

TEMPLE BETH SHALOM

“JEWISH JOURNEY” STATEMENTS MOVE AND INSPIRE!

On Yom Kippur afternoon, a special group of TBS members shared with our community personal stories of their “Jewish Journeys.” The presentation inspired many smiles and tears – giving all of us the opportunity to consider our own connections to our Jewish identity. We are very happy to share these moving statements with you, our TBS family.



AIMEE BIERMAN

So, the most obvious question to ask an Irish, formerly Catholic, girl from the Midwest is “Could you ever have imagined you’d be who you are or where you are today?” My answer is an unequivocal, enthusiastic, “Yes!”

Growing up, my family and I regularly celebrated the Jewish holidays with our close family friends, Mark and Susan Adler and their daughters, Carolyn and Michele. I learned to play *dreidel* and easily came to appreciate the fried goodness of latkes; I gobbled down *matzo brei* and taught myself how to play “*Hava Nagila*” on the Adler’s piano. I still remember the first Shabbat Saturday morning service I attended with them at their Conservative temple in Oak Park, Michigan. A bit nervous about attending Shabbat services, Susan sweetly assured me that the rabbi wouldn’t mind that I was Catholic. In the midst of my experience growing up in a fragmented, chaotic home, what struck me most about my time with the Adlers was the sense of family and tradition that infused their lives.

More than twenty years ago, as an undergraduate at the University of Michigan, I met and fell in love with my husband, Gregg—and his family. An Irish Catholic girl from Michigan and a nice Jewish boy from New York. Gregg and his family welcomed me with open arms and hearts. His parents quickly became my parents and his mom became the mother I never had—the mother who I was meant to have.

Gregg and I were married 16 years ago by a rabbi, under a chuppah. As we told the rabbi during our meetings before our wedding, we intended on raising our children in the Jewish faith.

Fast-forward to 2004. Gregg and I move from Brookline to Needham with our son, Henry (who was then almost 3) and our daughter, Sophie was born on December 31st. While we had been raising our children culturally Jewish, we really hadn’t taken any affirmative steps to raise them spiritually Jewish. So, we started looking for a temple...and we found Temple Beth Shalom.

For Henry and Sophie, “Temple Tots” and “Tot Shabbat” gave way to Hebrew School and, now, “*Mayim*,” summers at Camp Grossman and, this past summer, Eisner. Gregg and I became more involved at TBS, becoming active in Member Relations and Sisterhood. Through this all, as I was making a Jewish home, raising Jewish children and committed to living “Jewishly,” I still wasn’t Jewish myself. Four years ago, I decided that I wanted to make it official.

After taking the URJ’s “Intro to Judaism” class and studying with Rabbi Lenke, on January 20, 2010, Gregg, Henry, Sophie and I, along with Gregg’s parents, went to *Mayyim Hayyim*. My nervousness at the prospect of going before the *bet din* was assuaged by the fact that it was comprised of our dear rabbis—Rabbi Lenke, Rabbi Jay, and Rabbi Todd. We affirmed Henry and Sophie’s Jewish faith that day, and I became Jewish. That winter afternoon at the *mikveh*, I celebrated the outward recognition of an internal identity that I had been living

for years. That day was just the beginning.

Since then, my Jewish journey has taken me to CJP's "Ikkarim"/Parenting Through a Jewish Lens class, learning and sharing with other parents about the richness of Jewish parenting. Our family has Shabbat dinner every Friday night, with challah, candles and, more often than not, ending with "movie night" (with movies voted on by Henry and Sophie). I've cherished Sisterhood Spirituality retreats with the inspiring, fun, thoughtful women of our congregation. I've become involved with TBS Keshet, the LGBTQ/Ally Affinity Group that celebrates and elevates the diversity of our Temple community. Gregg, Henry, Sophie and I have enjoyed spending time with other temple families at Family Camp weekends at Eisner, with Shabbat services as sweet as the s'mores at our Havdalah campfires.

And, most recently, this past June, I celebrated my Bat Mitzvah on this *bima* alongside ten amazing fellow temple members from all backgrounds and stages of life, who quickly became beloved friends. As I recalled that night, between the busy-ness of everyday life—between helping with school projects, rushing to early morning meetings at the office, and finding time to still make it to the gym, I cherished the Thursday night class that I shared with such dear friends and such amazing teachers.

Today, on Yom Kippur, on this day of reflection and repentance, as we take stock of our lives and our shortcomings, as we reflect on where we've been and where we are going, I reflect on my Jewish journey of...

