

Rosh Hashanah 2018

Just behind me, hanging above the Ark, is the Ner Tamid, the eternal light. There is such a light in every synagogue. It serves to remind us of the presence of God in this holy space. Use of a Ner Tamid is ancient, dating to the Exodus from Egypt. In Exodus, chapter 27, we read these verses, “You shall further instruct the Israelites to bring you clear oil of beaten olives for kindling lamps regularly. Aaron and his sons shall set them up in the Tent of Meeting, outside the curtain which is over the Ark of the Pact, to burn from evening to morning before the Lord. It shall be a due from the Israelites for all time, throughout the ages.”

Light symbolizes many things. There is the comforting image of being led from darkness to light. We call new insight “seeing the light.” Israel is described by Isaiah as a light unto the nations. Light was God’s first creation. It is constant. Light symbolizes knowledge, learning, and spiritual growth.

Our Ner Tamid first hung at the previous Temple B’nai Abraham location in Newark. It and the Ark doors were moved with the congregation from Newark to our present home in Livingston. The light from our previous spiritual home continues to shine on us today.

While Jewish worship can take place anywhere, we pray together here.

While Jewish education can take place anywhere, we learn together and teach our children here.

While community involvement and working for a better world can and does take place anywhere, we certainly work toward Tikkun Olam, healing the world, here.

Temple B'nai Abraham is where we celebrate our good times: educational milestones, B'nai Mitzvah, baby namings, weddings, even birthdays and anniversaries.

This synagogue is an important place for us when we are in need of spiritual comfort at times of illness and loss - for ourselves, our family members, and our friends. When we are in need, the temple and its people come through. I thank you for bringing light into darkness.

To me, the synagogue is central to Jewish life now and into the future. Temple B'nai Abraham strives to be a place where everyone in our synagogue family feels safe and welcome. A lot goes into that effort.

Our clergy, Rabbi Kulwin, Rabbi Dantowitz, and Cantor Epstein continue to inspire us, leading us in worship, teaching us, providing that pastoral care that so many of us need. Many thanks to each of them.

As you know, Rabbi Kulwin will be retiring in the summer of next year. Rest assured, I will discuss the coming rabbi transition on Yom Kippur.

We thank our educators, Jewish Learning Program Director Melissa Weiner and Early School Director Debbie Ziering. The Jewish education of our next generation is vital.

Tracey Bent, you and your maintenance staff continue to do your incredible work year after year. You keep the building and its grounds in great shape. You also make sure that the building is ready to host every event, large and small. Thank you for everything.

The administrative staff works very hard. Your dedication and willingness to go the extra mile for us certainly shows. You have our gratitude.

Gail Milchman our Executive Director is simply the best. Not only do you do your job with efficiency, you do it with wisdom and insight. You care about each of us and it shows. You are also a true partner to me. Many many thanks.

I must thank those of you who generously donate to Temple B'nai Abraham. Those donations are absolutely vital to keeping this synagogue the successful place that it is. Thank you ... and please continue your generosity.

The eternal light, the Ner Tamid, that shines all the time, shows us that there is something that transcends our everyday concerns and worries. There is something constant and important. There is something more. At this time of year, we are supposed to take stock, atone for our sins, and in my view resolve to try to do better. I think it's no accident that much of that process happens here in our spiritual home, together with our congregational family. Yes, we are a family and we're seeking that light together.

Susan, Mark and I wish each of you a sweet, happy, healthy, and enlightened New Year. L'shanah tova.