

Rosh Hashanah 2017

This morning, I am profoundly honored to stand before you on the first Rosh Hashanah of my term as your president. As I was considering what to say today, a thought occurred to me. Most people never get the opportunity, if that's what it is, to speak in front of a group this large. Could be daunting. But surprisingly, I'm not nervous. OK, maybe a little. But I'm not that nervous because I am not speaking to any large crowd. I am speaking to you, the members of Temple B'nai Abraham. My fellow congregants, my community, my TBA family.

What is a congregation? What is a community?

Webster's defines a congregation as "an assembly of persons, especially an assembly of persons met for worship and religious instruction." It goes on to refer to a congregation as "a religious community." It also says that a congregation is "the act or an instance of congregating or bringing together."

A community is a group having common interests, policies, character, or location.

TBA is a community, but it is not just any community. We are linked by our commitment to something greater than our local concerns. We have a common interest in Judaism and all that it encompasses.

As we face the future, we recognize that our congregation, like all families, must anticipate and adapt to changing circumstances. We need to plan carefully for our synagogue's future. I am confident that we are ready to face the future; that we will continue to thrive.

TBA is many things to each of us. It is a place to worship. It is a place of education. It is a place to socialize. It is where the good work of Tikkun Olam – healing the world – begins and takes place. TBA is a place where people should be made to feel welcome, where each of you should feel like an important participant in our congregational community.

When Susan and I first joined TBA, we felt welcome right away. I mentioned earlier that I feel like TBA is my family. It really is. To those of you who are new to our congregational family, and this year we have over 50 new member families, welcome. To our not-so-new members, I hope that you continue to feel welcome, that you continue to participate in our community.

I want to take this opportunity to say a few words to our new members who come to us from Temple Emanu-El. I know that the closing of Emanu-El was painful for many of you, who invested so much of yourselves in that institution. I understand how you feel. I grew up at Temple Emanu-El. I became a Bar Mitzvah there. I know the sense of loss. I say to you now that you are welcome here at Temple B'nai Abraham. Please consider yourselves to be valued members of our community. I hope that over time, TBA will truly become your home.

Vital to our synagogue is that it be a safe place for us to gather. As I'm sure you all know, the safety of our local and wider world is a major issue today. During the six months of my tenure, we have acted to bolster the security of our building and property. The security presence has been increased. We now have guards on site whenever children are in the building. There are more and better security cameras on the property. We remain vigilant.

In our community, many of us play different parts. To the members who volunteer their time in various ways, you help to keep us going. To those who donate financially, thank you. Your continued support is vital. TBA could not continue without it. To those who come

to worship and to study, I hope that your needs are fulfilled here, in our sacred space.

To keep our congregation thriving, we need the spiritual leadership of our clergy. Here at TBA, we are truly blessed to have Rabbi Kulwin, Rabbi Dantowitz, and Cantor Epstein. Thank you to each of you for leading us in prayer, for teaching us, for helping us to celebrate simchas, and for comforting us at times of need and loss.

Education of the next generation is essential. We owe a deep debt of gratitude to our Director of Jewish Learning Melissa Weiner, to Early School Director Debbie Ziering, and to the teachers and staff of the schools. You do a most important job and you do it very very well.

Anyone who spends any time at all in this amazing building knows how much we owe to Facilities Manager Tracey Bent and his staff. You do an incredible job with incredible dedication. Thank you.

Our administrative staff truly does a wonderful job. Each of you goes above and beyond in all your efforts. I think it's because you truly care about each of us, the congregants, and our needs and well-being. Thank you.

To Gail Milchman, our Executive Director, words can barely express my appreciation for all that you do. You lead and supervise the staff with skill and professionalism. You are on top of everything that is going on. Congregants are blessed by your caring, your expertise and your experience. You have wisdom and excellent judgment. Speaking personally, it is a pleasure to work with you.

As our community begins this New Year, I am sure that together we will face challenges. We will experience joy and we will experience sadness. Things that we cannot predict will occur. Whatever happens, please know that TBA is your community, your congregation, your family.

I wish all of you a sweet, happy, healthy, and prosperous New Year. From my family and me to yours, L'Shana Tovah.