- ...escaping the difficult home of my childhood,
- ...discovering a home for my heart with my husband and his family,
- ...making a Jewish home of my own with my husband and children,
- ...searching for a home for my soul, and
- ...finding it here at Temple Beth Shalom.



LISA PEARLSTEIN:

Hello.....My husband, Noah, my daughters, Miriam and Sadie, and I joined Temple Beth Shalom almost 6 years ago. My mother, Rochelle Gordon, who is also here, joined last week and we are very happy to welcome her!

I was very intrigued by Rabbi Jay's invitation to discuss my "Jewish journey" with you this afternoon for several reasons. The first of which is that I have never thought about my relationship with Judaism as having been a journey per se. The second reason is that it forced me to sit down and consider my connection to Judaism, my Jewishness and when, where, and how it has developed.

A little background info: I grew up in Canton and attended the neighborhood conservative temple. I attended Hebrew school three times a week with my small group of Jewish friends and I liked it. I liked my teachers and I respected the rabbi and all was good. My mother kept a Jewish home, and my father (having been educated at Maimonides) knew all the answers to any questions that I may have had. After my Bat Mitzvah, I learned to read Torah and I led the younger kids in their weekly Junior Congregation services. All was good.

In 1989, I flew to college in Austin, TX. I didn't seem to "connect" with the Jews that I met there - the few in my dorm or the ones I met at Hillel. So, my mother cooked Rosh Hashanah dinner for me, froze it and 'overnighted' it to me so I would have a taste of the holidays from home. Life was moving along fine. My religious beliefs never really influenced my social life. I did, however start to view religion differently. I was a Philosophy major, and through my studies and readings concluded that religion is, and always has been, a propaganda

tool used to control the masses. This, at twenty years old, was highly disturbing to me and became a real impediment to embracing Judaism. Had I had a closer relationship with my rabbi, it could have been an enlightening conversation. However, I was brought up with the notion that while my rabbi was to be respected, he was also very separate from me.

Noah and I became engaged in 2000 and were in the throes of wedding planning. My family still belonged to a Conservative temple and it briefly entered my mind to get married in temple, but the room wasn't so pretty, needed lots of decorations and so I easily dismissed it and we began looking at hotels. My father, in his quiet manner, mentioned one day: "Seems like two Jewish people ought to get married in a temple." Guess what? The next day we looked up a rabbi that had a special connection with Noah's father (who had passed when Noah was eighteen) and we were married at Temple Emmanuel in Newton.

At this point in my life though, I don't think that I was making choices about my Judaism. I was still following along with my family because that seemed appropriate. We also joined a Conservative temple after getting married. We had our beautiful daughter, Sadie, in 2003 and celebrated her naming in temple at a Saturday morning service and did what we were told to do. It was so beautiful and such a wonderful celebration.

Now my hard work begins....Noah was a firefighter in Brookline and had to work on Yom Kippur when Sadie was around two. No problem. We belonged to a temple so I took Sadie with me and we went to the Children's Service with my sister-in-law and my niece who was around six. Sadie at two, and, as I'm sure you can imagine, didn't sit silently and was excited to be with her cousin and smiled and laughed a lot. And, I was told repeatedly by someone sitting behind me that there was a babysitting room for my daughter and that she shouldn't be in this service for five and six year olds. So, I picked up my daughter and left the temple. I got into my car and sat and cried. Here it is Yom Kippur, the holiest of days, my husband is at work, I belong to a temple and my family is inside praying and I have nowhere to go. I don't think I have ever felt so alone. I drove home, called Noah and told him that I couldn't go back.

Suddenly, it is two years later and Miss Miriam comes along. What to do? We called Rabbi Jay. Neither of us knew anything about Reform Judaism. We weren't even members of the temple, but we wanted a Naming and knew that we needed to make different choices for ourselves and for our family. Rabbi Jay had no structured, prescribed ceremony and encouraged us to make this celebration special and our own. He came to our home and celebrated Miriam's Naming with us and about fifty friends and family. It was one of the most special and meaningful moments in our lives. Rabbi Jay encouraged us to create a service that spoke to us and our daughters in a meaningful way. Ever since we have joined Beth Shalom, the rabbis have encouraged us to make our experiences personal and personalized. I believe that since coming to Beth Shalom, my journey has really begun. Prior to that, I did what I was told to do, prayed the way I was taught to pray, and felt the way I was expected to feel.

