

# Thank you to TBI – D'var Torah

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When I came here I had just spent 4 ½ years living in Philly while Maurice went to Rabbinical school – my first time living in a Jewish community. And I had only converted to Judaism several months previously. So I was a little nervous about coming here and inhabiting a fairly visible, albeit non-official, position. But now that chapter of life is closing, I want to share a few thoughts about my experiences as a “rebbitzen.”

First, Rabbi Yitz and Shonna....it's so unusual these days for a community to have a relationship with a rabbi that extends back, including the time when he was a young congregant, 40 years. And the love and sensitivity and sense of continuity that come from being part of a community for so long were immediately apparent to Maurice and me when we came here. And I know you all know and see Rabbi Yitz, whose contributions are so visible, but you may not fully realize what a central place TBI holds in Shonna's heart as well, and how much her commitment to TBI has shaped her life.

The thing I appreciate most about Rabbi Yitz is his moral clarity. Not the moral clarity of an ideologue, but the moral clarity of someone who has, thousands and thousands of times, had to figure out how to respond with compassion and in accordance with his values in morally complex situations. Time after time, Maurice would come home from work and tell me about some issue that had come up, an issue that, for anyone else, would present a challenge in thinking through the right thing to do, but Rabbi Yitz would know the right thing to do immediately, almost as if he didn't have to think about it.

Second, the people of this congregation. Being in a situation where I was probably more able to meet people easily than the average congregant I was so often inspired. There are so many people in this congregation who have moved me. I'm not going to name names, because I will inevitably leave people out, but I've been inspired by, for example, congregants gracefully caring for ailing loved ones, their courage in responding to the needs of the most vulnerable in our Eugene community, with their intellectual honesty, with their commitment to using their Judaism to live a mindful life. Their ability to enjoy life, and their ability to live through sorrow – illness, loss, divorce. And the way that the community responds when people die. TBI's Chevra Kadisha committee is so committed to helping people through loss – even though I have never been directly involved in their work, I find it very moving.

And the youth of TBI. When Maurice and I first came here, the kids going through their b'nai mitzvah knocked our socks off. They showed intelligence, seriousness, kindness, and engagement with their communities... and with every b'nai mitzvah I attend, my socks are knocked off one more time. Seeing the wonderful young people that have come out of this community is one thing that gives me hope for our future.

Third, the way this congregation welcomes people, not only GLBT folks but intermarried couples, and the way that the love and support of non-Jewish spouses is truly, deeply appreciated. This is just a hunch, but I wonder if the fairly frequent beit dins that take place here at TBI are a result of TBI's open, welcoming, non-judgmental atmosphere. The atmosphere in our community in Philadelphia was, at the time, somewhat different, and my conversion to Judaism, which was real and meaningful, nonetheless happened under pressure from Maurice's school. It is so wonderful to be part of a community where so many people, without that pressure, chose to follow a Jewish path.

And finally, that brings me to our children, Hunter and Clarice. There was something so magical about our first few weeks together as a family. And I mean literally magical, as it seemed as though for about a month after they came to us we found some kind of gift on the doorstep almost daily. We all felt very loved and cared for, and I know it helped the children feel truly embraced by the community. And, of course, every time we are at TBI, I see people extending so much love to our family, it is really a privilege to be a recipient of that affection.

Thank you all so much.

Shabbat Shalom.