

## November 8, 2024 - Installation Remarks

Thank you to the TBT leadership for offering me your blessing, and thank you, Rabbi Marder, for your beautiful words. I'm so honored that you could be here for my installation, and I'm delighted that you all got to hear her speak, because she truly is the Jedi Master of rabbis. She taught me everything I know, so anything that I do right as your rabbi, you'll have her to thank. Anything I do wrong is my fault entirely.

I'm so happy that my family is here tonight: my husband Eric and my son Maverick (who is up past his bedtime!): without their love and support and only mild grumbling about my unpredictable work schedule, I couldn't do this job. My parents Aaron and Carolyn Wolf, who both taught me the value of a life of faith, my in-laws Steve and Lisa Weissman, who I think actually love synagogues even more than I do, and uncles Clark and Gil, who earn major uncle points for being here. Thank you to my friends from across the Bay for joining us, and thank you all for your presence tonight. I also want to thank Rabbi Avi Schulman, who couldn't join us tonight, but who has been incredibly welcoming and helpful as I get to know this community.

I really love being a congregational rabbi, and I couldn't imagine doing anything else. In spite of the trend of declining synagogue

membership, a problem that is certainly not unique to us, I still believe that synagogues are the most vital of Jewish institutions, the places where Judaism can be most fully expressed. The synagogue is home to Jews – and those who love Jews – of all ages and stages of life. We don't ever graduate from temple. Last weekend, I led Torah study for adults, got together with a handful of our teens, and attended a playdate for preschool and younger elementary school families. At its best, congregations are places where different generations interact and connect in meaningful ways. I remember the very powerful feeling of being raised by the village of my synagogue growing up. All of the adults knew me and cared about me. They celebrated my successes and mourned my failures right along with me and my family. TBT has a similar feeling. When Cheryl Cohen, our temple president and longtime religious school teacher, popped in to say hello at our teen gathering, the teens jumped up to give her big hugs. Because of people like Cheryl, no matter how old and how cool they get, our teens will always know that Temple Beth Torah is a place where they are loved and cherished.

I also love synagogues because they are places where all of life can be shared. Highs and lows, beginnings and ends and everything in between, our temple community can accompany us through all of them. At

a single Friday night service, we might have congregants who are celebrating a simcha, those who are looking for comfort and strength to deal with an illness or other challenge, and mourners who have just suffered a loss and want to say Kaddish. Synagogues are big enough, physically and spiritually, to hold all of us. Joys are heightened and burdens are lightened when we share them in community.

Synagogues might all have similar functions and offerings, but each one is, of course, unique. I've been at Temple Beth Torah for four months now, and while I'm still getting to know you as individuals and as a congregation, I'm starting to get a picture of who and what Temple Beth Torah is. Here's some of what I've learned so far:

First, TBT is a truly inclusive, welcoming community. We have active TBT members of different backgrounds, ages, ethnicities, sexual orientations, gender identities, and abilities. When a new person attends services, they are greeted warmly and without judgment. We strive to make TBT accessible to those with special needs, whether it is by having ASL interpreters during High Holy Day services or offering rides to those with limited mobility. There is a real sense, a shared assumption, that it's up to all of us to make sure everyone feels a sense of inclusion and belonging.

Second, TBT feels like family. Many members have been friends for decades. You've watched your children grow up together, and delight in the fact that many of them are still friends as adults. You genuinely enjoy being with one another, you love and take care of one another and, yes, you sometimes argue with one another, just like relatives do. As one member put it, "My wife and I have two families: our family back East, and our Temple Beth Torah family." One of the lovely customs we have is to end our Friday night services with the Priestly Benediction, which is known to some TBT members as the Family Blessing. It's traditionally recited by parents over their children on Friday evenings, but here at TBT, everyone reaches out to bless one another, acknowledging that family comes in different forms.

Third, this congregation is proud of its history. With so many longtime members, TBT is full of historians who remember what it took to create a Jewish congregation in Fremont over 60 years ago, or how much work it took to raise the funds to build this sanctuary, or what happened when you replaced the carpets and you couldn't put up the stage for the annual Purim shpiel. The plaques on the buildings aren't just names: they are real people who poured their hearts and souls into this community, and whose

spirits still enliven it. Even those who are long gone are still remembered and honored and missed by TBT members today.

Now we're writing a new chapter in Temple Beth Torah's story, and I hope it's one that we'll all be proud of. Together, we will carry with us the memories of the past, uphold the values that have sustained us, and find new ways to ensure that this synagogue continues to bring fulfillment, inspiration, and hope for the future, to us and to the wider Jewish community.

The Torah is famously called Etz Chayim, a Tree of Life, because it has been the source of life and strength for the Jewish People for thousands of years. At the end of the Torah service, we sing the words from Proverbs,

עֵץ-חַיִּים הִיא לַמַּחְזִיקִים בָּהּ וְתַמְכִּיהָ מֵאִשׁוּר:

It is a Tree of Life to those who hold fast to it, and all of its supporters are happy" (Prov. 3:18). The same can be said of this House of Torah. Just as Torah gives life to those who hold it fast, so does Temple Beth Torah give life and purpose to those who hold onto and uphold it. Just as Torah brings happiness to its supporters, so does Temple Beth Torah bring happiness to those who love and support it. I'm humbled and honored to be your rabbi,

and I look forward to working together as we continue to grow as a holy congregation. May we go from strength to strength.