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Subject: Moving On, Moving Forward
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On a wintry evening in late 2015, I received a call from the President of the BJC. I had not been Vice President for long and cannot remember anything that I did in that position. She told me that she was leaving Brevard, and that I would take over as President immediately. A new chapter in my life opened.

When I assumed office Norm and Marv were skillfully and movingly leading services every Friday and on High Holidays and holiday celebrations. The President did not have many duties other than to run board meetings, oversee finances and consider administrative issues. He or she did not always and sometimes only rarely attended services.

Though I came into this position unexpectedly, I had been thinking about what I might do if I ever held it. These thoughts were shaped in large part by my experience for four years as Chairperson of the Faculty Senate at Florida International University, a large State University in Miami. When I took over most faculty looked at the Senate as a weak, insignificant body. I wanted to see if would be possible to make it an important part of university governance. We had several crises and confrontations and, as it turned out, I was able to significantly raise the standing of both the faculty and the Senate. I wanted to see if an activist President in a much smaller body, the BJC, couldn't accomplish some of the same things without disrupting Norm and Marv's leadership.

Working from what I had learned as an historian, my first initiative was to enhance the intellectual and historical understanding of our community by inviting challenging and thoughtful speakers. Some of them were local leaders such as the Mayor and the President of Brevard College. Others were individuals knowledgeable about critical issues including climate change and civil rights. We listened to religious leaders including both rabbis and clergy of our more progressive

churches. Major scholars spoke to us including Deborah Dash Moore, one of the most prominent American Jewish historians. Amy-Jill Levine, a renowned biblical scholar, visited Brevard for an historic weekend. We were the leader of a coalition that included many of the leading churches in Brevard that raised, with the help of Ken Wallston, over \$12,000. Her visit was an overwhelming success and put us on the map as a substantial member of Brevard's religious community. Finally, and of equal significance, we constantly tapped the considerable talent within our own community to share their knowledge and experience.

To enhance our services, I persuaded the board (sometimes the persuasion was not so easy) to purchase the new Sabbath and High Holiday prayerbooks that had just recently been published by the Reform Movement (CCAR). These made a real difference and we have received many compliments over the years from both members and visitors, Jewish and Christian, about how meaningful they found these books.

During my time as President, we moved well beyond services. Our Torah Study group has grown to a high level seminar of between 10 and 15 people; we have explored in depth not just the Torah but other books of the Bible and the New Testament, providing a remarkable intellectual and sometimes spiritual experience to participants. A spinoff of the Torah Study has been the addition of Dvar Torahs as a central and often inspiring part of each service. Thanks to Justin, our Chevra support group has enhanced the lives of many in our community. We are still in the early process of developing a social justice initiative.

The biggest challenge that we faced, and that I faced, during the past eight years was holding together during the many weeks of Covid when we were largely and fearfully confined to our homes. Using Zoom we met every Friday, week after week after week. Because of Marv's passing, Norm became the cantor and I moved into the role of lay leader. This was a great experience for me as I had once wanted to become a rabbi and even entered a seminary for a brief time; it was something like

living a childhood dream. And we held together, everybody in the congregation who went to services gave at least one talk and some many more. With Vance joining Norm we made music an even more significant part of the service. Vance brought us many new melodies and musical talent which when joined with Norm was wondrous to behold. During these weeks, we shared our experiences and difficulties, we bonded and became a tightknit group. I will always remember those months with great warmth and appreciation for everybody in the BJC. Really there was nothing like it, how could there have been? Something that I, that we, will never forget.

Along with our weeks with Covid, I have a second special memory. After the massacre at the Pittsburgh's Tree of Life synagogue, working with Father Shawn and Norm, we planned in the space of 24 hours a service for the Brevard community at Sacred Heart. The parking lot was full as was every seat in their large sanctuary. I spoke as did Norm along with clergy from several churches. The event was covered extensively by the *Transylvania Times*. Our community's response touched me very deeply. It was a moment of spirituality that I have seldom felt. I can still vividly picture Marv's leading this inter-faith congregation in "Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with me."

During these years I was cognizant of how important it is for a congregation like ours, indeed for most organizations, to have new leadership, men and women who bring fresh ideas. After both four and six years I tried but was unable to get a member to serve as our new President. I did not wish to leave my office, a position whose significance I'd worked so hard to increase, to a place where the President stood close to the same footing as Norm, without a capable and willing replacement; so I stayed on longer than I had intended.

When Harvey Federman arrived, I had new hope. I felt that we had someone to take over and build on whatever I'd accomplished. One of the first things I did after I recognized Harvey as a capable successor was to invite him to lunch and seek to persuade him to be a candidate for

president. He said he would think about it and at that moment I knew that he would. Since that meeting, he has worked energetically and skillfully to become an integral part of the BJC leadership. He will move us forward in many directions.

I am stepping down as President on March 1. I had planned to leave at the end of my term on October 1. My schedule, however, has complicated this decision. I'm going to be in New York City for March and half of April and then to New York and Ireland for four weeks in late May and June. As a long time subscriber to the Brevard Music Center, I will be missing many Friday evening services in July. I have missed services before using email and zoom, but with the advent of hybrid services a great deal is now demanded of the President. It did not make sense to remain in my position if I could not do the work that is required. Harvey has graciously agreed to take over early. I will remain the coordinator of our Torah Study group and Dvar Torahs, lead services when needed and serve on the board as Past President. I will also, if asked, continue to invite speakers. I intend to remain involved while not getting in anyone's way.

One cannot hold a position of leadership for so many years without making mistakes and offending people either by becoming too demanding or too bossy or too ambivalent or not recognizing people's viewpoints or not seeing what needs to be done. I'm sure that at times I have in these past years caused some of our members dismay or disappointment or upset feelings for either my actions or inactions. I deeply apologize to anyone who I may have hurt. You need to know that it was never intended and that, whatever my shortcomings, my greatest concern has been for the welfare of the BJC both as individual members, fellow travelers seeking a life of fulfillment and purpose, and as a community seeking a collective Jewish spirit. I trust that Harvey and the new leadership team will fill in the gaps that I left or did not even perceive.

At our age we spend a lot of time looking back over our lives, how can we not? Becoming a leader of the Brevard Jewish Community has been one of the greatest honors that I have ever had. It has been so heartwarming to work with so many wonderful members. If I tried to thank individually everybody who has helped me, I would have to thank everyone so let me just give each of you my deepest appreciation for helping keep our community going in good times and bad. With Norm and Marvin and then Norm and – dare I say it –myself as our spiritual leaders, we've never missed a service. We will continue to grow under Norm and our new leadership. And I, of course, will be here with you.

Thank you for giving me this wonderful opportunity.

Howard