

Farewell party Rabbi Chai Levy 6/7/18

Thank you all for this incredible event.

I am just blown away.

How can I leave this amazing place?

You incredible people? This wonderful community?

I have asked myself this question many times over the last nine months

Ever since Netivot Shalom announced their rabbi would be leaving.

I've been so happy here at Kol Shofar,

especially these last 6 years since Rabbi Leider has been here and

I shifted to this perfect part-time job with the perfect portfolio.

I wasn't looking for a new job!

I love you all, and I care about this community.

We found our groove together

And we're in such a stable, strong, and thriving place.

Why would I leave all of that to take on more responsibility

as the sole rabbi of another shul? It's kinda crazy!

A few weeks ago, I had a conversation with Marty Zelin,
one of the many conversations I've had recently about leaving,
(and you all have been so supportive!)

I said to Marty: "it feels so strange to leave because usually
people get divorced because the marriage isn't going well.

But I love you guys, and the marriage is going great!"

Marty said: "but that's the wrong metaphor for your leaving.

We're not getting divorced. The metaphor is:

you've grown up and you're going off to college,

and we're proud to see you go and we're excited for you."

It actually is a lot like going off to college.

I've been here 16 years, which is the same amount of time I was in pre-school
through 12th grade! That's a lot of life I've shared with you all!

Thank you, Marty – and others of you have said similar things.

This is a Lech Lecha moment for me:

Lech Lecha was what God said to Avram:

Go forth. Leave your parents' home and everything that is familiar,
and go off into the unknown, to the land that I will show you.

It was so beautiful last week when Lunch and Learn sent me off after our last class
together by singing Lech Lecha/Lechi Lach.

The difference is: Avram left his origins behind.
And I am bringing you with me, inside.
I have learned so much from each one of you.
Each of you has touched my life in profound ways and helped me grow as a rabbi,
and I am bringing you with me.

There are many people I want to acknowledge and thank.
First, my mom, Ellen,
who is here with her husband Richard and my brother, Michael.
Mom, you always supported me in my love for Judaism and my desire to grow
Jewishly, whether it was sending me to camp or on Israel trips.
And you always gave me confidence to get on stage and perform
and shine my light. You took me to singing lessons and taught me how to dance
back in the 70's.
(You know that Disco Havdalah outfit? – that was my mom's!)
When your friends would come over, you'd say:
Karen, come sing "the Sun'll come out Tomorrow" or something like that,
and that little girl grew up to be Rabbi Gaga!
I love you, Mom, and thank you for always being there for me.
I'm sorry I lech lecha'ed so far away from Virginia!

I want to thank Karen Hirsch and Joan Levison.
Karen, this party is incredible. I am beyond touched – you planned everything.
And thank you to all those who helped, David Levine with the slideshow;
Barbara Schwartz and the Baking Havurah;
and all who volunteered – I don't even know who else)
And, Karen, you did it with your signature style of generosity, love, and
exuberance. I am blown away by you, not only for this event,
but in all of the many ways that you have been a friend and mentor to me.
Karen even showed up at my interview Shabbat at Netivot Shalom to root for me
and to bring Kol Shofar love to me. Thank you for everything.

Joan, you too have given me so much support, mentorship, and encouragement
as I went through this decision-making process.
Our conversations over the last several months helped me discern what path to
take. Thank you for sharing your wisdom and guidance.
Kol Shofar is fortunate to have had you as president.

And I feel fortunate to have had you in my life for so many special moments over these many years. Thank you.

Thank you, really, to all of the Kol Shofar board presidents who have given so much of themselves to this community during my tenure:
Ron Brown, Diane Zack, Stephen Fierberg, Joshua Steinhauer, Karen Hirsch, Scott Waxman, Steve Tulskey, and Joan Levison, and welcome to the club, Alan Hakimi. All of you have been incredible role models and teachers for me. I have learned so much from the many wonderful and also challenging experiences we have shared. Thank you for all of the support, wisdom and for your inspiring commitment to this community.

Rabbi Leider, it has been a blessing to work with you these last six years. You came into a challenging situation – a community that had been through a lot of turmoil, to be senior rabbi with a colleague who had been here for a long time. That’s a tough situation to be in, but you nailed it. You are an incredible leader, and you always made room for me to spread my wings too. I have learned so much from watching you, from observing how you build community, how you think strategically, how you work with people and guide an organization. I know for a fact that some of the ways that I impressed Netivot Shalom and gave them the confidence to choose me for their rabbi were things that I learned directly from you. I know that when I get into a difficult situation in my new job, I will think to myself: what would Rabbi Leider do? Thank you for being my teacher. I am thrilled that you will be taking over much of the work that is so special to me: the Musical Meditation service, Kol Neshama Minyan, CJS, and Thursday lunch and Learn. I care deeply about these, and I am confident they will be in good hands with you. I will miss getting to work along side you and getting to learn from you, and I will especially miss singing with you and hearing your magical harmonies, but I look forward to seeing how you continue to thrive in leading Kol Shofar.

