

Rabbi Mari Chernow
Erev Rosh HaShana

Welcome to our 36th Year

Good Yontif. Shana Tova. It is a beautiful thing to be here with you welcoming 5772. 36 years ago, a group of people had a crazy and courageous idea. They stood in someone's backyard and decided to found a synagogue. They called the new entity Temple Chai and I wonder if they could have anticipated this day. I wonder if they foresaw this beautiful building or the thousands of people who will come through it this season. I wonder if they had any idea that not only their children and grandchildren would make Temple Chai the center of their Jewish life and education but also the children and grandchildren of hundreds, thousands of Jews who would someday call Arizona home.

There was a time when Temple Chai was housed in a church. There was a time when it was housed in a school. This land, the property we're on right now was first held with a \$25 down payment.

We've seen a lot in 36 years. Think about what the world was like in the 70s for Jews in Russia, in Iran, in Ethiopia and in Israel. Not to mention right here in Arizona. Could the founding families have possibly imagined the YouTube videos that are going around right now – young Israelis singing and breakdancing while they fling apples dressed like angry birds at one another and wish us a Happy New Year?

Then again, some things have stayed very much the same. The first priority of our founding families was to educate their children. They were looking for a

modern expression of our ancient tradition, for rituals and Torah that would touch their lives and support them in their drive to be a force for good in this world.

Could they see that we would be the home of the Shalom Center, of Valley Beit Midrash, of a booming early childhood center? Did they know that our schools would welcome their children from 6 months all the way through adulthood, inspire them with Jewish values and above all love them for being who they are? Could they imagine that our own youth group TCTY, would nurture and train young people who would go on to lead on regional and national levels? I could go on and on. I just want to tell you one more thing that you may not know about Temple Chai – we’re becoming something of a training ground for aspiring rabbis. If you want to be inspired, spend a little bit of time with a young person who is thinking about dedicating his or her life to the Jewish people. We’ve got rabbinical school interns, we’ve got college grads who are considering the rabbinate. It is truly our privilege that they want to spend time here, with us. Indeed, we have come a long way.

On the bimah tonight and throughout the HHD, our clergy represents both the rich Temple Chai history and our exciting future. Rabbi Berk, though not the very first rabbi of Temple Chai, was truly the institution builder. His leadership, his vision, his passion for the Jewish people, were the driving force that made Temple Chai what it is today. It is our privilege and pleasure to share the bimah with our Rabbi Emeritus.

Long before she joined our team, Rabbi Bonnie Koppell was a friend of Temple Chai. We asked her at first to fill in with some teaching here and there. People started asking for more and since that time she has become central to who

we are at Temple Chai. When she is not serving the troops as a Chaplain and Colonel in the U.S. Army, we're very lucky that she is here to teach and inspire.

Cantor Peter Halpern led communities in places as diverse as California, New Jersey and Holland before making Arizona home. Those of you who were here for Selichot have already been lifted straight into the High Holy Day Season by his breathtaking voice, his stunning musical leadership, his prayerful spirit and the essence of menschlekité that you can't miss when you are in the presence of our cantor.

For some, this is the first time you are meeting Rabbi Jacob Singer-Beilin. Rabbi Singer-Beilin joined Temple Chai just this past July as our Director of Education. He jumped right in, spent the summer meeting with teachers, students and their families. He has launched a fabulous school year and also has made a great impact on those who have had the opportunity to study and pray with him. I know that you join me in welcoming him to Temple Chai.

I am Mari Chernow. It is my privilege and pleasure to be your senior rabbi. I am truly humbled by the trust you have placed in me to lead Temple Chai into our 36th year.

I love seeing all of you here. I really do. I mean it from the bottom of my heart when I wish you a Shana Tova, a year filled with many many blessings. May 5772 be a happy, healthy and sweet new year.