



## What I learned at Hevreh

Every few weeks for the past two years, I have had the unique experience of leaving my busy life in New York City and escaping to the Berkshires, where I spend three incredible days celebrating Shabbat, soaking in the fresh air, and learning from a warm and

welcoming Jewish community. I feel so lucky to have had my formative student experiences at such a dedicated, thriving congregation that takes such care of and pride in their student clergy.

Last week, I attended a funeral for a friend's mother, an emotional day for all involved and clearly a challenging time in my friend's life. As he sang the beautifully comforting notes of Gerald Cohen's "Adonai Roi" (Psalm 23), I could not help but flashback to singing the same Psalm 23 setting at a funeral in Great Barrington this past September. I remembered choking back tears as I nervously sang through the funeral liturgy by Rabbi Hirsch's side, my first funeral as a student cantor. My mind wandered to memories of standing on the bima on Shabbat, whether guiding the congregation through the Mi Shebeirach prayer for healing, or lending my voice in joyous prayer to the tunes of Debbie Friedman's "Mi Chamocha" or Elana Arian's "Hinei Mah Tov." I thought of my music classroom at Hevreh's

religious school, teaching holidays and liturgical music covering the scope of the Jewish year. I remembered my many meals with congregants, where I formed personal connections and friendships with beloved community members.

I have come to savor my Shabbatot at Hevreh, and they have become part of what Shabbat means to me. I have not only learned how to be a cantorial presence, but what it means to be a member of the Jewish community in the Berkshires, to experience first-hand a spiritual environment where the surroundings parallel the beauty of our Jewish ritual.

I take my Hevreh memories with me wherever I go, and they help me remember how far I have come in my cantorial journey.

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I started working at Hevreh in the fall of 2017, having just returned from my year in Israel and still settling into life in New York City. Today, almost two years later, I am finishing my third year of cantorial school, and feel much more experienced in my clergy role. Yet if I have learned anything in my time at school so far, it is that my cantorial identity is far from set. Cultural theorist Stuart Hall posits that, "instead of thinking of identity as an

already accomplished fact," we can rather imagine "identity as a 'production,' which is never complete, always in process." With every personal interaction, every song session, every Shabbat experience, Hevreh has become an integral part of my continuing identity production. There is no doubt in my mind that my formative experiences at Hevreh will continue to inform my cantorate for the rest of my life.