

Wendy Gutterson 2022

It's so good to be here with all of you today in person or via livestream. I'm Wendy Gutterson and it is truly my honor to serve as President of this amazing temple congregation. I sincerely thank each of you for allowing me this opportunity.

Often when I mention to acquaintances my role as temple president, their response is "*How did you get roped into that?*" or "*Hmm, how is that going?*" or just simply "*Why?*" Clearly, these are individuals who don't know us, who don't know Temple Beth Shalom. By way of contrast, I will share that when talking with TBS Past Presidents I hear comments such as "*They were the best two years of my life*", "*I would do it all over again*", "*It's an incredible privilege and I hope you enjoy it as much as I did*". I want to publicly thank our past presidents for their encouragement and for all of their contributions that have helped make our community so special, so vibrant, and such an honor to serve.

When I first walked into our building 26 years ago, the pre-Mikdash version of our building, I never could have imagined that I would become part of the lay leadership team, let alone stand here as your temple president. My children were small, and it was my husband David's idea to look for a temple home. Having never belonged to a temple before, I didn't know what to expect or what it would mean to join. I had no idea how much I would learn, how many friends I would make, or just how much my Temple Beth Shalom participation would change me personally. One of my highlights was learning to read Hebrew and ultimately becoming adult b'mitzvah in 2005. Looking back, I realize that my very first experience was grounded in, what has now become, one of my favorite Torah stories – Abraham and Sarah's tent. Frankly, back then, I didn't even know people had favorite Torah stories.

Certainly, Abraham and Sarah can be seen as role models for graciousness and generosity in welcoming. When I read this story, I see so much more than a tent serving as a friendly stopping point on a long journey. To me, Sarah and Abraham's tent is a guidepost for an engaged life and thus the image of our own Temple Beth Shalom community.

Our tradition shares that the tent was open on all sides to welcome travelers coming from all directions. I translate this to our own TBS experience of welcoming each of us, regardless of the path *we* followed to arrive here. In *our* Jewish community, we strive to be open, to listen and learn, to accept and respect, and we welcome the chance to engage.

Sometimes, we come together in large groups – as we are gathered today in worship to reflect on the past year and think ahead to how we might be the best version of ourselves in the coming year. Other times, we might be part of a smaller Temple Beth Shalom community- for example, a 10<sup>th</sup> grade confirmation class, a children’s center picnic, or Saturday morning Torah study. Each of these TBS communities is different, with a different purpose, a different size, and a different constellation of congregants. But all of them share the characteristics which embody our community – caring and kindness, warmth and vibrancy, and an openness that welcomes you to come and stay a while – which is exactly the Welcome Corp Greeting I imagine you would have received when approaching Abraham and Sarah’s tent.

There are so many programs, events, and opportunities to step into life at Temple Beth Shalom – way too numerous for me to share here. However, I do want to take a brief moment to mention our Sefer Torah Project. As you likely know, our community has engaged a torah scribe, Soferet Ariela Housman to scribe a beautiful new Torah for us. This Torah, and the story of its creation will become part of our own TBS history. For many of you in our Mayim program, this Torah is yours – you will read from it at your b’mitzvah. However, I want to emphasize that this Torah is not just for students. It is truly for all of us. And for anyone who has not yet participated in a scribing ritual and seen our torah up close, I want to make sure you know that Soferet Ariela will be here for a week at the end of this month – and I am extending a personal invitation to each of you to contact me, Bernice Sue Behar, or Rachel Happel to join one of our upcoming scribing sessions and see *our Torah* come to life. Scribing sessions are open to all so please reach out to reserve your spot. You can reach us through the TBS website or the Sefer Torah Project newsletter than was emailed earlier this week.

As I stated earlier, serving as president of Temple Beth Shalom is an absolute joy and a true privilege. However, there is one part of this role that can be, well, uncomfortable – asking for your additional financial support. While our amazing community is funded in large part by your membership commitment and learning program tuition, the reality is that adequately serving our community also requires our shared philanthropy. For those of you who have already contributed to the Annual Fund, I thank you for your generosity. For those of you who haven’t done so, or for those who can perhaps do a little more, I’m inviting you to join me and David in making a gift that is meaningful to you and to our community. Whatever your gift, I thank you and appreciate that your participation will help Temple Beth Shalom continue to add that something extra, that something special that makes us just as open and accessible as Sarah and Abraham’s tent.

David, Sam, Tzipora, and Adam join me in wishing you and those you love a new year filled with much sweetness, good health, and abundant joy. Thank you and Shana Tovah.