

As we enter a new Gregorian year, I want to thank all of you who have shown up in this community since the Pittsburgh shooting. I realize there is a vulnerability that comes with walking into a synagogue; Pittsburgh raised it to the forefront of our collective consciousness. And yet, so many of you have continued to show up for services, for learning, for cultural events, and to bring your children and grandchildren.

Thank you for understanding that even though there will always be vulnerability, even a devastating act of violence cannot destroy Jewish community. We ourselves have the power to cultivate or undermine a secure community. As long as we do not let our fear dictate whether or not we step into the building, whether or not we light our Hanukkiyot, whether or not we show the world around us that we are Jewish; as long as we advocate for our practices and holidays, then Jewish community is secure. You have chosen to secure our community through being visibly Jewish, through continuing to show up. And it means the world to me, and to our future.

Some of us take strength from the efforts of the Safety Committee, who work so hard to create and communicate safety protocols for our community. Some take strength from the other communities of worship who have shown up almost every week to put their own bodies on the line and express their solidarity. For some, the need to be with community outweighs the fear. In whatever way you take strength, I honor you.

As we each keep navigating our commitments and fears around this project of Jewish community, I have your back. If you need a sounding board about Jewish practice, or an ally against anti-Semitism at your workplace or school, or in a social context, know that I am here and ready to strategize with you and, if necessary, advocate for you. I have met with school principals and coached community leaders around responding to anti-Semitism, and I will continue to do so wherever and with whomever you need. And I'm joined by the many representatives from surrounding communities who have attended services and written letters. They attest to the fact that we have allies well beyond this synagogue who are willing to jump into action and advocate for us if we request it. We are not alone.