

Creating Sacred Time and Space: *Bo'u Lifanav Birnanah*

To everything there is a season

And a time to every purpose under heaven...

Book of Ecclesiastes

This month marks the beginning of my year on the *bimah* as both B'nai Jacob's cantor and spiritual leader. Actually, we all know a cantor is by definition a spiritual leader, so perhaps, it would be better for me to say 'sole spiritual leader'. For the coming year B'nai Jacob will be without 'rabbinic leadership', but I give you every assurance B'nai Jacob will surely not be without 'spiritual leadership'. It is a time of change and experimentation for us. We have a unique opportunity to explore possibilities for integrating the new with the old, the innovative with the 'tried and true'. With change comes both excitement and renewal. Know that I am here to work together with you as we navigate the waters of change. As we expand our understanding of spirituality this coming year, let us renew our commitments to be not only members who are defined by the dues they pay, but members who are defined by the contributions they make beyond the financial. Don't get me wrong: the financial is critical, our lifeblood, but our *neshamot*, our B'nai Jacob souls, our spirit is even more important. Let us begin to engage in a creative dialogue regarding our beloved B'nai Jacob and how we can all participate in shaping its future. I invite you to renew your commitments to being part of the wonderful spiritual community B'nai Jacob has always been.

Almost 50 years old, Congregation B'nai Jacob of Jersey City is already experiencing some exciting growth and renewal. Recently we have attracted four new members and by the High Holy Days (only months away), we expect to attract many more. Tell your friends and colleagues about B'nai Jacob and the warm and caring *chevra* we have with our Shabbat and Holiday suppers, Kiddushes and Onegs, as well as special musical Shabbats and beautiful High Holy Day services. Recently three of our younger members – Yael Israel and Jessica and Allan Lemmon – have become members of the Working Group for the newly established Hudson Jewish Community Forum. They are working very hard on B'nai Jacob's behalf to expand our visibility in the larger Jersey City community and beyond. Our goal is to become the synagogue of choice for Jersey City Jewish residents.

So what do programs and initiatives have to do with spirituality? I believe that every action we take and every thought we have can be informed by our relationship with God and Judaism. Of course, coming to services is an important aspect of that, but visiting the sick or paying a *shiva* call, is important, as well. B'nai Jacob is a collection of individuals and a community. We are both. There are many ways to participate in the experience of B'nai Jacob. Come into our beautiful sanctuary for services and experience first-hand the sanctuary as a place of warmth, comfort and peace, a refuge, the true meaning of sanctuary, from the world outside and our everyday problems and concerns. The sanctuary is a place of *Torah*, *Tefillah* and *Tikkun Olam*, a place of **sacred learning**, **prayer** and **healing the world**. The regulars who attend services every Shabbat and even weekday *minyan* are always taking the blessings of the sanctuary with them into their

everyday lives. They are an example B'nai Jacob members should attempt to emulate. They are the members who comforted me at my home and sent cards when my beloved brother, David, died recently. They are truly sacred souls and I thank them deeply for their generosity of spirit. I also wish to thank all the board members and other volunteers who work so hard to make B'nai Jacob such a warm and caring place. We are a community and we are individuals. Over the next two months as we prepare for the High Holy Days let us as individuals begin to renew our engagement with B'nai Jacob. Ask yourself how you can make a difference, how you can be a part of the rebuilding we will be initiating in the months to come.

This summer there are four special dates of services in the sanctuary I invite those of you who may not have been regulars to try to attend. If not all, then perhaps one or more. These are **July 13th**, **July 23rd**, **August 24th** and **September 8th**. On **July 13th** and **August 24th**, we will have our **monthly musical Shabbat**. On these **Friday evenings**, services are a little different from the usual with a keyboard and original compositions woven through the service. **July 23rd** is *Erev Tisha B'Av* commemorating the destructions of the Temple in Jerusalem. With the soulful melodic chanting of *Eicha* and additional readings and melodies appropriate to the occasion, we come together as a bonded community to acknowledge the devastations to the Jewish people of centuries ago, as well as more recently, and to reaffirm the Jewish people's enduring hope for redemption. **Saturday night, September 8th** we will begin the High Holy Day season with the traditional *Selichot* services. It is a moment of new beginnings and a time to reaffirm our individual commitment to being a true member of the B'nai Jacob community. I welcome you to join me in B'nai Jacob's journey of renewal. Please feel free to contact me with any thoughts, ideas or questions.

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