I have found Beth Shalom to be a truly special place. One where nothing is prescribed, rigid, or must be done in a certain way. I like that. It has allowed me to embrace the spiritual feel for Judaism. Attending a Friday night service, sitting down and taking in that deep breath really does allow me to separate myself from my crazy week. Watching my daughters respect, interact, and really have a warm and nurturing relationship with their rabbis makes me so happy. Our rabbis know my children for who they are and embrace them for it. I feel the same way with regard to my relationships with my rabbis. While I enjoyed my experiences at temple growing up; Sadie and Miriam connect with their experiences, their rabbis, and their teachers in an authentic way that I never did.

And finally, I am at a point where I am weaving my social life together with my religious and spiritual life. And, it brings a comfort and underlying level of ease with which I come to these friendships.

So, my journey continues....at a wonderful place....with supportive people around me...with my family and on my own. And....though I still think that religion can be a propaganda

tool used to control the masses, I truly believe it is a choice for an individual to embrace and sculpt as her own!



PEGGY GASSMAN:

Good Afternoon and *Shanah Tovah*.....My name is Peggy Gassman and I am honored to have been chosen to share my Jewish journey with you today.

My mother and father met and lived their entire married lives in Hull, MA. My family belonged to a Conservative shul in that small town with very few Jewish families. And would you believe that temple was also "Temple Beth Shalom"? I remember sitting in the third row in our assigned seats next to my father braiding his *tallis* while he and my uncle stood and proudly announced their pledges during the High Holy Day Appeal.

TBS in Hull provided me a warm and welcoming spiritual home as a child. At home on Friday nights, my stepmother lit the Shabbat candles at the moment of sundown and my father led us in Kiddush. And to this day, whenever I smell a roasting chicken and fresh baked challah, and when I open my eyes to the glow of the Shabbat candles, I am brought immediately back to the warmth of my family and the beautiful Jewish traditions that still guide our family today.

I was six years old when my mother died. What does a father do with such a young child who has just lost her mother? Send her off to a nurturing camp for Jewish girls of course. You might think that this was an unusual thing to do at such a traumatic time. But at Camp Pembroke I was able to spend my summer in a loving, nurturing Jewish environment surrounded by wonderful new friends and traditions. Over those eight summers, camp provided me with a clear understanding of what it means to live Jewishly and I was instilled with a strong sense of Zionism.

When I first entered this Temple Beth Shalom as a new member of Sisterhood, I immediately felt embraced by an energetic and committed group of women of all ages. When Isabel was a little girl, we began attending family services here. Isabel would march us right up to the front row where she sat proudly, and we sat hoping that people would not realize that we were not yet temple members. By the time we actually joined TBS, I had already served on the Executive Committee of Sisterhood and knew that this temple provided us with that same warm and welcoming feeling I had while praying on benches in the pine grove of Camp Pembroke surrounded by my dear friends so many years ago. And many of those girls remain some of my dearest friends to this day. Whenever we spend time together, we sing old songs and bring back the memories of those sweet summers while we were being instilled with our great passion for and devotion to being Jewish.

In 1994, I was diagnosed with cancer, and it was my dear friends at TBS who came together and arranged to provide our family with dinners for a week following each of my treatments. Terri Snyder and Gail Bor led a group of elves who arrived at our door each evening with the most lovely feasts. Since then, I have had many opportunities to give back. We are all blessed to have this extraordinary community that truly understands what *chesed* is all about.

In 1996, Rabbi Sonsino told me that now that my hair was growing back and I was well on the road to recovery, it was time for me to step up to the plate and join the leadership team of TBS. When I was called by a member of the Nominating Committee, how could I say, "No"? Since that time, I served in many roles on the Executive Committee culminating with my years as President of this wonderful congregation. I started attending Torah Study each Saturday morning and I began shutting down my computer from sundown on Shabbat until Sunday

mornings. This period of separation from the daily routine of our busy lives provided my family and me with much needed time for rest and reflection. Isn't Shabbat a wonderful gift afforded us by our beautiful religion?

After spending so many years steeped in temple life and having had the privilege of meeting with Rabbi Jay every week for more than two years, I was concerned with the emotional void that I would face now that my official work was completed. I decided to enroll in "Me'ah" - a two-year course delving into Jewish studies. I felt it was the appropriate next step for me as I continued on my lifelong Jewish journey. In fact I, along with my class decided to extend our studies for a third year. Many of those new friends have joined us here on occasion for Shabbat services sharing that unique opportunity Shabbat gives us all to stop, reflect and restore.

