Let me begin by reiterating my thanks to my colleagues, for their beautiful music, and kind sentiments. I am so delighted to be able to share this service with you.

And to my friend, our Temple President, Ellen Baken: thank you for your support and encouragement. We’ve come a long way since last fall – and I cannot imagine a kinder or more patient partner to begin this journey with, here in Scarsdale. Thank you, thank you, thank you.

Tonight, I thought I might take a few minutes to reflect on our surroundings….not so much on this physical space, per se…but rather with regards to the people, values, and traditions that we surround ourselves with.

In the section dealing with the laws of Hanukkah in the 19th century summary of Jewish law known as *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch*, Rabbi Shlomo Ganzfried discusses the extraordinarily specific instructions that traditional Jewish law offers us with regards to the proper placement of the menorah in one’s house. He writes:

“It is a mitzvah to light the menorah in the doorway that opens to the street, in order to publicize the miracle [of Hanukkah]; and it was done in this manner in the days of the Mishnah and Talmud.” And nowadays, he writes: we light the menorah in the house, and ideally in the window facing the street. If you don’t have such a window, he notes, *madlikan eitzel ha petach.* No big deal! Just light it in the vicinity of your front door.

But anyone who has formally studied Jewish law before knows that “in the vicinity of your front door” is far too vague. There is – at least for our more traditionally minded friends – a kosher way of placing a menorah, and a less kosher way. And so, *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch* goes on:

“It is a mitzvah to place the menorah within a *tefach* – within several inches – of the left side of the door.”

Why the left side?

The text goes on: “So that the mezuzah will be on the customary right hand side, and the Hanukkah lights will be on the left, and in doing so, you shall find yourself to be *misubav b’mitzvot*  - literally: surrounded by mitzvahs.”

The text provides us with a deeply moving image: the notion that we might find ourselves surrounded on all sides by opportunities to engage Jewishly with our ever-changing world. It is, I think, a compelling encapsulation of the personal and professional choices that I have made in my own life that have led to this moment.

(Pause)

My parents, Debi and Michael Brown, are here with us tonight. And I think that they would be the first to tell you that I was not raised in a rigorously observant Jewish home.

And yet, their commitment to the family traditions which they inherited from my grandparents, as well as deeply held beliefs about both *tzedek* – justice and the notion of right and wrong in the world and *tzedakah*: always sharing philanthropically that which we had with others…all of that was more than enough to kindle a strong sense of Jewishness, and a desire to serve others, in both myself and my sister. Though I might not have had the ability to articulate it – and though they would have never used these Hebrew words…from an early age, I would say that I was most certainly *misubav b’mitzvot* – surrounded not just by their love and support, but also by a matrix of values that enabled me to go out out into the world…grounded….knowing who I was, and what I stood for.

(Pause)

Sparks of a different sort were kindled during Hanukkah of the year 1999, when my friendship with Amy turned into something much deeper.

During our more than 10 years of marriage, I have come to learn and appreciate that who we surround ourselves with makes all the difference in the world. She is the better half of our relationship in every sense of the word. She is a smarter, nicer, and more generous person than I am. She is the kind of parent to Siona and Avi that I aspire to be. And, in case there was any question, she is most certainly the better driver in our household.

For years, I tried to get her to apply to Rabbinical School. Because there is absolutely no doubt in my mind that if she were a rabbi, she would be a far finer one than I ever might hope to be.

She is also my partner in the professional work that I am privileged to be able to do with you. She never questions the vagaries of the rabbinic work schedule, nor the sacrifices that that schedule sometimes demands. She is my hero, and my best friend.

Together, we have crafted a Jewish home for ourselves and our children that is *misubav b’mitzvot*. Not *shomer mitzvot…*not an all-encompassing Orthodoxy by any stretch of the imagination. But nonetheless, *misubav b’mitzvot* – surrounded and enriched by the plethora of Jewish choices that are, for the four of us, a means to a life that is grounded and rich with meaning.

How privileged I feel, on this night, to have chosen a vocation which enables me to walk a parallel set of Jewish paths with all of you….with the hope: not that you and your family will make the same set of Jewish choices that Amy, Siona, Avi, and I have. But rather: that you might be open to making your *own* set of Jewish choices. There will be times when I will challenge you to reconsider your assumptions about what it means to be Jewish today. And there will be times, as there already have been in these last six months, when you will teach me…about the texts and values and personal stories that speak to you: the ones that you’ve been privileged to inherit from your own families, and the ones you’ve lived out with your own significant others.

Along the way, if we *misubav* ourselves *b’mitzvot* – if you and I surround each other, and treat each other, with the ethical values of our tradition…values like compassion, patience, and mutual respect, then I believe that we will be most successful at bringing forth an *or chadash*…a new light to guide this sacred community forward into the years and decades ahead.

**Keyn Yehi Ratzon – May this be God’s will.**