

Remarks for Bet Am Shalom 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Gala, December 10, 2016

Rabbi Lester Bronstein

First, my *yasher koach* to Ellen Cutler Levy and Susan Roth; their entire committee; Beth Nash for her very special role; and everyone who conceived this night. *Todah Rabbah!* And to all of you for coming, and for believing.

My favorite Israeli writer, Amos Oz, published a collection of short stories a couple of years ago called *Beyn Chaverim*. The English translation was called *Between Friends*, which is the literal meaning, but not the intended one.

It's actually a series of vignettes about one fictional kibbutz over the span of many years. It portrays the kibbutz members' individual life stories intertwining with one another in complicated ways, sometimes humorous and sometimes dead serious. Mostly both at the same time.

Ultimately we realize that this kibbutz in its essence is really the composite of the members' life stories, and more importantly, the stories created by the web of interaction among its members. Their aspirations and disappointments, all intertwined.

That's why the book's title, *Beyn Chaverim*, should really be translated as "between members." *Chaverim* are "members" in the deepest sense. Members of a collective enterprise. Members of each other's lives over a span of years.

I remember a TV drama that played when I was a little kid called *Naked City*. You'd watch a searing episode in some random person's life, somewhere in New York, and at the conclusion a voice-over would say, "There are eight million

stories in the Naked City. This has been one of them.” And you’d realize that this random person’s story was somehow related to your own.

You probably know where I’m going with this. Bet Am Shalom is, in its essence, sixty years of stories *beyn chaverim*, between and among its members, living and dead, still here or moved away, young or old, or once-young and now-old and still here making stories. No more and no less. *Naked Shul*.

Bet Am Shalom, like all congregations that somehow lasted this long, is a sacred conglomerate of many life stories. It is a weave of many members – *chaverim* - striving to shape a Jewish life among the multiple components that make up their modern identities.

Tonight I invite us – I invoke us – to look within ourselves, even as we laugh and celebrate – to see if each of us can touch that sacred story that is our own, and to see if we can recognize ourselves in the web of stories that comprise this sometimes disappointing, often rewarding, always aspiring community.

If we can do that, then we give ourselves a chance to have not just a quirky, glorious past, but also a hope-filled, glorious (God-willing) future.

[raise glass]

To that past and future, my fellow *chaverim* and *chaverot* of Kehillah Kedoshah Bet Am Shalom – to that past and future I say *l’chaim*.

And now it is my honor to introduce the host of our program, master storyteller and superhero of National Public Radio, the one and only Ophira Eisenberg.