

Why Does a Thriving Jewish Community Like Ours Matter?

Shanah Tovah.

I am Jeffrey Shapiro and am honored to serve as president of Temple Beth Shalom. Serving our community is one of the great blessings of my life.

In preparing for today, I thought about how I might be a leader and take the stress out of delivering High Holy Day words for generations of temple presidents yet to come – for a fleeting moment - I thought this would be the perfect time to transition to the Silent Prayer ! And then take my seat! It was a thought, just a thought!

As a communal leader I have the unique opportunity to witness, first-hand, the ways that TBS is invited to enrich the lives of those in our community and beyond.

Our reach is multigenerational and incorporates, worship, learning, social action, social justice, environmental action, community building, social engagement and so much more.

I speak to you today, sharing what is truly in my heart, and on this Holy Day when we gather together as a congregation, the question in my heart is, **“Why Does a Thriving Jewish Community Like Ours Matter?”**

- It is estimated that less than 100,00 Jews who survived the Holocaust are alive today¹
- Holocaust denial and anti-Semitism on Social Media, increased 30% from 2016 to 2018,²

¹ down from 500,000 in 2014, according to the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany

² on Social Media, from 2016 to January 2018, According to the World Jewish Congress

- There was a 60% increase in anti-Semitic incidents in 2017 over the prior year and a 90% increase in k-12 classroom anti-Semitic incidents across the US³
- It is almost one year ago that we assembled in this sanctuary with our Needham neighbors and clergy from all-faiths to mourn the tragedy at the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh, which was followed by the tragedy at the Chabad of Poway

Given these realities, **a strong temple community like ours is even more important because the synagogue is...**

- a central hub for our culture, our people, its history and a place to learn the painful truth of the Holocaust;
- Our synagogue is a place to assemble, to fight anti-Semitism, bigotry and hate in all its forms and against all humanity;
- It is a place to pray as a community, in words and song as our tradition compels us to do - a manner that cannot be fully replicated when we pray alone;
- Our synagogue is a place to share life's blessings and sadness;
- It is a place where friendships begin, flourish, and are nurtured; and
- A place where relationships and inclusion are part of the fabric of everyday life.

Throughout the history of our people, we have had many enemies that have tried to destroy us. In our darkest hours while no one could stop us from praying and being Jewish in our hearts - they could and did stop us from praying and gathering as a congregation.

For these reasons – and for so many more - a thriving Jewish Community matters. Each one of us, alone decides - okay maybe with a little Jewish guilt - whether we live our Judaism alone or as part of a

³ According to the ADL

community. However, in order to have that choice to make, there needs to be a strong congregational option to choose.

In addition to providing us a choice, the existence of a vibrant Jewish community is critical to demonstrate to our children, to future generations and to the world, that the strength of our people is one of resolve and determination.

How is it that despite the rise of unaffiliated Jews in America, here at TBS we have a thriving community? Geography and demographics play a role, of course; however, the more significant part of the equation is the thoughtful and deliberative actions we take as a community.

We strive to be inviting, inclusive and welcoming; across the ages and generations and we thoughtfully meet people where they are in their Jewish journeys. Some hear our call in the sanctuary, others through our child or adult learning programs, others through our social action or social justice work, our Israel connections, and the opportunities to engage socially with one another.

In the end, what door you enter never matters as much as the simple fact that you are here. Jews by birth, by choice, and those who are not Jewish but connect to Judaism through their loved ones are equally part of our community.

This is who we are at TBS. If we continue to stay relevant, we will flourish, if we do not - our long-term future is less certain.

Last year, our TBS community responded to our 2020 Vision Strategic Plan through more than two dozen “TBS Tomorrow” conversations, leadership meetings, and a congregation-wide survey that invited comments, questions, and input. More than 300 individuals, representing the full spectrum of the congregation, participated.

Since the 2020 Vision was adopted, we have taken many significant actions including engaging our new Assistant Rabbi, Julie Bressler, who has already added so much to our community.

Our member commitment and tuition do not provide the 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. Additionally, we remain absolutely committed to ensuring that a household's finances never become a barrier to becoming a member of our community. We are proud of this....and happy to welcome everyone!

During the year we sponsor only two formal congregational fundraising programs, **Our Shofar Appeal** which includes the opportunity to dedicate a sanctuary chair in honor or in memory of a special person – which is currently taking place -- at this very moment -- as I am speaking with you -- like right now! And our spring “**L’Chaim**” fundraising event.

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 become the community that we aspire to be. As you consider your family's immediate charitable giving and your long-term legacy plan, I warmly invite you to include Temple Beth Shalom.

For those that are still uncertain as to why a thriving Jewish community matters, I encourage you to join us in a few hours for our Afternoon Service. Collectively, we will experience one of the most moving rituals of the year here at TBS. When we rise as one Jewish Community and honor the Torah Scroll rescued during the Holocaust from a congregation in Soboslav, Czechoslovakia.

This Torah is on permanent loan to TBS from the Westminster Memorial Scroll Trust, with appreciation to Patti & Louis Grossman who helped to bring this sacred scroll to our congregation. I cannot

imagine a more compelling ceremony to demonstrate why assembling as a Jewish community continues to matter - as this scroll – intended by the Nazis to be part of a museum to a lost race – is read from in our extraordinarily inspiring, living Jewish community.

I look forward to continuing our community's exciting journey together, as we make Temple Beth Shalom the most meaningful and joyful community that it can be – for us, for our collective children and grandchildren, and for future generations.

Lisa, and our sons, Joshua and Benjamin, join with me in wishing you and your family a very special, sweet and healthy 5780.

May you be inscribed in the Book of Life.

L'Shana Tova