



Message From Cantor Joshua Shron

July is upon us, school's finally out, and summer 2015 is now in full swing. But as I write this, it is late June...and graduations are still the talk of the town. For me, this year's graduation season is a little more meaningful than most. Why? Let me take you on a short walk down memory lane.

It is September 2009, and I've recently signed on as cantor of what was then known as "Little Neck Jewish Center". One of the first things I was told was that our synagogue would be blessed with TWENTY TWO B'nei and B'not Mitzvah celebrations throughout the 2009-2010 school year. While some of those were "inherited" eighth grade students who had already begun studying with my predecessor, Cantor Schram, most came from a large pool of then-seventh-graders (and members of our largest "Hey Class" in recent memory), eager (usually) to begin the training that would prepare them for their big day. I rolled up my sleeves and dived in to the task at hand.

I spent that first year getting to know lots of amazing teenagers and their families, and I'm proud to say that each one of them knocked it out of the park when it came time for their Bar or Bat Mitzvah ceremony. In the years that followed, I was pleased to keep in touch with many members of that "first" class, watching them grow into mature high school students. Some would read Torah or lead services each year during the High Holidays; some assumed leadership positions in USY or BBYO; some attended my teen class at Starbucks from time to time; some participated in our High Holiday choir; some would come to Shabbat services each year to celebrate the anniversary of their Bar/Bat Mitzvah; some participated every year as part of our annual Holocaust remembrance; some were even honored as our synagogue's "youth of the year". All, however, have made me proud as I watched them grow into young adults...a far cry from the seventh and eighth graders I got to know so well.

By the time you read this, these "kids" will all have graduated from high school, all preparing to begin exciting and successful lives outside of the Great Neck/Little Neck area. At the risk of sounding like an emotional parent, it's hard to believe that these kids have grown up so fast!

Back to 2009. That same year, I encountered a large, rambunctious, bright group of youngsters, beginning their very first day of Hebrew school as part of our Alef class. I've watched these kids learn Hebrew, prayers and Jewish laws and customs throughout their Hebrew school career, and ultimately celebrated with them and their families as they became B'nei and B'not Mitzvah. I don't know how it happened, but the "little" members of that Alef class have just graduated middle school - and are preparing to enter high school this fall.

Two groups of graduates, two groups of neighborhood kids who hold a special place in my heart. To each and every one of you...though you're probably ready to throw up if you hear another motivational speech, here's one more:

You are about to embark on a whole lot of NEW. A new school, new friends, new teachers, new activities, new challenges. The world around you changes at a frightening pace...and it's not always easy to hold on! BUT - some things DO tend to stay the same, like your bedroom at home, your family and your grandmother's delicious matza ball soup. They become the comforts of *home*...always welcome in our lives no matter how far away our travels have taken us.

I hope you find Judaism to be among your most cherished "comforts" as well. No matter where in the world you find yourself, you'll always be among FAMILY if you find a synagogue or a Jewish community. When you bring Shabbat into your life...or sit in a sukkah...or light Chanukah candles...or participate in a Passover seder...or explore the weekly Torah reading...you will hopefully sense a feeling of belonging that you would never have expected. I urge you to seek out those opportunities often throughout your "new" life. As Ralph Waldo Emerson said: "What lies behind us, and what lies before us are small matters compared to what lies within us."

And remember, when you do find yourself in the Little Neck area on a Saturday morning, you'll find familiar, friendly faces at your synagogue, ready to welcome you with open arms. Whether your new school is across the parking lot or across the country, please remember that your rabbi and cantor are just a phone call, email or visit away, excited to hear about your adventures, challenges and experiences.

I'm proud and honored to have been a part of your lives for nearly six years, and I hope and pray that this is just the START of a lifelong relationship. Mazal Tov to our graduates!

Cantor Josh Shron