Shabbat Shalom!

What an extraordinary night this is for us and our future. From the bottom of my heart: thank you all for being here this evening, as we celebrate the formal beginning of a new chapter in the history of Scarsdale Synagogue Temples Tremont and Emanu-El.

Let me take this moment to acknowledge the many guests who are with us this evening. Amy and I are honored to have so many loved ones join us on this occasion. We have a contingent of Brown’s here tonight from the Philadelphia suburbs of South Jersey, and we have Bebchick’s from New England and Kentucky, with other dear friends and family who have made the trip from the TriState Area, Washington DC, and South Florida.

I wanted to take a moment to acknowledge the absence this evening of Rabbi David Ellenson, my teacher, the teacher of my teachers, and the distinguished president of Hebrew Union College. As many of you know, Dr. Ellenson was to have delivered greetings and remarks this evening. Unfortunately, an urgent personal matter required his attention. Our thoughts are most certainly with him, even as we celebrate tonight.

To my five colleagues who will be joining Cantor Becker in leading tonight’s service, the phrase an “embarrassment of riches” comes to mind. I am so deeply humbled by your friendship and mentorship, and I am moved beyond words that you have taken time out of your enormously busy schedules to share Shabbat with our community this evening. And to David and Davida, and to Leigh: you will never know how much your willingness to travel from California to be with us tonight means to me and my family. Thank you.

I feel particularly privileged to greet Rabbi Klein, our Rabbi Emeritus, this evening. I am so pleased and humbled to welcome you, and Joanne, back to this space, and this community, which you built, grew, and nurtured. Thank you so very much for your friendship and support during these last few months.

I also want to take this moment to acknowledge the presence this evening of Reverend Fran Grenley, of the Scarsdale Congregational Church. She is a longtime friend of our temple’s, and I am honored that she is able to be with us this evening.

Special thanks to Donna Vitale Ruskin for graciously overseeing all of the details of our evening together, and to Cantor Becker for graciously planning every aspect of tonight’s service. Thank you very, very much to you both.

(Pause)

But most of all, my thanks go to the Rabbinic Search Team, and to all of you…not just for the invitation to serve as your rabbi, and not just for the genuinely warm welcome that my family and I have received from you since we arrived, but also for the patient and compassionate willingness on your part to take a little bit of a risk in calling me to this synagogue. Any new hire, and particularly a rabbinic one, is fraught with a little bit of risk….The relatively brief interview process might be likened to a couple getting married after one round of speed dating. Nonetheless, our future together is predicated on a certain faith that we each have in the other’s potential. And I am grateful for the hope you have attached to that faith.

I have grown fond over these last few months of sharing a piece of poetry towards the beginning of our prayer. And although these words are not poetry strictly speaking, they poetically reflect those sentiments. They come to us from Andre Neher, offered up by our teacher Avivah Zornberg, in the contexts of her comments on this week’s Torah portion, Parshat Miketz from the Book of Genesis. Neher writes:

What is to weep? To weep is to sow.

What is to laugh? To laugh is to reap.

Look at this man weeping as he goes.

Why is he weeping?

Because he is bearing in his arms the burden of the grain he is

about to sow.

And now, see him coming back in joy.

Why is he laughing?

Because he bears in his arms the sheaves of the harvest.

Laughter is the tangible harvest, plentitude.

Tears are sowing; they are effort, risk, the seed exposed to

drought and to rot, the ear of corn threatened by hail

and storms.

Laughter is words, tears are silence…

It is not the harvest that is important; what is important is the

sowing, the risk, the tears.

Hope is not in laughter and plentitude.

Hope is in tears, in the risk and in its silence.

Neher, *Exile of the Word, p 246*

Our hope is kindled as well in the lighting of our Hanukkah candles…