

If you search the Torah, the Mishnah and the Talmud, or indeed any other great work of Jewish thinking, you are not likely to read the lyrics of the Beatles hit song, "Here Comes the Sun". While I will spare you the pain of listening to me sing that classic, there is much in that song that is consistent with our liturgy and reminds us of the inflection point at which we now stand as a Synagogue, as a community and as a world.

The Beatles sing: "*Here comes the sun little darling, it seems like years since it's been here.*" It has been a long and difficult year, with a tremendous amount of pain suffered by so many of our families. There have been deaths, there have been prolonged illnesses, there have been business reversals and, even if you have been fortunate enough to avoid those perils, for all of us, there has been anxiety, sleepless nights, wondering when the pandemic will truly end. There has been unrest all around us, from the Upper West Side to streets throughout our nation to the insurrection at the Capitol Building and abroad, without any true sense that we have adequately addressed the divides that cause us to think blue/red, black/white, or we/they.

And yet, where we stand today, we also have great hope, or as the Beatles remind us, "*Little darling, the smiles are returning to the faces.*" Our smiles spring from so many places:

- Our smiles spring from **vaccines** that have been made available in this country more quickly, more widely and more equitably than any of us would have imagined. And soon, they will be made available to many of our younger children.
- Our smiles spring from the **re-opening of our physical doors**, not as fast as some would like, but in a fashion that takes into account the needs of all members of our community.
- Our smiles spring from the knowledge that **we have a brilliant clergy team**, led by our new Senior Rabbi, Rabbi Spratt. This clergy team is the most diverse clergy team in our history. Our clergy team is infused both by new voices and by voices that you have known for many years, but in all cases by voices that, whether they are singing or speaking, resonate with hope, reflect concern for all of us and express new ideas built on the foundation of our rich history.
- Our smiles spring from our awareness that we have an **extraordinarily dedicated staff** that has literally worked around the clock to keep our synagogue relevant. In his latest book, President Obama wrote that he never had to ask anyone on his staff to work hard, because they just did that. That staff could take a lesson from our extremely hard-working staff. Please join me in thanking our staff members when you next see them; they deserve our profound thanks.

- Our smiles spring from **what we have learned this year**. In this year of disconnection, we have learned how much our members value and strive for connection. As a Synagogue, we understand that belonging has never felt more important.
- Our smiles spring from what we have built:
  - Minyan, our small groups initiative, has thrived this past year and is expanding. This year we are adding the opportunity to sign up for affinity groups and interest-based meetups for those looking for more informal CRS connections. And If you have not participated in a Minyan as yet, please sign-up. If you are interested in sparking a Minyan – all you need is a topic that will interest nine other members – please get in touch with me and we will enable you to start a Minyan.
  - We have created more programming around Shabbat, offering opportunities not only to worship, but to connect before and after services through music, meditation, meals, chats, and more.
  - We are able offer online and in-person options for our beloved ongoing programs and new initiatives that build important social networks among congregants, such as Sholom Sprouts, Social Action and our Caring Community.
- And, I think most importantly, our smiles flow from a **unified vision** – it is a vision of clergy, of CRS and RSS staff and of CRS and RSS lay leadership – it is a vision **that sees every person as a human being with inherent value, with challenges and joys, and that invites everyone to come as they are**. So much flows from this vision:
  - It is a vision embodied by our *Shireinu* program for those with special needs, a program that we are expanding through our partnership with the Park Avenue Synagogue.
  - It is a vision that demands that we hold more space for complex conversations around justice, American Judaism, Israel and what community looks like in 2021. It is a vision that recognizes that naming and discussing hard issues expands our understanding and, in some instances, expands our respect for competing views.
  - It is a vision that compels us to keep our doors open to everyone through our long-standing commitment to no-barriers financial assistance at CRS.

- It is a vision that embraces technology to enable us to pray from our living rooms, to organize on-line post-card parties to get out the vote in Georgia and to read Hebrew text brilliantly projected on the walls of our Sanctuary.
- It is a vision that demands that we stand up and be counted, by fighting anti-Semitism, by advocating for civil rights and by recognizing that if we don't fight for freedom, there is no freedom.
- It is a vision that unites us in everything we do.

And once again, back to the Beatles: "*It's been a long, cold, lonely winter, [but] here comes the sun.*"

Your support of the Annual Appeal, formerly known as the Yom Kippur Appeal, is what enables us to see the sun. The Appeal has a new name and a new look this year, symbolized by the pomegranate that adorns our doors right here on 83<sup>rd</sup> Street. In Jewish tradition, the pomegranate represents vitality, fruitfulness, and abundance. For me, and hopefully for you, the pomegranate is a reminder every time I walk through our front doors that each of us is like a seed within the pomegranate; together we create something larger than ourselves – a vibrant, dynamic, and strong community. A house of belonging.

When you make a gift to the Annual Appeal, you invest in the future of that community. As you have heard me and my predecessors say, a contribution to the Annual Appeal directly supports our operating budget, which results in more accessibility to membership, more innovative and meaningful programming for all congregants, and a greater ability to attract and retain the very best clergy, staff, and educators to serve our community.

If you make a gift to our Annual Appeal, you are helping to build a community:

- a community that connects us,
- a community that sees us, hears us, and needs us, for who we are,
- a community that views Judaism as a pathway to discovery;
- a community that will be with us on all parts of our journeys, big and small, happy and sad.

When it comes to the Annual Appeal, we ask each member to do what he or she can do to support the Congregation. For those of you who have already made your gifts, I thank you from the bottom of my heart. If you have not yet made your gift but have done so before, please consider making a gift to this year's Annual Appeal at a level that is meaningful to you. If you have never made a gift to our Appeal before, now is a great

time to start. The needs are significant, as are our commitment and our remarkable potential.

My wife Camille and I wish you a very happy, healthy and meaningful New Year. And, please remember, as Rodeph Sholom, as a community of seekers of peace, each one of us is someone else's little darling. Let's hope we each bring each other, and receive, more sun.

Indeed, HERE COMES THE SUN.