

A Rabbinic Perspective *By Rabbi Seymour Rosenbloom*

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A Transition: Looking Back and Looking Forward



I know I share with all members of AJ our sadness at the recent resignation of **Gavi Miller** as our Executive Director, and welcome with anticipation **Robert Friedman** assuming the role of Interim Executive Director.

It is hard to believe that it is seven years since Gavi joined our AJ staff. The times could not be more different than they are now, and we owe him a debt of gratitude for his dedication, creativity, vision, and capacity for hard work

to get the job done.

When Gavi assumed the role of Executive Director, the synagogue was in a state of administrative anarchy. We had gone six months with the position being vacant. Al Nadel, president at the time, and Deb Strauss valiantly struggled to keep the organization together. In addition, each member of the professional staff did extra duty to compensate for the absence of an executive director.

Then Gavi arrived on the scene. With a smile that seems ever-present, and an optimism that is unflappable, he began to gather *Shabbat Rockin' Eve*, Friday, June 5 all the reins of a galloping congregation, and started to create order out of chaos. The financial turmoil that had beset us subsided, and we began to have a clear sense of our finances, and confidence in the numbers, good or bad, that were circulated to leadership.

Gavi has been integral to every large and small effort over the last seven years. Every committee chair knew that Gavi would be there to help the event run smoothly. The website is current. The weekly emails were instituted.

Gavi was integral to our successful Capital Campaign and our 150th Anniversary Celebration. He has managed building maintenance, repair, and innovation with skill. The merger with Oxford Circle Jewish Community Center-Brith Israel was smooth because of Gavi's technical skill in successfully combining and managing the records, and his friendly and warm manner. And he has organized the records of our finances, our everyday operations and our Endowment Fund, in a clear and accurate way, with systems in place that will facilitate continuing clarity.

Gavi is one of the hardest working people I have ever met. He never shies away from a difficult task, and the light in his office is often, perhaps too often, on late into the night as he works to meet a deadline, whether institutionally necessary or self-imposed.

Gavi is blessed with a quick mind, a broad range of knowledge, literary as well as business, and Jewish knowledge and commitment. He truly knows what a synagogue is all about, and has helped advance our mission as a sacred congregation.

For all of us, Gavi has been a friend as well as a leader, and we will all miss him.

For me personally, his leaving is a great loss. Over the past seven years, I always knew that I could rely on Gavi. I knew that if he said something would be done, I never had to doubt it. He has been both a confidante and sounding board for me, and I have come to trust and value his advice and friendship. I am grateful for the work he did in making the surprise tribute on April 4 possible, and for reading *Torah* on that occasion. I will miss him greatly, as a colleague and a friend.

I know that I speak for all AJ members in wishing Gavi success in his new endeavor as Executive Director of another distinguished congregation, Har Zion Temple. When Gavi came to AJ, he and Minna had one young daughter, Ari. We shared with them the joy of the birth of Sarah and Rebecca. All three girls have been students in our Preschool and they are wonderful children. We will miss them as a family, as part of our family, but we wish them every blessing. They will always be in our hearts.

Robert Friedman assumes the role of Interim Executive Director with a firm knowledge of the congregation and an unsurpassed love for it.

Robert grew up at AJ, has been an officer for many years, and is our lead tutor for *Bar* and *Bat Mitzvah* children. This past January, when we marked "Robert Friedman Day," the outpouring of affection and respect for Robert from the whole congregation was truly touching and reflected his years of service and devotion to the synagogue.

When I first met Robert, he was "Robbie," a teenager who clearly loved living Judaism and loved teaching it. Through the years this young man has grown into an impressive leader and family man. I had the privilege of officiating when Jen and Robert were married, saw the birth of Melissa and David, led the service when Melissa was *Bat Mitzvah*, and look forward to David's becoming a *Bar Mitzvah*. Robert and his family, his mother Rita, and his late father Harry, are the quintessential AJ family.

And now Robert has the opportunity of taking the love he has for the congregation and using his talent and professional skill to assume a key role in our professional staff. It is not easy to transition from a lay leader to a professional staff member. Robert's willingness to take on both the risk and the opportunity of this move is, in my opinion, a great boon to the congregation, and a way for him to really fulfill the passion of his soul. I am confident that his leadership will usher in a new era of success for our synagogue.

Change is the only constant. Nothing ever stays the same. We can only hope that as we change and transition through the challenges we face, we can continue, in a resolute way, to fulfill our mission as a synagogue as articulated on our cornerstone, "To help perfect the world under the Kingdom of the Almighty." We have been blessed with Gavi Miller's leadership. I am confident that Robert Friedman's leadership will be a new blessing for us all.

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