Just last May, I was diagnosed with a reoccurrence of my original cancer and once again my family and I found ourselves on the receiving end of an outpouring of support and concern, love and generosity. On our way to the hospital, Andy and I stopped at the temple for a blessing from our Rabbis. Rabbi Jay wrapped us in his tallit and he and Rabbi Lenke held us and blessed us. That feeling being wrapped in a beautiful tallit brought me back to the time I sat next to my father in shul while braiding his *tallis*. With my eyes closed I felt like I was being held by my parents who had been taken from me so long ago.

Rabbi Markley wrote me the most beautiful blessing, which I framed and kept by my bedside in the hospital. Our rabbis called, emailed, and even donned the gloves and gowns required to visit me in my sterile closed environment over a period of twenty-eight days. During each of their visits, they would hold my hands and we would pray together. I knew that my recovery was in the hands of my doctors, but I felt like I was in G-d's embrace whenever we prayed and that gave me much strength and courage throughout my months of treatment and recovery.

Over the years, we have been blessed to reach many milestones, special anniversaries, birthdays and transitions. And we chose to mark them with a private moment with our rabbis wrapped in a *tallit* and blessed with the ancient Priestly Blessing. And each time I have the opportunity to wear my own *tallit*, I always feel that I am being wrapped in peace and love.

When I finally returned to Torah study just a few weeks ago, one of my fellow congregants approached me and said that the best part of seeing me was to watch me being embraced by those who welcomed me back literarily with open arms. I am now fully recovered and find myself looking forward to every minute I get to spend among my congregational family praying, learning, volunteering and celebrating here at Temple Beth Shalom. I have so missed the beautiful music during Shabbat services, singing along with the cantor and choir from wherever I may be sitting. Have you ever noticed how the Shabbat candles take a moment to fully ignite after being lit? It is almost like they too are taking in that extra breath to restore their sole during this special period of rest.

My husband Andy and our daughter Isabel have each had their own identity through their participation in temple life. Through the lessons and values that Isabel learned here at TBS and at home and Camp Pembroke, she decided to continue on her lifelong Jewish journey, choosing Jewish communal service jobs after college. She is now living a Jewish life in New York City attending the NYU Graduate School of Social Work. Isabel's favorite day of the week is Friday when she joins the friends she has made over the years from NFTY, college, while working at CJP and Hillel. They attend Shabbat services at various Reform congregations throughout the city and then spend the evening together enjoying the gift of Shabbat.

My lifelong Jewish journey is made all the more rewarding as Andy and I watch our daughter as she continues that legacy that began so many years ago when my parents met, fell in love and began their journey as young Jewish parents at Temple Beth Shalom in that small beach town of Hull.



LOUIS GROSSMAN:

On Yom Kippur afternoon, Louis spoke using the following notes...

My wife, Patti and I have been 30+/- Year Members of TBS (only Temple we ever belonged to), 4 Children, 3 Daughters-in-Love, 4 Grandsons (1 Grandchild "in construction").

Impossible task to convey a 63-year Jewish Journey in 5 minutes. I have divided my journey into 3 distinct time periods (highlights/lowlights only).

1. Informative Years (0-17 through High School)

- Father grew up Orthodox and Mother Reform-hence my 3 sisters and I were raised Conservative at Temple Emmanuel in Newton;
- 3 days/ week for 2 hours each day, only subject I truly loved was Hebrew and particularly Chumash;
- Became a Bar Mitzvah with my twin sister (one of the first times a girl on Shabbat Morning) - disappointed because my voice was cracking, pimply face, my paternal grandfather had died;
- Had to stay home Friday nights (Shabbat dinner with interesting guests);
- Joined Temple Israel and went through Confirmation and Post Confirmation (Little Lower Than the Angels, Consecrated Unto Me, comparative religion, felt G-d's presence at Cathedral in the Pines, Youth Group, no Prozdor/Yavneh);
- Last leg of the March from Selma to Montgomery with maternal grandfather and uncle (hate mail from Jewish dentist).

2. Young Adult Years (18-22)

- Lost Years (Brown Hillel with unexciting rabbi, mostly Orthodox);
- Close to home so spent Jewish Holidays with family;
- 2 Highlights: a) Trip to Israel with entire family after the Six Day War and b) Yom Kippur exactly 42 years ago to this day (*Aveinu Malkeinu, Al Cheit Shechatanu*).

