

Shana tova. My name is Michael Bailit and I am honored to be able to serve you as the president of Temple Beth Shalom for the next two years. I stand here today because of my dad. He moved to Needham in 1954 as a young physician, his training having been interrupted by his service as a medic in the Korean War. He became the third pediatrician in town. As he settled in, he looked for a Jewish community and found one in the newly incorporated Needham Jewish Community Center (NJCC) , a nomadic small band of Jews who worshipped in churches and at the Village Club. The Center soon became Temple Beth Shalom and he joined the congregation, later served on the Board of Trustees and along with my mom made his spiritual home our family's home.

The major lifecycle events of my life have occurred through the fabric of this community, including moments of profound joy, such as my bar mitzvah (wearing horrid chocolate brown polyester) and my wedding to my wife Julie (who is also a child of Temple Beth Shalom). I have also experienced lifecycle events of heart-breaking sadness in this community, most notably during my younger brother's funeral. Being a part of Temple Beth Shalom has not only been about experiencing these moments of lasting meaning. Temple Beth Shalom has also enriched my life in many other ways. I learned how to live a Jewish life here, began to develop leadership skills through BESTY (our teen youth group), wrestled and still wrestle with my relationship with G-d , and developed my very closest friendships, which I maintain to this day.

I know that my experiences are not unique. There are many of you here today who have had your lives and/or your children's lives touched by Temple Beth Shalom. I have witnessed with joy and pride how we enrich the lives of the members of our extended family.

In a world that is not always kind, not always caring and often not fair, Temple Beth Shalom holds what is good to be sacred. It is a community that brings light and love to so many of us. Together and as part of this community we find meaning at all points of our lives, and that is why we sit here together today, members of all ages. Temple Beth Shalom is not a building, it is not an institution; rather, it is all of us, and it is a precious gem to be cared for and sustained.

For all of these reasons I want to serve this community, and am honored to do so with our remarkable clergy and professional staff, our talented and devoted 18-member Board of Trustees, the almost 40 leaders who serve as chairs and co-chairs of our many committees and as presidents of our Garden Club, Brotherhood and Sisterhood, and our past presidents who stay involved and continue to contribute to the welfare of our community.

Because this is the one day during the year when almost all of us sit together, I would like to share with you a few of the eight goals that our Board has set for ourselves for this year, most of which derive from the strategic plan adopted by the Board last January. I wrote about all of them in the September *Scroll* (that's our newsletter, for our guests here today), but I want to focus on a few. I believe that it is important that we have a shared understanding of where we want to go as a community, and how we think we will get there.

One goal is to successfully implement *Mayim*. *Mayim* is the Hebrew word for water, and is the name of our new elementary learning program. Three years ago we recognized that we needed to make

transformative change in our elementary learning program. It was not engaging our children and parents in the way that we knew that it could and should. With significant support from CJP and Brandeis consultants, and with inspiring leadership from R'Todd, we began a planning process that stripped away every assumption about elementary learning. The result – *Mayim* – was piloted last year with two classes and beginning earlier this month implemented in full. As R'Todd explained here on Erev Rosh Hashanah, *Mayim* is not your parents' religious school, nor yours, for that matter. It is a fundamentally different approach from anything that we have done before. For those not familiar with it, you can learn more about it through our web site. Its positive impact is already being felt. Implementation of *Mayim* is a priority of the Board. We decided that there are few, if any, priorities higher than educating our children as best we can.

A second goal is to further engage more of our members in relationships that we each find personally meaningful. As depicted in our new booklet, "Doorways into the Temple Beth Shalom community", that you will be receiving shortly, there are many different ways to participate in our community, be it by knitting healing wraps for those experiencing illness, spending time with the guys playing softball or at next month's Brotherhood retreat, participating in Saturday morning Torah study, or performing mitzvot for those less fortunate. Yet there are some of us whose current relationship with TBS is not central to our lives – perhaps we never had such a relationship or maybe we once did but our life's focus has taken us elsewhere. I could be wrong, but I believe that Temple Beth Shalom offers something for all of our lives – not the same "something" for each of us – but *at least* some one thing that can make our lives in a small or large way richer and more fulfilling. No matter where you are in your own life's journey – I invite you to step into community life in a new way during the coming year. Further, I invite you to contact me personally if you want to explore how you might do so. Our Member Relations Committee in partnership with other committees and professional staff will be working this year to figure out how we can better make connections between each of us and our community, in some cases simply by extending a hand when we may just need an invitation.

The third goal I would like to describe relates to our building. As R'Jay and R'Todd discussed on Rosh Hashanah, we launched an effort earlier this year to assess our space needs. We are referring to this work as our *Mikdash* or "sacred space" initiative. We began this work out of necessity. Portions of our building are falling apart and not worthy of repair. Other spaces are simply inadequate to meet our needs. Our building was constructed for a congregation half our size. Anyone who has seen our children learning in hallways – tried to reserve a space at the temple for a program or meeting and been told that none are available – or visited the cramped office of R'Todd or of our executive director Daniel Barkowitz who works in a windowless converted closet, knows we are long past the time when the building could accommodate our needs. In fact, our building has become an impediment to our congregational life.

Because of this necessity to act, we will spend considerable time this year talking to all of you through parlor meetings. These meetings serve as venues for education and discussion, including the assessment of our current space and both current and future needs, concepts and elements recommended by the architects we engaged, and next steps in considering design, site considerations,

cost, and congregational commitment. These meetings are an opportunity for you to offer feedback, ask questions, and share your interests in our space.

We've only had a few so far, so don't be concerned if you haven't yet received an invitation. You will receive one soon to participate in a future parlor meeting. The drawings in the atrium represent images of the concept that we are currently considering. Let me emphasize that this is not our adopted plan – in fact, we don't have one yet. Our final building project will emerge as our parlor meetings and feasibility work proceed.

These three initiatives are just three of eight, so you can see that we have a lot to handle. The fourth and final goal that I will mention is ensuring effective financial management of the temple. Over the last few years our temple's excellent financial leaders worked extremely hard to balance our desire to retain our stellar clergy and professional staff, including our teachers and learning guides, and keep Temple Beth Shalom dues and tuition affordable. I must confess, it has not been easy. We are currently developing a multi-year plan to manage our operational budget – separate and apart from any building project. It is to support our temple operations that we hold our annual Shofar Appeal during the High Holy Days. You all should have received a brochure within the past few days for the Shofar Appeal. I ask that you support the appeal as generously as you are able. The dollars go to support our temple operations and are a necessary source of revenue in our budget.

In closing, I've tried to share why I believe that Temple Beth Shalom is a rare and extraordinary congregation. We will maintain that status by continuing to be a caring community, and by continually identifying and pursuing ways to bring us together at different times, in different ways, to study, inspire, celebrate, act, pray, share and ultimately, elevate our lives to a place to which they would otherwise not rise.

L'shana tovah. I wish you and your families a New Year of good health, happiness and much sweetness.