

THE HAMPTON SYNAGOGUE

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18 | 25

THE HAMPTON SYNAGOGUE 18TH ANNIVERSARY | RABBI MARC SCHNEIER 25 YEARS IN THE RABBINATE

May 23, 2008

To: Mayor Conrad Teller, Village of Westhampton Beach Board of Trustees, and Members of the Westhampton Beach Community

This summer, The Hampton Synagogue celebrates its 18th anniversary and the immeasurable impact of this oasis for Jewish life that infuses vitality and vibrancy into the greater, and diverse, Westhampton Beach community.

For 25 years in the rabbinate, I have dedicated my life to the advancement of interreligious and interethnic dialogue. I have found that, especially during difficult times worldwide, “understanding” is only fostered by sharing our similarities and differences.

Recently our congregation proposed establishing an *eruv* in Westhampton Beach. The *eruv* will enable families to push small children in strollers or baby carriages when they go to service on the Sabbath. The *eruv*, surely, will not be invasive to private property interests of any individual or entity, and simply enables a technical religious compliance that allows observant Jews to comply with their religious beliefs. Most importantly, the *eruv* is not intended, in any way, to communicate that Westhampton Beach is not the diverse community it truly is.

Yet, the *eruv* has evoked controversy in the village. Since I am a Rabbi who believes in promoting tolerance, I choose not to attribute untoward or foul motives to those who have circulated clearly offensive e-mails or remarks saying that – business owners have been asked by me or members of the Jewish community to close their stores on Saturday; that the *eruv* will allow Jews to walk on the private property of individuals on the way to synagogue; and this is the beginning of a push by the rabbi to create “another Lawrence.” Parenthetically, however, it is hard not to understand the true meaning of one expression that has been used: “Just what we need, more Jews.”

One of God’s most precious gifts is the power of speech. Yet, how prone we are to misjudge situations. How quick we are to impugn motives. Our words should be used with kindness, care and compassion.

To be certain, The Hampton Synagogue does not wish to win a pyrrhic victory. Victory must be redeemed by purpose and elevated by principle. Therefore, for the present time, the Synagogue leadership will suspend its application for the *eruv*. Instead, I shall use this summer to extend the hands of friendship across the faiths and educate all segments of the Westhampton Beach community to precisely what the *eruv* is, and what it is not and should not represent to its detractors. I have great faith that in so doing we will join together to put an end to the misgivings some have.

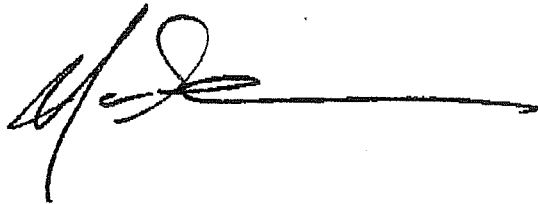
I see this controversy as an opportunity – an opportunity to promote greater understanding. I will thus seize this moment to that end, going from community to community within Westhampton Beach, if need be, to open doors to such understanding. At the end of that process, that is in the fall, we will revisit this issue and anticipate, with great confidence, that the *eruv* will be erected in the near future.

Presently, we find cause for gratitude and thus express our heartfelt appreciation for the vibrant support of Mayor Conrad Teller, the unanimous backing of The Hampton Interfaith Council, civic and business leaders, and the hundreds of men and women who have demonstrated a genuine understanding and respect for Judaism and its tenets.

The goal of any community is transcending our separateness. We must reach beyond ourselves if we are to rise above ourselves. In this spirit, I recognize the enormous possibilities for good in this somewhat contentious environment.

As we inaugurate the summer season let us become even more sensitive to the abiding joys of sharing in one's faith and belief.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'M. Schneier', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Rabbi Marc Schneier

RMS/sn

cc: The Hampton Synagogue congregation