3. Adult/Family Years (23+)

- Temple Community involvement with Sisterhood, Brotherhood (Blood Drive/Minyan Leader), Pre-School, Religious School, Brit Milah, B'nei Mitzvah, Conversions, Weddings;
- 3 Trips to Israel (1 with all four children);
- Me'ah Program from Hebrew College, Torah Study (Rabbis Jay, Todd and Daniel Lehmann at Hebrew College);
- Patti and my interest in Jewish Continuity through involvement (time and resources) in Jewish education and camping—Synagogue, Union for Reform Judaism / Women of Reform Judaism, Mayyim Hayyim, Hebrew College, Jewish Community Center of Greater Boston, Eisner/Crane Lake Camp / Camp Grossman;
- Pride of knowing you've done something "right" (with a little bit of luck) when children go on Birthright Israel trips, get involved in Jewish organizations, and emulate the Jewish values you model and behavior in giving back to the community (time and financial resources).



BEN MARSH:

Good afternoon, my name is Ben Marsh. My wife Elyse, and son Jonathan, are here with me today. My daughter Sara is a senior at Elon University down in North Carolina and unfortunately she could not be here today. We joined Temple Beth Shalom in 2004.

I suppose my Jewish Journey as I know it, started when I moved to Nassau County, NY when I was six years old. I was never really cognizant of religion before the age of six, but I was now the only Jewish kid in the class. I only knew this because I was reminded of this at the bus stop on a daily basis. My parents taught me what bigotry and prejudice meant. And like most six year olds do I happily moved on, proud of who I was.

When I was ten my mother signed me up for Hebrew School because she knew it was the right thing to do... and there I went for 3 years, preparing for my Bar Mitzvah. This is where my Jewish journey took a sudden turn to the left. My parents divorced when I was seven and my mother raised my sister and me with help from my grandparents as my father had remarried and lived in Chicago. My mother worked full time and did what she had to do to raise two kids on her own in the 1970's. She probably earned about \$12,000 a year - but on a day I remember vividly, the President of my temple sat in a meeting with me and my mother and told her she had to "come up with the \$2,000.00 or we can't get Ben Bar Mitzvahed." I was Jewish - I was proud - I was now a Bar Mitzvah - and I had lost all interest, as a 13 year old, to be part of the temple and the temple community.

Well, I made it through high school, and I made it through college, still Jewish and still proud of my heritage. But something happened: I met a girl. She was Jewish - and her family belonged to a temple that I knew we'd one day get married in! And this is where my Jewish journey took a sudden turn to the right. We met with the rabbi... We liked the rabbi. And I had this yearning to get back to this place I had left ten years earlier.

The journey was just revving up and I knew it was about to go into 'turbo drive' because a few years later our first child, Sara was born. We moved to Massachusetts and Sara was enrolled in TBS's Children Center. I wanted so much not to deprive my children of their Jewish heritage because of what I had to deal with many years ago. I was starting to get that "good feeling" back that one should have when you go to temple.

My Jewish journey didn't feel like it was an uphill journey any longer. It was full steam ahead and I wanted very much to be part of the Bar and Bat Mitzvah processes that Sara and Jonathan were going to have. I sat down with the rabbi and opened up about my inner conflict. What he said made a great impact on me: "You may not be religious. But you are observant. And for that, we, as a congregation, are grateful. We're happy you're here"! Boom, I was back!

My Jewish journey was indeed full steam ahead and Temple Beth Shalom had me and my family going in the direction we wanted to go! Elyse had never become a Bat Mitzvah when she was thirteen and around this time she made a commitment to herself and her family and to finally become a Jewish Adult Bat Mitzvah. She had been to Israel. She's a very proud active member of our Jewish Community (on the Board of Jewish Big Brother / Big Sister - recently making an appearance on the Front Page of the Jewish Advocate!). But seeing her and her class of thirteen adults becoming Bar and Bat Mitzvah was an awesome sight. I saw a swell of pride in the whole congregation that day - the whole Jewish community.

However, my Jewish journey was missing one BIG component: Israel. Along with five other families in 2008, we signed up for the Temple Beth Shalom trip to Israel. I suppose if we went as just a family it would have been a really great experience. But the way we went - as a temple community - a TBS community, was awesome! Four years later and we all still feel a

sense of family, a sense of community, a sense of pride, whenever we see each other or spend time together.

So this is where my Jewish journey is headed. I'm back. I'm here. And I feel part of something bigger, I feel part of a community and it feels good!

Thank you, and Happy New Year!