

Thank You: Marking the Season of Gratitude

This is a season for gratitude. My family and I are profoundly and humbly grateful for the tremendous outpouring of love from the CSZ family as we all celebrated together my son Caleb becoming Bar Mitzvah. Thank you for “Zooming in” on Monday morning, Friday night and Shabbat morning, and to all the people who worked behind the scenes for that to happen.

Thank you too, for all the acts of generosity; the expressions of love; the kind e-mails, texts, Facebook posts, and calls. Thank you for the hundreds of letters filled with wisdom. Thank you for letting us be part of the CSZ family – of your family – and for allowing us to share our celebration with you. We are truly grateful.

Indeed, this is a season for gratitude.

With the CSZ Annual Meeting yesterday, we transitioned from the 2019-2020 Board of Trustees under the leadership of president Jeri Fishman to the 2020-2021 Board of Trustees under the leadership of president Susan Kozik Klein.

Thank you to the outstanding leaders of our community for their hard work, self-sacrifice, wisdom, and commitment in bringing our congregation from strength to strength. May God bless Susan, the Officer Team and our new Board with vision, patience, compassion and a sense of sacred purpose as we seek to navigate new ground in a world of pandemic and growing antisemitism.

Thank you to the previous Board for their service; thank you to the current Board for its commitment; and thank you to all members who volunteer and donate on behalf of our synagogue family. Our work is holy work.

Friends, this is truly a season for gratitude.

Beginning tonight and continuing for the next forty-eight hours, we celebrate Chag Shavuot: The “Festival of Weeks.” Our rabbis in the Talmud come to teach that, based on the verses of Torah referencing the season, we are to commence the second night of Passover counting each of forty-nine nights (the period of time known as the Omer). On the fiftieth night, we mark a sacred occasion in which no work is to be done, for it is on this day that we remember that God gave to Moses the Torah on Mount Sinai.

This is a season of gratitude because, through the Torah, the unique relationship between God and the Jewish People is given form and substance. Our rabbis describe the Torah scroll as the wedding ring – as an eternal gift of love – that God gifted to our ancestors. Moreover, God renews the covenant in every generation by allowing us to immerse ourselves in the study of sacred scripture so that we can in our own day seek to understand God’s purpose for us. So we thank God in this *Z’man Matan Torateinu*: The Season of Giving the Torah.

We express our gratitude to God by spending tonight in study; please join us beginning at 7:00 p.m. We express our gratitude to God by spending the next two days in prayer, with Festival services evening and morning. And we express our gratitude to God by taking the time over the next forty-eight hours to conceive of new ways that we can invest our energy, time and resources in performing acts of loving-kindness.

Yes, we show our gratitude to God by caring deeply and profoundly for God’s children, God’s creatures, and the earth.

Perhaps, too, as we mark the Season of Gratitude during these days of pandemic, we can show our thanks to God for the gift of life by working to protect our own lives and the lives of the vulnerable among us: wearing masks, staying home to the extent possible, and even by keeping the doors of our synagogue closed for the time being.

Of course, though our beautiful building may be closed, our synagogue is most definitely open. And, among so many other prayer experiences, learning opportunities, community-building moments and acts of *chessed*, we show how “open” we are through our celebration of this Season of Gratitude: this season of the giving of the Torah.

This is a season for gratitude.

Rebecca, Caleb and Ayal join me once again in saying “thank you,” and in wishing you *Chag Shavuot Sameach* (happy Shavuot) and an early Shabbat shalom!

Rabbi Aaron Starr
May 28, 2020