

A Blessing on the Bimah for Non-Jewish Spouses and Partners: A Ritual for Yom Kippur Morning and Family Services

Adapted by Rabbi Barry Lutz from Blessings Written by Rabbis Janet Marder, Denise Eger and Paul Kipnes

Today I want to recognize and publicly acknowledge for the first time some very important people in our congregation. They are part of Ahavat Shalom because, somewhere along the way, they happened to fall in love with a Jewish man or woman, and that decision changed their life. I want to let you know in advance that in a few moments I am going to be asking our non-Jewish spouses and partners to rise for a special blessing of thanks and appreciation. I also understand that some of you may prefer the privacy of your own convictions and may choose not to rise. I hope that whether your rise or not, you will feel the embrace of your community.

I hope that you will not be embarrassed or upset that I am singling you out in this way. The last thing I want is to make you feel uncomfortable. What I do want to do is to tell you how much you matter to our congregation, and how very grateful we are for what you have done.

What we want to thank you for today is your decision to cast your lot with the Jewish people by becoming part of this congregational family. We want to offer our deepest thanks to those of you who are parents, and who are raising your sons and daughters as Jews.

In our generation, which saw one-third of the world's Jewish population destroyed, every Jewish child is especially precious. We are a very small people, and history has made us smaller. Our children mean hope, and they mean life. So every Jewish boy and girl is a gift to the Jewish future. With all our hearts, we want to thank you for your generosity and strength of spirit in making this ultimate gift to the Jewish people.

If you choose to do so, I would like to now ask for our non-Jewish members and their partners to please rise.

You are the moms and dads who drive the carpools. You help explain to your children why it's important to get up on Sunday morning or to come to Temple for Hebrew school and TAS High, and learn to be a Jew. You take your own classes and read Jewish books to deepen your own understanding, so you can help to make a Jewish home. You learn to make kugel and latkes; you try to like gefilte fish; you learn to make Shabbat and to put on a Seder; you may even build a Sukkah in the backyard.

You come to services, even when it feels strange and confusing at first. You hum along to those Hebrew songs, and some of you even learn to read this difficult language. You stand on the bima and pass the Torah to your children on the day they become Bar or Bat Mitzvah, and tell them how proud you are and how much you love them, and how glad you are to see them grow into young Jewish men and women.

We know that some of you have paid a significant price for the generous decision you made to raise Jewish children. You have made a painful sacrifice, giving up the joy of sharing your own spiritual beliefs and passing your own religious traditions down to your kids. I hope your children and your spouse tell you often how wonderful you are, and that their love and gratitude, and our love and gratitude, will be some compensation, and will bring you joy.

In your honor, I now ask our congregation to join with me in repeating after me as we offer you this ancient blessing from the Torah...

Yivarechecha Adonai V'yishm'recha – May God bless you and watch over you;

Yair Adonai Panav Eilecha Vi-chuneka – May the light of the Holy One shine upon you
and
be gracious unto you.

Yisa Adonai Panav Eilecha, V'yasem l'cha Shalom – May God be with you always and grant you the precious gift of peace.

Todah Rabbah Lachem – Thank you all very much.