

Shanah Tova. I'm Bernice Sue Behar and I am honored to serve as President of our congregation. Today I'm going to talk about change, continuity, and commitment.

Temple Beth Shalom has been my spiritual home and my center for Jewish learning and prayer, since my husband Sam and I moved to Needham with our two small children nearly twenty years ago. Many of our family friendships developed from our common bond here at the Temple, and over the past 9 years, my work on the board of trustees has only deepened my relationship with this community that I have grown to love.

Over these past several years, our congregation has accomplished so much together, making important changes that have transformed our community in profound ways.

The most recent and dramatic has been our Mikdash project, the rebuilding of our temple home. Working together in a community wide effort we reflected on our deepest held values, imagined a building that reflected those values and ultimately created a place that comfortably accommodates our full life as a congregation. Each time I pass by our colorful new mezuzah and enter our front doors, I feel a rush of excitement, sensing the energy that comes from everything that is going on here: Members of all ages studying Torah in the bet midrash, families celebrating a bar mitzvah, or friends relaxing and schmoozing in the community court.

In another remarkable effort that brought together our clergy, our learning staff, members of our community and the broader Jewish community, we completely re-envisioned our learning programs to meet the needs of today's children and their families. This resulted in the creation of Mayim our wonderfully successful program for k-5 learning.

And, we have built an outstanding children's center and developed new early engagement programs that offer our children a nurturing Jewish environment coupled with top notch education. With nearly 200 children enrolled, our Children's Center is truly a magnificent gateway into our community for young families in Needham and many surrounding towns.

Our work together has truly enabled our community to blossom and I am thrilled. We can be proud of the fact that we have built a foundation for a community that will grow and continue to thrive well into the future.

Indeed, there have been many changes over the past decade. And I know that change, even a welcome change, can feel unsettling at times. With these changes, some may wonder whether we will continue to be the kind of community that we have always been. My answer to this question is: Absolutely.

I believe, at our core, we remain true to ourselves because even in the midst of change, we hold tight to some key defining values:

- 1) We value our history. We do this by seeking the wisdom of our longest standing members. When we grapple with important issues, we turn to the full diversity of ages and life experiences in our community, including those who have been members of our board, leaders in our Sisterhood and Brotherhood communities, and others who have contributed their leadership insights over the years.

We also value our history when we enjoy opportunities that bring the generations of our community together. What a beautiful thing it was to see people of all ages working side by side creating

mezuzahs for our building at our Artist in Residence gathering this spring! I'm inspired by the camaraderie and friendly banter I witness each week at Torah study among our younger learners and our older learners, and I have watched with admiration my friend Judy Weinberg help young sewers create NICU blankets at Tikkun Olam day.

Whether it's through recalling our past, cross-generational friendships, or listening to the wisdom of our longest standing members--in all these ways, we carry our congregational history into our future.

- 2) A second defining value: We care about having accessible and authentic worship experiences. Our Rabbis and our worship committee have worked in countless ways to assure that our prayer experience is personal as well as meaningful. From the first time that I heard Rabbi Jay ask us all to "take a deep breath—and then another" I knew that whatever followed was going to be accessible to me. Our worship services can and do elevate us, but here at Temple Beth Shalom, there is always a sense that the service meets us where we are, rather than reaching down to us from lofty heights. Whether you attend a "Simchat Shabbat" service with your family, a contemplative service, or a minyan led by a fellow congregant, there are many paths to meaningful worship in our community.
- 3) Finally, and perhaps most importantly...we care about each other. The other day, my doorbell rang and there stood Anne Tribush, mug of candy in hand, bearing the well wishes of the Chesed committee, because I had injured my hand. I was surprised, and then, upon reflection, not so much. In ways great and small, openly, and more often, privately, we are a community that takes care of each other. We cook for each other in times of need, we

attend houses of shiva, and we offer a hand when life throws a curve.

Another very meaningful way that we take care of one another is through our daily minyan service. Believing that everyone should have access to a daily service in order to say kaddish for their loved ones – or simply for spiritual uplift, a small group initiated by Steve Peljovich, has stepped forward to assure that there is a minyan every day. This is truly a mitzvah performed by people who care deeply about our community.

This list is far from exhaustive, but when I think about what seems constant about our community, these things rise to the top.

Yom Kippur – as part of our High Holy Day season - is a time to consider the bigger picture and the larger questions. And so, I think that it is important for us to ask: “what does it take for us to sustain this community that we hold precious?”

In my opinion, the first is involvement. Our common bond is our Jewish connection, but amongst us are multitudes of backgrounds, perspectives, interests, and passions. Maybe you love gardening, or yoga, or you are committed to social justice. Perhaps you want to learn more about Judaism or you just want to meet people. How great is it that you can come here and pursue those passions alongside others who also share a Jewish connection? This doesn't mean that everybody needs to join a committee or attend a class. But for everyone who attends a minyan service, or ushers at a Shabbat service, or participates in any other activity here at TBS, our community is only richer. The ways of being connected at the Temple are so varied, and the reward for being involved in even the smallest way is a feeling of connection

that really defines what it means to be a member of Temple Beth Shalom.

Another important way that we sustain our congregation – not surprisingly - is through financial support from every member. We are now blessed to be an incredible community of more than 800 households. We now have a building that can support our very dynamic Jewish community – one which places learning, prayer, social action, compassionate outreach, and community at the center. We also have fantastic staff and clergy who dedicate themselves to helping us make our community all that it should be. It takes an equally dedicated financial commitment to maintain all of these things. As members, we are asked to make a member commitment each year. But that simply does not fund all our needs.

As you took your seat today, you received a card asking you to support our Temple in this year's Shofar appeal. You may have been surprised to see this reminder at services. In previous years, we simply sent this invitation to give tzedakah to everyone's home. However, we felt that focusing on the importance of our shared financial commitment to a community that we love – contributing at whatever level is meaningful – is so important, that I am asking for your support today. Many of you have donated to Mikdash, which is our one-time campaign to build this beautiful new space and for that we are all proud and incredibly grateful. But we must remember that year in and year out, the shofar appeal provides funds that are part of our budget. Those funds support learning and programming for children and adults. They support our administrative team and our financial assistance programs so that everyone can participate in our community. Even if you have donated to Mikdash, I ask that you consider a donation to the Shofar appeal as well.

During these days of deep reflection, we are invited to consider what is truly important in our lives. I am grateful for this community - for the richness it has brought to me and my family— and for the support, guidance, and inspiration that it brings to countless lives every day. On behalf of my husband Sam and our children, Hannah and Daniel, I wish you a very sweet and healthy New Year.