

June, 6th, 2022

Dear Congregants,

I write to you today, my CCI family, with all the love in my heart. It is with great consideration, pain and sorrow that I write this letter. I have spent many wonderful years and consider CCI my home and my family. Through every happy and difficult moment during these past eight years, everyone has been exceptionally kind and generous with their time and emotion. When I lost my father and when my son was ill – you all stood by my side. I am grateful beyond words for the outpouring of love and the strength it gave to me during those difficult times. Just as importantly, I have laughed and



celebrated with you. I have held the hands of many congregants who are no longer with us and I've blessed our newest, smallest congregants as they entered our synagogue for the first time. From the first day I came to Augusta, each of you welcomed me into your homes and hearts. You taught me to say "Augusta" and "y'all" properly. You gave me my first (and only) boiled peanut. You gave me so many gifts of Chesed and so many wonderful memories I will hold close to my heart forever. As Leviticus 19:34 tell us: "the stranger that dwells with you shall be to you as the home-born among you, and you shall love him as yourself. . . "

As my contract at CCI comes to an end on June 2023 I've had to make many hard, personal decisions. It's with a heavy heart to announce that I will not be renewing my contract. I will be leaving at the end of my contracted term to advance my academic goals. Many of you know I am pursuing a Psychoanalyst degree and I must begin my clinical in the New York area.

Congregation Children of Israel is a wonderful place filled with 176 years of history. I am proud to have been part of that history and to have helped guide you during these many years. I understand change is never easy...often a little scary. I have the confidence CCI is in good hands to continued future successes.

I leave you with this: the Torah teaches us about Moses and how the discovery of his own identity put him on a mission to free the Israelites. Moses spent a lifetime leading His people to the promised land. And yet in the end Moses died in the land of his birth and was unable to go into the land of Milk and Honey. The Torah doesn't tell us why but many scholars believe there is a very important reason. Moses represents a past that was no longer relevant to survival. What once worked in the past no longer worked moving forward. For the Israelites to be successful in the new land it was imperative the newer generation take the reigns. Were they sad to lose their leader? Of course they were. Moses guided them for a long time. The Israelites loved him. But, even with the passing of Moses it is a step forward and ultimately another springboard for the Jewish people to grow and strive. My friends, I am not Moses BUT you are Israel. You will move forward with all of your successes. Even after a fire, the earth is more fertile than ever before and greater growth can and must happen.

With all of my love,

*Rabbi Shai*

