

Haverim,

It happens on rare occasion in one's life that one feels that they have been waiting their whole lives for a particular moment. That moment has arrived for me, as I apply to be the next Cantor of the historic Anshe Emet Synagogue. Since childhood, I have dreamt of the work I would do as the Cantor of an imaginary synagogue - a truly extraordinary place; a place so wonderful, so beautiful, so incredible, that it was hard to imagine such a place could exist in this challenging world. A real sanctuary. A place in which everyone is welcome, where the traditions of our people are alive and well, and where the beauty of music is celebrated. As I have learned more and more about your community, it has become clear to me that Anshe Emet is that very place. The possibility of serving Anshe Emet, and being a part of the AES community, brings me the same feeling of excitement I experienced as I stood at the amud, a seven-year-old boy, about to daven *Shochein Ad* alongside Cantor Herschel Fox for the very first time.

There is one verse which stands out to me in the morning liturgy, which guides my cantorate: "*Ashreinu! Mah tov chelkeinu, u-mah na'im goraleinu, u-mah yafah yerushateinu!*" - "Behold! How good is our lot, and how wonderful our destiny, and how beautiful our inheritance!" One of my first teachers of composition, Dr. Michael Isaacson, teaches that as Jews we must live in three "time zones" at once. We must be deeply respectful of our past, our tradition. And yet, we must recognize where we are - spatially, societally, temporally - seeing the beauty and the challenge of the moment. Finally, we must always be looking hopefully toward the future - the same hope that, if we were to ever lose it, our entire people would crumble; the hope that has kept us alive for thousands of years, through some of the darkest moments in human history. This is not just a lesson about living a Jewish life; it is a lesson about how we pray, what we sing, how we program, how we dream. And I challenge myself every day when I daven to live up to this verse.

Since a young age I have been drawn to synagogue life, particularly to the music of the synagogue. Some of my earliest memories are of the sanctuary at Valley Beth Shalom in Los Angeles. I began davening from the bimah in second grade with Cantor Herschel Fox, eventually to become the synagogue organist shortly after becoming a Bar Mitzvah. The foundational experiences I had as a child have driven me to dedicate my life to the perpetuation of Jewish music and the beauty of our tradition, always thinking about what more can be done to enhance and engage a synagogue community. Cantor Fox also advised me as a young man that as a Cantor it is my duty to be able to perform the many ritual and musical roles necessary in a congregation, and as such I have become an excellent Torah reader, and am happy to pitch in whenever and wherever possible to help the ritual team.

I have long dreamt of working in a congregation such as Anshe Emet, where I may inspire and be inspired, where I may bring Yiddishkeit to life through music, where I may teach children and adults alike the beauty and power of connecting through music. The mission of my cantorate centers around deep relationships, respect for tradition, creativity and innovation, a deep desire to engage and inspire through music, excellence in musicianship and artistry, teaching, and pastoring. At the core of all of this is a desire to work with an incredible team, and to support and further the vision of a congregation and its leaders.

I look forward to leading and co-leading inspirational, engaging, and inclusive services for a congregation such as Anshe Emet, which has a deep understanding and appreciation for the combined power of *tefilah* and music, as well as cultivating opportunities for new explorations of *tefilah*, if so desired; all the while maintaining the powerful tradition of *Hazzanut*. I cannot imagine any Jewish child growing up having never heard a beautiful, traditional *Hineini* or *Unetaneh Tokef*, and it is my mission to make sure that this will not happen during my tenure at Anshe Emet. At the same time, we must celebrate the beautiful innovations in

worship music, challenging ourselves to think about our sacred texts in new ways - through new melodies, instrumental or choral accompaniment, guest artists, and other means. Equally important is time spent on Friday morning with the preschool, singing songs of Shabbat on the bimah - letting them know that the sanctuary is theirs as well, that they should always feel safe and welcome there.

It is important to me to be part of a community like Anshe Emet, which celebrates and embraces the beautiful tapestry which makes up today's Jewish community. I grew up in a synagogue which was always a leader in conversations about inclusion, social justice, and responsibility to the greater world. I know that these values are core to the mission of Anshe Emet, which is why I would wish to serve as one of its leaders, and why I would like to raise my own children in such a community.

A trained musician, I play piano, organ, guitar, and shofar; I compose and arrange for choir and instrumental ensembles; and I am an excellent impresario, and producer of events and experiences. I have worked as a songleader and day school Judaic music teacher, so I have a deep understanding of the importance of these key positions, and am able to create and support a team of professionals to share in the music-making and education of a community. I feel particularly strong about teaching children the songs of Israel, cultivating their connection to our homeland, as well as teaching songs which support the core values of Judaism, and the core mission of the schools. I am well-versed in a variety of musical styles from traditional Hazzanut to art song and opera, jazz and Broadway, Israeli and pop, and more; my repertoire spans eight languages. I have enjoyed using my varied musical interests to engage with different segments of synagogue communities in a variety of settings, as well as representing my congregation in the broader Chicagoland community; I look forward to doing the same and more for the Anshe Emet community.

We have seen that technology has become more and more important as the current pandemic has progressed. We know that nothing will ever be the same post-pandemic. I have produced numerous concerts and virtual programs, and other virtual content, for the Cantors Assembly, American Friends of Magen David Adom, and synagogues around the country, including my present congregation. I look forward to putting these skills to good use for the benefit of Anshe Emet, exploring the many ways in which technology may be used to further the mission and program of the congregation.

I am a lifelong learner, always looking to broaden my horizons, and to share that learning with my congregation. My fluency in Hebrew allows me to teach not just about music, but about poetry, sacred text, Israeli life and culture, and of course, food (I'm an avid cook and oenophile!). I have had the privilege to teach and sing at synagogues and conventions across the country, in Canada, and in Europe, bringing *kavod* to my congregation; this is something I am passionate about and look forward to continuing on behalf of Anshe Emet.

I look forward to the opportunity to get to know the Anshe Emet staff and community, learning about the results of the Az Yashir project, and exploring the ways in which I might use my skills and talents to build on that sacred work.

B'yedidut--In Friendship,
Cantor Ben Tisser