

President's Address
Yom Kippur, 5772
Beth Pinals

Good morning and good yontiff. This morning I have the privilege of being here in this 3rd year of Temple presidency and invite you, as we do at this time, to reflect with me.

During these Holy Days, as we each contemplate our personal circumstances – our growth, our joy, our pains and regrets - we too as a Temple family are considering in an unprecedented way the health of our community. This morning we read from Deuteronomy about an entire people, standing before God, a people who entered into a special relationship with God and with each other. This takes us back to Sinai, where the Israelites also stood together before God, and after enduring a golden calf, broken tablets and vows renewed, received Torah.

It is in the rituals and stories of the High Holy Days that we consider how our decisions are part of a greater whole. We too, are directed, through the process of teshuva, turning back for renewal and clarity, to stand before God as a people. And there is power in the collective, in a people who strives for holiness.

In our own congregational reflection, we are considering the role and meaning of a Jewish community in our lives. Rabbi Larry Hoffman, a leading figure in the Reform movement's synagogue innovation efforts, writes about the history of the synagogue communities in America. Through much of the 19th and 20th centuries, synagogues went from sitting in the center of village life, to being one of several gathering spots in a marketplace of services. In the post- World War II move to the suburbs, there was a resurgence of synagogue life but the mindset retained was that the temple was a place where services were rendered in exchange for a fee, not unlike being a member in any other service-oriented organization to which one might belong.

By the late 1990s, the understanding of community shifted again. With a more complicated and fast-paced culture, geographic separation of families and less federal support for the sick and elderly, a new generation of rabbis and lay leaders sought to return to temple life, the true notion of what it means to be a community. Focusing on Judaism's core values, synagogues separated themselves from the

model of temple life where the expectation of membership was that one would receive a deliverable: a life cycle moment, a class, a number of services attended.

Temple Beth Shalom has proudly been part of this evolution. Here, our leaders and our members are partners in creating a special union, one through which we promise to care for one another, to study and grow, and to look out into the world and seek opportunities for repairing it.

And so, at this season of reflection, we consider how our project of building sacred community is progressing.

Though numbers don't offer a complete picture, they are one guidepost in understanding how our Mission is being embraced. TBS, 8 years ago 550 member households, is now well over 700 and continuing to grow. The growth is well-balanced, the result of many young families joining, but also of former members coming home. That is accompanied by the fact that so many of us are choosing to over time, remain part of our community. Last week at Rosh Hashanah we were proud to honor close to 100 of our families who have been part of the TBS community for 36 years or longer. They are such an important model to us of what it means to foster a lifelong relationship with one's temple family.

But the kind of community we happen to be is not about our numbers. It is instead about the deepening of experience and the relationships that we share.

- We are a community of care and strive to make this more so every day. Our Chesed, our acts of kindness- come in many forms, not only from our clergy, but also from amongst one another: a meal for the homebound, healing wraps for those struggling with illness and recovery, a shiva outreach, a new baby basket, to name a few. These are not services provided, but rather the ways in which we share relationship with one another. In addition to participating in these mitzvot, our Men's, Women's, Youth and Garden Club communities are filled with learning and service, and make TBS safe, well-organized, and enhanced by the beauty of nature.
- Tikkun Olam – healing the world - permeates the life of our synagogue, in the form of dozens of Social Action efforts, including our initiatives of Reaching Across Faith Boundaries, and our Israel Relationship Group.

- Our adult learning opportunities encompass a wide range of topics from Prophets, prayer and spirituality, to sports, social media and Israeli dancing. Most importantly, through retreats, Torah study, and visiting scholar weekends, we build community through lifelong learning together.
- We celebrate both Shabbat and Holy Days with song, poetry and prayer. We are grateful to Max Chaiken, Josh Schriber, Emily Perlman, and Joe Polliceli who help to fill our lives with with music all year round.
- One of our greatest strongholds is our clergy who offer blessings each and every day with their compassionate spirits, wise counsel and poignant teachings. We celebrate Rabbi Jay's fruitful sabbatical in Israel and his return home to leadership. We are thrilled that Rabbi Todd will continue to bring his visionary leadership to us, ascending to this next level of his rabbinate, and focusing in the coming year, on the innovative development of our children's learning programs. We are enriched by the musical leadership of Cantor Jonas, whose sweet melodies enhance our prayer in this, her first High Holy Day season with us. Renaissance Rabbi Educator Michele Lenke offers her gifts in leading our B'nei Mitzvah program, organizing our Holy Day Torah reading, and in chesed beyond. And we are grateful for the continuing presence, scholarly insight and support of our Rabbi Emeritus Rifat Sonsino, who is esteemed locally, nationally and famous in places as far away as Barcelona.

