

## Personal Statement

*Surrounded by my tallit, I hold on tightly as I wrap myself in the warmth of God's presence. Sometimes I say the blessing, but sometimes I just stand silently and do my best to become one with God. When I am ready, I let my tallit slip down to my shoulders. I then walk onto the bimah. I look up and see the faces of the congregants – together, we are ready to pray. The music begins, and I am home.*

My journey to the cantorate began when I was eight years old. My spark was ignited by my mentor, Cantor Stephen Dubov, z'l. He showed me that music has an intangible power to connect us to each other and to something greater than ourselves. Through him, I learned the true meaning of *ואהבת את יי אלוהיך* (*V'ahavta et Adonai Elohecha*) – to truly love God with my whole being. He helped me realize that my life's purpose is to help other Jews discover their own spirituality and create their own connections to God.

*I am exhilarated by being on the bimah. As music brings the words of liturgy off the page of the siddur, I feel the energy rush through me. The singing souls of Israel – the congregants who have come to pray, the musicians who pray through their instruments, the adult choir of excited volunteers, and the youth choir of enthusiastic children – bring the liturgy to life, and God soars throughout the room. Breath and voice energize the prayer as we become immersed in the spirituality of worship, and, with the congregation, I am home.*

I believe in the power of music to foster a community that inspires, comforts, uplifts, and heals. Whether through the words in the siddur or the words of the heart, music provides a universal language that turns connection into being: between one person and another, and between each person and God. In my work with children and teenagers, I see these sacred relationships come alive, and I see the future of our people in their sparkling eyes as they forge meaningful connections for themselves.

These sacred relationships – both across the generations and with God – allow Judaism to live outside the synagogue just as it does inside. Our tradition gives us a blueprint through which to celebrate and to mourn, and by embracing all these moments, we have the opportunity to make Judaism a part of everyday life. Whether in life or in loss, Jewish music plays a crucial role in framing our most important moments. Such connections are at the center of my own spirituality, as well as at the center of my work as a cantor.

Among the most inspiring work I have done is the chaplaincy internship I completed at Northwestern Memorial Hospital in Chicago. While there, I met the interfaith family of Sam, a 55-year-old father, husband, and son who was dying from complications following a kidney transplant. During the five-day period between when Sam was readmitted to the hospital and when he died, I accompanied his family along the emotional path of reflecting on memories of his life and preparing for the reality of life without him. When Sam's family and doctors decided to remove the machines that were keeping him alive, his wife requested that he receive both the Catholic last rites and a Jewish blessing.

*I am in the middle of a hospital room filled with Sam's family – nearly twenty-five of them, both Jewish and Catholic. The priest begins giving Sam his last rites, and, as his distraught family is saying goodbye, I think to myself, "God is surely present in this hospital room." The priest finishes, and it is my turn. I walk over to Sam and touch him gently. I begin to sing Debbie Friedman's L'chi Lach, and, as I do, I look around me. Sam's wife and two young daughters are sobbing. I find that I am helping not only Sam, but also his family, through these last minutes of his life. I am reminded of what a blessing it is to be able to help people through the most fragile times in life – and, inside this sterile hospital room with Sam's family, I am home.*

When I was a child, an extraordinary cantor showed me how amazing it is to be Jewish. He taught me how to pray, how to inspire, and how to infuse everything I do with God's presence. If I can do the same for others – whether a child or an adult, during a time of joy and sadness, in any way large or small – I will consider it my cantorate's greatest contribution and my life's greatest reward. I will strive to fill my cantorate with moments of meaning, letting the music and liturgy help me to inspire my congregants. It will be as if they have joined me under my tallit, all of us drawing closer to God – and whenever that happens, together, we will be home.