

TBS President Jeffrey Shapiro
HHD Remarks – 5779 / September 2018

I am honored to be wearing the tallis that belonged to my Great Grandfather – Julius Bellis, of blessed memory, - which is nearly 100 years old.

Intro

Shanah Tovah.

Good morning. My name is Jeffrey Shapiro and I am honored to serve as president of Temple Beth Shalom. Aside from my family, serving as president of our congregation, is one of the blessings of my life. Thank you.

As a son of this congregation, Children’s Center Class of ‘72, I have been in this sanctuary for countless Presidential Yom Kippur Addresses – it always struck me as daunting to see row after row of congregants focused on the speaker – let me tell you it is not nearly as daunting from the seat as it is from the bima!

Having this opportunity to share these words and this day of meaning with all of you is a very special honor!

You may already be wondering – how long is he going to be talking – not to worry – I will try not to take too much time – because I know that I am all that stands between you and seven more hours of prayer and self-reflection.

When I was at the URJ Scheidt Seminar for incoming temple presidents this past April, whether the congregation had 18 households as in North Dakota or 2,400 households, as in Memphis, or any number in between the concern was the same – what to say during the High Holy Day Presidential Address that would be relevant, interesting or appropriate? Many were concerned that they were not public speakers and the task was overwhelming. Others were concerned that there was nothing new to share.

The latter concern is not the case for me. So much has gone on in our community that I want to share, and our year ahead is full of excitement and opportunities for engagement; thus, while the assignment appears overwhelming, it presents a unique opportunity to share what is truly special about Temple Beth Shalom.

This morning I want to share five things with you – 1) the State of Our Community, 2) TBS of Today, 3) the Innovation that is TBS, 4) A Snapshot of How We Do This and 5) an introduction to TBS Tomorrow.

1 - The State of Our Community

I remember, growing up, when Needham was not a community that was drawing lots of new residents. Honestly, it was more of a sleepy suburb of Boston and its Jewish population was small. I recall when one of the first women and certainly the first Jewish member of the School Committee floated the idea that Needham Schools should close on the High Holy Days. This was revolutionary. Yet Joan Schwartz, of blessed memory, a TBS member, fought and won this battle. I think of those earlier days and compare it to the Needham of today.

Needham is experiencing a wonderful renaissance. If you travel around town, you will see the new Sunita Williams Elementary School on Central Avenue, the expanding Needham High School, the new pool complex, and the technology & innovation center and so much more. The surrounding area is also experiencing exciting development. With all of this growth, the Jewish community in our area is growing. One of the most important questions we can and should ask - as a congregation is: "How can we respond and create the most meaningful, joyful, and engaging Temple Beth Shalom possible?"

2 – TBS of Today

Over the years, TBS has blossomed by being a community dedicated to nurturing relationships – relationships amongst our members, relationships between our members and our clergy, staff, and leadership, and relationships with the richness of our Jewish tradition. To do so, we have worked together as members-in-partnership to expand and enrich our services and programs and activities for all ages. To do so, our clergy and community have been there for us during times of great joy.....and during some of life's most difficult moments.

The growing numbers of our community are the result of a lot of hard work, countless caring hearts, an innovative spirit, and thoughtful participation by our community's members and staff.

Today, TBS is blessed to be the spiritual community of well over 900 households. Our Children's Center has 232 students. Our K-12 Educational Programs have approximately 540 students. Annually, we celebrate between 65 and 75 teens becoming Bar or Bat Mitvah. Hundreds of adult members of our community participate in classes, seminars, services, and volunteer opportunities that enrich the lives of countless others. We actively engage with families from life's earliest moments – **Bumps, Babies and Beyond** through all life stages to those in the 90's

and beyond. Thankfully our size allows us to provide resources that would otherwise not be available, yet – and this is most important to us: our culture provides a sense of community and warmth like that of a much smaller congregation. Leadership in our community is also very strong. Amongst the many TBS members who serve in volunteer and professional leadership positions in Jewish organizations locally, regionally, and nationally, we are thrilled that TBS is the spiritual home to a **URJ National Board Member**, the incoming president of the **Northeast Region for Women of Reform Judaism**, and the President of the **North American Federation of Temple Youth, Northeast Region**. Very impressive!

I am proud to say that the state of our congregation is strong!

While we are thrilled to welcome so many to TBS and to have so many long-standing members - Temple Beth Shalom - is about the people and the community that we create!

3 – The Innovation that is TBS

Of the 87 URJ congregations represented at the Scheidt Congregational President Seminar, the number of incoming presidents that talked about growth in their congregations was small, many talked about preserving membership, some about how to thoughtfully manage downsizing and unfortunately others were talking about merging.

One important piece that has led to the vitality of our community is our thoughtful, deliberative and collaborative way of reimagining the possible. TBS is a remarkable Lab of Innovation among the 900 URJ communities.

