

Dear Friends,

We are about to enter 5777. The *Yamim Noraim* afford us an opportunity to look inwards at ourselves and to lift our eyes to the vista around us. Where will we take ourselves in the coming year, what part of our life journey will we navigate? What will we enhance, what will we change?

Last year the Inclusion Committee brought in two speakers from NAMI, the National Alliance on Mental Illness. We believe strongly that it is time for increasing parity between mental health and physical health, brain illness and body illness. We would not build a public building without a ramp, we should not build community programming without addressing access for those with mental illness.

But first we need to develop our understanding of mental illness as brain illness. Schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, depression, anxiety and addiction are biological illnesses. Symptoms should not be viewed as malingering, eccentricity, obnoxiousness or a character defect, nor are they solely the consequence of what kind of parenting you had as a child; although there can be a genetic factor to mental illness. It can be a long struggle to achieve mental wellness and successful functioning. Yet, with early identification and appropriate treatment people with mental illness can live full and satisfying lives. Reducing stigma, educating ourselves and creating an accepting and supportive environment for those with mental illness and their families is a mission we ask you to embrace with us. We each probably have no more than 3 degrees of separation from someone with an impairing mental illness. This is a part of the vista to which we at Shaarei Tefillah raise our eyes as we begin this new year.

As a start to this part of our journey together we would like to share the article you can find at the link below. It is a long article, but well worth reading. There are also many interesting links within the article to a range of organizations and program resources. For example, the [National Council for Behavioral Health](#) and the [Mental Health First Aid course](#), the [Mental Health and Faith Community Partnership, Drisha](#) and The [NY Federation "Partners in Caring"](#) program, among others.

There are other many other paths that bring us to being an inclusive community. In addition to a focus on Mental Health, we have already begun a mini-workgroup to address Allergies, Food and the Environment. We are also interested in working with the Youth and Education Committees, among others. If you are interested in participating in any way in one of these areas of Inclusion, please be in touch with Judi or Esther so we can count your voice in our conversations.

<http://forward.com/news/350067/jews-must-take-mental-illness-out-of-the-shadows/>

Shanah Tovah u'Metukah,

Esther Kletter and Judi Roth,
Inclusion Committee Co-chairs