While I’m on the topic of thanking rabbis, I also want to acknowledge Rabbi Lavey Derby. As with many of you, Lavey was what first drew me to Kol Shofar, and I had the delight of working with him for my first 8 years here. Lavey had a unique ability to open your heart through his teaching and drashot. He made Kol Shofar a

place for deep questions and yearning and spiritual seeking, which created a receptive community for much of what I've offered here. I learned so much from him, and I am grateful for the ways he impacted my rabbinate.

I want to say Thank you to the Kol Shofar Staff, who work hard mostly behind the scenes to make everything happen here. Anything I've been able to do here has only been because the staff. Kirk and Jack – you do so much here, and you guys now hold the institutional memory for the staff! How many decades has it been? Sara, you're new, but thank you for all of your work especially for this event. Elena, I'm going to miss your kiddushes (Ezra too!) and your enchiladas! Elan, Alona, Denice, Pam, John, Rabbi Paul, Kaia – all of you are amazing. The staff is the strongest it's ever been. I have learned so much from how we've grown as a team that works well together. I am bringing all of this into my new position and will think of you when I need inspiration for how a synagogue staff can get it right.

There are so many Kol Shofar members I want to acknowledge, really every single one of you. I hesitate to name specific people, because I know I will be leaving most of you out. So please take a moment and reflect on a moment we shared or a time that you supported me and know that while there isn't time to mention every one of you, know that I remember these moments and that am so grateful to each and every one of you. Thank you for letting me into your lives and into your celebrations and milestones. Thank you for trusting me in your vulnerable moments. Thank you for learning Torah with me, praying with me, and wrestling and struggling together with me. Thank you for supporting me and helping me become a better rabbi. I will carry all of these moments with me forever.

I do want to mention by name just a few people, however. Employees don't usually think of performance reviews as their favorite part of the job, but I am really grateful for those folks who took the time and care to work on creating and implementing a helpful and supportive review process: Keith Chertok, Craig Laviano, Jonathan Levy, Gary Scholik, Jeff Samuels, Helene Holly Gibbs, and Esme Gordon. You helped me grow and be a better a rabbi.

Thank you also to Dina Hatchuel and all those involved in our strategic planning process back in 2009 or so. I learned so much from you that I will take with me, and this process helped me find my place and purpose at Kol Shofar.

My God, there are so many people to thank, and I'm going to have to stop soon. So, I just want to mention a couple of groups –

CJS: Larry, Ilene, and everyone who worked on creating the Center for Jewish Spirituality. Thank you to the board and Rabbi Leider for supporting the idea.

One of my favorite quotes is: "The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet."

That was my experience with our CJS project, and I'm so grateful to all who have been part of it.

Thank you to my friends in Thursday Lunch and Learn.

Rita was right when she said: it started as a class but became more of a Havurah.

I love all of you and cherish the deep learning and conversations we had.

And I will miss our special time together on Thursdays.

And I want to mention Louise Lipsey and everyone else who has been involved with the Green Team in its various configurations. I am beyond thrilled that Kol Shofar is going Solar, so please keep up the critical work you all are doing and talk to Louise about getting involved and getting solar in your own home that can benefit Kol Shofar.

Ok, I've got to wrap up. I know I didn't mention everyone, but I love all of you and am profoundly grateful to each and every one of you.

BUT: I have one person left to thank, and that is my husband, Roger.

As Rabbi Leider said on my last Shabbat, the spouse of the rabbi does so much behind the scenes.

Thank you for always being so supportive of me.

Thank you for tolerating my long-winded stories and for listening when I needed to debrief the day's events or run a sermon by you for feedback.

Thank you for stepping up and taking on extra childcare when my schedule suddenly changed for a funeral or an emergency.

Thank you for being a great father to Ezra and

thank you for being my advisor, coach, and emotional support.

Rabbis get to be the "face" of the synagogue, but,

just as the staff and board make our work possible,
I can't imagine trying to do any of this work without you as a partner.
Thank you for the many ways you have supported me and for your support of my
taking on an even bigger job, which means more work on the home-front for you.
Our society talks a lot about the need for women to "lean in" and advance
professionally, but it's only possible with partners like you. Thank you.

I want to end with just a little Torah.

I started by talking about this being a lech lecha moment for me,
Of being called to "go forth" into the unknown.
We are in a Torah portion this week called Shlach Lecha,
which is a lot like Lech Lecha, but instead of God saying "go forth,"
this week God says "SEND forth."

I believe that we are all SENT on a mission by the Holy One.

There is a beautiful teaching by Rav Soloveitchik about "Shlichut,"
or being "sent forth" and he says that:

when the Torah says teaches that the human being is created in the image of
God, it means that:

we humans are messengers, angels,
sent into the world to be emissaries of the Divine.

Or as I like to say, quoting the Blues Brothers:

"We're on a mission from God."

I take comfort in this teaching at this time that feels so hard to leave you all –
Because it means that leaving really isn't up to me:

I was sent here on a mission, and now I'm being deployed somewhere else,
and now others have their mission to fulfill in this community.

And I take comfort in knowing and feeling clearly

how you all have been Divine emissaries for me,

here to teach me and prepare me to be sent off to my next deployment.

Thank you for everything.

I am profoundly grateful.

I have a Thank you gift for you to help us remember some of our special moments
together...