In all that we do, we are values-based and Mission-driven. Our TBS Vision serves as a living document, guiding our leadership, and launching us this year in 3 transformational directions that will reshape how we lead, how we learn, and how we anchor our administrative functioning.

This year we are living in an entirely new model of Governance – one that has been fashioned as a direct reflection of our community's values. Significant in this model is the creation of a Leadership Council lending broad-based voices and wisdom to a new streamlined Board of Trustees.

Our learning community – ages 2-18, is now home to over 600 children. This reflects growth from last year of over 15%. In our Children's Center alone, under the leadership of Ellen Dietrick, our Director of Early Childhood Learning, we

have seen growth of 18% this year. Under the leadership of Allison Gutman, our brand new Director of Elementary Learning, our k-5 learning is in a transformational revisioning process. In collaboration with an expert team of Brandeis educators and thanks to a generous grant from CJP recognizing us as a leader in educational innovation, it is with great excitement that in the fall of 2012, we will begin a brand new model of learning for our children. And in our upper grades, we are proud that our teen learning programs continue to grow, with an unprecedented 70% retention rate from 7th to 8th grade. This comes under leadership of Lauren Bohne, our Director of Teen Learning, a role evolving nationally in Jewish Youth Education, dedicated to developing avenues for teen synagogue involvement. With partnership from our Communications team, and in a process parallel to our Temple wide social media engagement, all of our learning settings are making incredible new use of communication tools like Facebook and blogging, to allow our parents to be involved in their children's learning in previously impossible ways.

Finally this year, as a part of our Strategic Planning and administrative revisioning efforts, we have engaged our first ever Executive Director, Daniel Barkowitz. Daniel's warmth and initiative is being felt across synagogue life. His leadership is allowing us to look broadly and deeply into all of our community's administrative needs from technology and communications to systems and finance, all in concert with our vision of sacred community. Along with Daniel, we are grateful for our dedicated administrative team including, Sandy Hain, our Temple administrator, Tiziana Getz, Rufina Kotlyar, Rachel Oblath, Rachel Block, as well as for our custodial staff- Nate Medrano and Eber Montenegro. Occasionally, we are also delightfully surprised by the generous support of our dear friend Leandro Restrepo.

Our reflection this season is part of a far reaching and exciting Strategic Planning effort for our congregation. With our TBS Vision as our guide, we are thoughtfully charting the course that will turn our Vision into reality over the next five years. Later this year, a plan for our future will be brought forward.

As we reflect during these Holy Days, it is clear that unlike the model of the service-oriented congregation of decades ago, we are here in sacred community. We understand temple life in terms of what we create by giving, not solely what we receive by joining. This means that every day, we are here – clergy,

professional staff, congregants - poised to support one another in times of simcha, and in the most difficult moments of our lives. This means, that together we ensure that membership in our congregation and education for our children are accessible to all, regardless of financial circumstance. And this means that today as we stand before and for what is holy, we acknowledge that our financial health is imperative to realizing our dreams. Great care was given in our new "Annual Shofar Appeal" to explain why our dues are needed, but not sufficient to carry the community from our generation to those that follow. So many of you have already responded generously. There are many ways to give of ourselves, some financial and some in the form of time, energy, and passion. It is this combination, above and beyond services and dues, that sustains us. When we stand together as did our ancestors, we too can realize our full potential for ourselves and for our children.

In this High Holy Day season, may each of us, wrestle with and return again to consider how we may bring our hearts, our hands, our minds, our souls to enrich the experience that we all share in this our sacred Beth Shalom community.

G'mar tov, may we be inscribed for good this year. Shanah Tovah.