something we create in partnership. Students, parents, teachers, clergy, and staff all learn from one another.

And perhaps that has been one of the greatest lessons of my time at TBE. I came here expecting to be a teacher. I leave recognizing how often I was the student. Now, to be fair, these were not entirely new lessons. My parents, teachers, mentors, camp directors, professors, and many others taught me about the importance of relationships, community, and showing up for others long before I arrived here. But Judaism teaches us that we return to the same texts year after year because we are different each time we encounter them.

In many ways, these past three years have been like that for me. Familiar lessons took on new meaning through the experience of being a rabbi. Our students reminded me of the power of curiosity, creativity, and asking questions. Our families taught me about commitment, resilience, and the many ways people build Jewish life in their homes. Our volunteers showed me what it means to invest time and energy into something larger than yourself. Our teachers demonstrated patience, flexibility, and a deep dedication to helping every child succeed. Our staff taught me the value of collaboration and partnership. And all of you taught me what it truly means to be part of a congregation, to celebrate together, support one another, and continue showing up for community year after year. These are lessons I may have encountered before, but TBE helped me understand them in a deeper and more meaningful way.

And when I stop and think about those lessons, I realize they all have something in common. None of them were learned alone. Every one of them came from people who were willing to share their time, their wisdom, their experiences, and their lives with me.

Judaism teaches that we learn in relationship. We study in chevruta, we pass traditions from generation to generation, and we grow through community. If these past three years have taught me anything, it is that no one becomes who they are on their own, which is why, as I reflect on my time at TBE, my overwhelming feeling is one of gratitude.

Thank you to Rabbi Stoller, Stephanie, and Shy for being the best clergy team to work with. I feel like I have grown so much on the bimah because you allow me to be my fully authentic self.

Thank you to Stu, Yanira, Judy, Joy, Joy, Sheri, Fredda, Larry, and all the other staff here at TBE who have been partners, mentors, and friends.

Thank you to our lay leaders and volunteers who dedicate countless hours to this congregation.

Thank you to our teachers, Jennie, Izzy, Karen, and Adam, who care deeply about our students and showed up week after week.

Thank you to everyone who helped bring The Kehillah Project to life: the Religious School Working Group, Jenn, Joanna, Kasi, Michael, and Ethan, without whom there would be no program, our parents who send their kids and volunteer their time both to join us and to plan our programming, and of

course, our students. You are the reason we do this work, and watching you learn and grow has been one of the greatest gifts of my time here.

Thank you to all of you, the congregants, who welcomed me into your lives. It has been my honor to be there for you through all your ups and downs. I have loved learning about you and your families, and I hope this is not the end of getting to hear about all the wonderful things you continue to do.

And finally, thank you for trusting a brand-new rabbi from the other side of the country and allowing me to grow alongside you.

As many of you know, I will be returning to the West Coast to be closer to my family. This summer, I will begin a new chapter as Director of Jewish Life and Camp Director at the Stroum Jewish Community Center in Mercer Island. It feels like a natural continuation of the work I have loved most here: building community, creating meaningful Jewish experiences, youth education, and helping people of all ages find connections to Jewish life.

As I thought about what I wanted to leave you with tonight, I found myself returning to a song that has been important to me since the very beginning of my time here.

At my installation service, we sang “And the Youth Shall See Visions” by Debbie Friedman. I chose it then because youth education has always been at the heart of who I am as a rabbi. I believe deeply in investing in the next generation, helping them ask questions, build Jewish identity, and imagine what Judaism can become.

Three years later, I still believe that. But I hear the song a little differently now. The song is not only about young people. It is about a community willing to imagine the future. It is about having the courage to dream. It is about believing that Judaism continues to grow and evolve because every generation brings new ideas, new energy, and new possibilities.

As TBE prepares for its next chapter, selling this building and imagining what comes next, that vision will be important. The future of this congregation will not be defined by a building. It will be defined by the people who continue to dream, learn, teach, and build together. It will be defined by those who are willing to imagine what Jewish life can become and then do the work to bring that vision into reality.

Three years ago, I arrived here as a new rabbi eager to learn. Today, I leave having learned far more than I ever expected. Thank you for teaching me. Thank you for helping shape my rabbinate. Thank you for being part of my journey.