For example:

- TBS was one of the first to institute a **Senior Rabbi partnership structure**
- TBS has a nationally recognized **Inclusion Task Force** focused on ensuring full accessibility – physical, emotional, spiritual - to individuals with special needs or requirements
- **Mayim** – the first of its kind – a collaborative approach to revising the k-12 Jewish educational experience transitioning from a passive classroom to an active, project-based one, has resulted in greater post b'nei mitzvah and post confirmation engagement

- **Mikdash** – our recent “sacred space” construction project - resulted in the creation of space that fosters lifelong learning, the building of community, collaboration and faith-based engagement
- Our leadership and committee structure allow for us to innovate in our response to core community values: **Tikkun Olam** (Our “repairing the world” initiative), **Shomrei Adamah** (our initiative to “protect the environment”) and **TBS Tzedek** (our “social justice” initiative) mobilize us to improve society.

In the year ahead, we look forward to many special highlights:

- This year we will be celebrating Rabbi Todd’s 13 years – his “Bar Mitzvah Year,” if you will - as a Rabbi here at TBS. We have set aside the weekend of May 3rd through 5th for a full-community celebration.
- Our Adult Learning and Engagement program has been expanded to include dozens of classes, programs, film series, social events, and more. This year we look forward to welcoming our first Jewish Astronaut to TBS where we will learn that Jews in Space is not a film by Mel Brooks
- This year, we are thrilled to welcome to our staff, Talia Stein – a fourth year rabbinical student at Hebrew College. Talia will be our first ever Social Justice Rabbinic Intern, who will help us take essential next steps as a congregation in our work for a just society.
- In the coming months we will be welcoming national leaders from our movement including URJ President Rabbi Rick Jacobs, URJ President Emeritus Rabbi Eric Yoffie and Director of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism Rabbi Jonah Pesner
- And...importantly.....as part of our ongoing environmental improvement work, I am proud to say that this fall we will be installing a significant solar power array on our roof. Many thanks to our Shomrei Adamah and Building committees and our lay legal experts for all of their hard work.

4 – A Snapshot of How We Do This

At TBS we are fortunate to have a longstanding tradition of collaboration and partnership among our Officers, Trustees, Committee Chairs and Members, Clergy, Professionals, and community members. As ordinary as this may sound, this is not the case nationally. We are all focused on the needs of our community - understanding that Jewish spirituality, culture, faith, values, and community are

experienced by our families in different ways. We are committed to helping each family and each individual find the most meaningful connection rather than being rigid in our beliefs based upon outdated traditions or past views of societal norms.

I am fortunate to serve with a lay-leader Board, all of whom volunteer countless hours and significant professional expertise for the betterment of our temple. The names of everyone on our Board and their contact information is available on the TBS website. If ever you have a question, suggestion, or insight we are all interested in hearing from you. Again, creating our community is partnership that includes each of us.

5- TBS Tomorrow

Having successfully completed our new building, last year – thanks to the hard work of an inspired 2020 Vision Task Force - our community completed our “2020 Vision” Strategic Plan. This year, we are now beginning an important series of congregational conversations to consider our best path forward as a congregation. We have called these “TBS Tomorrow” Conversations and we invite you to sign up and be part of them. As we plan for our future, every voice is essential.

In the service supplement that you received when you came in, you will find a brief paragraph describing these Conversations - about our collective aspirations for the future of TBS, including the legacy that we provide for future generations.....when they will be held.....and a weblink to register.

We invite you to choose one of the dates and join us. In the spirit of Temple Beth Shalom, your ideas, insights, and questions will help our future. This is an exciting opportunity - seize it and add your voice.

And so now the natural question.....How do we keep doing all of this?

Year in and year out since the days of Moses, I am sure, Temple presidents have taken the opportunity at this time to make the appeal for donations to the congregation. You have heard it before, so I will not belabor the message – the truth is that temple dues and tuition do not provide enough revenue to fund all that we do. Our extensive programming, engaging outstanding staff, creating successful opportunities for both children and adults, and more.... all require financial resources above and beyond what we receive from membership dues and tuition. As well – and importantly – we remain absolutely committed to

ensuring that finances never become a barrier to becoming a member of our community or providing a Jewish education for children. Currently, approximately 10% of our TBS budget is dedicated to financial assistance. We are proud of this...and happy to welcome everyone!

Not surprisingly, then, fundraising is therefore a necessary component to maintaining a balanced operating budget. In this regard, we are very similar to hospitals or universities, which also rely on the gracious giving of philanthropy.

During the year we sponsor only two congregational fundraising programs. Our **Shofar Appeal** – which is currently taking place – and our spring “**L’Chayim**” gala.

And so....as I stand here today....I ask that you contribute to the TBS Shofar Appeal in a way that is meaningful to you and your family so that we can continue to be the community that we aspire to be. As you consider your family’s charitable giving, I warmly invite you to consider making Temple Beth Shalom an important part of your annual plans.

Conclusion

As we spend this day in reflection and consider what is important, I wish to thank YOU for helping to make Temple Beth Shalom all that it has become. Because of you and your choice to share your life journeys as part of our community, you have enabled us to become the congregation of blessing that we are.

In my current personal role as president, I am but a temporary guardian. I am fortunate to stand on the shoulders of - and continue to be guided by past TBS presidents who led our community with vision and compassion.

I look forward to continuing our community’s exciting journey together and to all of us helping to make Temple Beth Shalom the most meaningful and joyful community that it can be – for us, for our children and for our grandchildren.

My wife, Lisa, and our sons, Joshua and Benjamin, join with me in wishing you and your family a very special, sweet and healthy 5779.

May you be inscribed in the Book of Life.

L’Shana Tova