

It is a pleasure to join the Young Israel of New Rochelle community in celebrating our 54th Annual Dinner. The number 54 is symbolic of the word "Dan", spelled Daled-Nun in Hebrew. This special Hebrew word is one of the names of the tribes of Israel. There is a remarkable insight to be gleaned from the census that took place in Sefer Bamidbar. The tribe of Dan had the second to highest population count both times the nation was counted. What is interesting is that Dan and his wife only had one child. The commentaries point out that we see from here that from humble beginnings, great blessing can blossom. Our Shul began with a few committed families that sought a vision for a warm Shul where they could raise their families to continue the great traditions of our past. From our Shul's humble beginning, we can, thank G-d, proclaim that there has truly been great blessing. I believe we can all wish each other Mazel Tov on the occasion of our Shul Dinner, and extend our gratitude to Hashem for the blessing our community has received to have grown in the way that it has.

This year's Dinner is celebrating our YINR Strong community. Since the very beginning, I have been most proud to be a part of this community and its response to the challenges of the past 14 months. From the initial Tehilim and Chizuk Zooms, to the witnessing of the wide net of Chessed spread throughout our community, it is quite clear that YINR was never really closed. Rabbi Fink's leadership and Halachic guidance gave us all stability and comfort when we needed it most. The lay leadership of this Shul did not sign up for such a term in office, but Hashem saw fit to have Michael and Judy in place to help us all in so many ways that are impossible to enumerate. We are blessed that the peaceful transfer of lay leadership to Andrew and David has allowed us to continue as a community to help and assist each other. The Gabbaim and Women's League have added paragraphs to their job descriptions in terms of what they put into helping us in the spheres of Tefilah and Chessed. The Medical professionals have gone above and beyond the call of duty in assisting, advising, and treating all of us, as they would their own families. All throughout this community, people who are not part of any official committee took the time to help others in need of food, humor, companionship, and advice on topics I did not even know existed. We all should be so proud to belong to YINR Strong.

In particular, this year's Dinner is recognizing the outstanding leadership of Michael Raskas. By no means is the Raskas family new to Jewish communal leadership, but I think the yoke of leadership and responsibility that was placed upon Michael's shoulders is most unique by any standard. We were so blessed to have Michael as the President of our Shul when the Pandemic struck. Michael remained focused and determined to advocate for the needs of us all, whether those needs were physical, financial, emotional, or spiritual. We cannot thank Michael enough for his contribution of decades of service to our Shul. We also must not discount the sacrifice of Karen and the Raskas family in literally sharing their husband and father with us, at such a time of crisis for themselves as well. This is also an opportunity to thank Michael for the other leadership roles he has served in our Shul: President for two non-pandemic years, vice-president, youth commission chair, founder of most of the minyanim in the shul, and so many other roles. Personally, I would like to thank Michael for the taking me under his wing, as the board appointed liaison to the new assistant Rabbi when I began here. The chats that we had during my first year here and beyond, have helped me be a better Rabbi and a better person. I am ever grateful for his guidance and friendship. Our community will miss this branch of the Raskas family immensely, as they embark on a different chapter of leadership, leading the way for all of

us to follow, to live in Eretz Yisrael. We wish only Mazel and Bracha to Michael and Karen, and the entire Raskas family.

It has now been four and a half years since my family and I joined the YINR community. The annual Dinner is a perfect occasion to offer thanks for allowing my family to become part of yours. I thank Rabbi and Rebbetzin Fink for continuing to enable our collaborative efforts to enhance the Shul, as well as providing mentoring and guidance with a sincere care for our well-being. I thank Andrew Wurzburger and David Blumenthal, as well as the members of the Executive Board and Board of Trustees, for their constant support and guidance. I thank Amy and Isio for doing all the heavy lifting in the office, and for smoothly managing the day to day activities of the Shul. I thank the members of the YINR family for continuing to open up your Shul and community to me and my family. My family and I are so excited to continue to work for this Shul in the years ahead. I thank Hashem for giving me the opportunity to be part of a wonderful congregation, and for allowing me to help play a role in furthering the success of the New Rochelle Jewish community.

I look forward to celebrating with you all, virtually, at the Dinner!

Chaim Axelrod