

## FAREWELL REFLECTIONS FROM RABBI KIEVAL

Dear Ohav friends,

This week concludes my time as a rabbi of our congregation. At this moment of transition, I am filled with memories of experiences we have shared. We have celebrated, mourned, studied and prayed together, moving together through the life cycle and the Jewish calendar.

As I think back on the milestones I was privileged to share with you, I am deeply grateful that you put your trust in me to serve as your spiritual leader. You let me in to share your most sacred moments: as you welcomed new life; as you watched your children blossom and become Bat and Bar Mitzvah, as you prepared for marriage, or studied to become Jewish.

You let me stand at your side in times of family challenges, of serious illness, fear and vulnerability, and you allowed me to escort you through moments of loss, grief and pain.

These moments in life are sacred. They are the times we are most fully ourselves. When our hearts are full to overflowing, or when our hearts are utterly broken, that is when we touch something of the infinite mysteries of love, life and death. I thank you for sharing some of those moments with me.

Your support and friendship have nourished me and enabled me to grow as a rabbi, as a Jew and as a person. As the sage Rabbi Hanina states in the Talmud, "I have learned much from my teachers, and even more from my colleagues, but most of all - from my students." I have always tried to give of myself to our community, but I have also gained immeasurably from our relationship. As I listened to your insights, and responded to your concerns and your questions, I have understood our magnificent tradition more fully. You have deepened my appreciation of Jewish wisdom and values.

Serving as your rabbi, I have also seen the goodness and resilience that resides in every person. I believe that is the meaning of the Torah's teaching that human beings are created in the Divine Image, a teaching we should each try to carry in our hearts at all times, in all of our interactions.

Our tradition guides us to build and maintain Jewish life with other people, in community. It takes many dedicated individuals to sustain a multi-faceted, busy community like ours. I am grateful to Ohav's wonderful educators and to the dedicated administrative and building staff who keep it all running, including our

tireless Executive Director Nancy Pandolfo. I feel fortunate to have worked alongside so many committed Ohav presidents, and other lay leaders and volunteers who give selflessly of their time and talents. Please appreciate and support all of these individuals.

I have been blessed in countless ways to have shared rabbinic leadership with Rabbi Dan Ornstein. With hard work and mutual trust, we created a rabbinic team that has enriched my life and, I believe, the life of Ohav Shalom. I will be ever grateful for my dynamic, creative, wonderful colleague and friend, Rabbi Dan.

Change is both exciting and challenging. I look forward to more time with my family and more time to read, write, travel, volunteer, and enjoy friends and the great outdoors. At the same time, I know I will miss many aspects of my role at Ohav Shalom. I am grateful that I will continue to teach regularly and to see Ohav friends.

My transition is made easier by the knowledge that our congregation is thriving, vibrant and strong. I feel confident that we will continue on this path, going “from strength to strength” in a community of learning - *limmud*, of kindness – *chesed*, of social justice – *tzedakah* – and of spiritual connection: a *kehilla kedosha*.

With gratitude, blessings and love,

Rabbi Rena