

President's Address: Rosh Hashanah 5777

L'shanah tovah, a very sweet New Year to you all. If you happened to have been here last year for the High Holidays, I gave my President's address on the morning of Yom Kippur, and I treated you to (or subjected you to, depending on how you liked it) a discussion comparing the metabolic response to fasting to the workings of a synagogue community. This year, I'd like to aim a little higher than the stomach: the heart and the head; what we feel and what we dream.

We are all sitting here together tonight because of a dream imagined by a group of Jewish pioneers on the Shoreline, many of whom are sitting among us this evening. In 1970, a group of Jewish families along the Shoreline came together to form the Shoreline Community Jewish Organization, in order to pray together, study together, and create a communal Jewish presence in the area. They met in each other's homes, held religious school classes in area churches, and like our ancestors, transported a Torah and portable ark around wherever it was needed. Desiring a more permanent home, our founding congregants purchased this plot of land, built this edifice, and named it Temple Beth Tikvah, House of Hope, reflecting the optimism and faith they had in establishing a permanent Jewish presence here in Madison. Our synagogue was officially dedicated at Shabbat services on May 13, 1977, and as I hope you know we will be celebrating our 40th anniversary of our synagogue at a wonderful gala on May 13, 2017; I would tell you to "save the date" but I know all of your phones are off.

I try to imagine the challenges and uncertainties these families faced: Where do we settle? Do we even dare to build? Will we be accepted? Today, we are the beneficiaries of the success of their hard work and vision. Temple Beth Tikvah remains a strong, vital presence, attracting families

from New Haven to Old Saybrook, desiring those same opportunities: to pray, to learn, to be together Jewishly.

Today, our uncertainties and challenges are different, perhaps a little more abstract in their articulation, but just as critical to our survival: In an era of competing priorities, alternative social communities, and financial limitations, how do we continue to thrive? Our Board wrestles with these questions on a regular basis, and they go right to the core of our communal identity: Why are we here? What purpose do we serve? What do we aspire to be? How do we remain RELEVANT and VITAL to our community?

The answers are not simple. A generation ago, when you moved to a new neighborhood, you joined the synagogue. That's just what you did. Programs and activities that were responsive to congregants' needs 40 years ago, or even 20 years ago, may not resonate as well today. Jewish learning is available 24/7, on-line, at the touch of a button. Social media has enabled virtual connectivity to Jews both local and global. The very basic notion of "membership" is changing. Jewish clergy and lay leaders frequently look at these trends and lament the incipient demise of the synagogue, but I disagree. We just have to have the courage and vision to not only accept these realities, but to fully understand them, learn from them, embrace them, to see what is important and vital to people today, and then we will continue to thrive.

One of my best Bar Mitzvah gifts was a beautiful SLR camera. It had great features: a wide range of shutter speeds, F-stops, selection of zoom and telephoto lenses, and took beautiful pictures. But as wonderful as all the features were, it was big, heavy, and difficult to take pictures quickly. I used it for special occasions: holidays, special events, or projects. Compare this to the cameras of today: the cameras today are not even standalone devices; they are fully integrated into our cellphones. Who could have imagined 20 years ago that every single person would walk around every day with a camera, and use it, not just to document special events, but the

fabric of their daily lives? What is “snapchat” but quite literally the phenomenon of talking with pictures?

This is I think a good metaphor for our thinking about our synagogue: ultimately it doesn't matter what kind of features or programs we have if they are utilized only for special occasions; but if we can be vital and responsive to the new ways in which we learn, socialize, and interact, if we can be fully and seamlessly integrated into the every-day lives and experiences of our community and congregants, then we will continue to be truly successful.

For this, we need you. As Lewis Carroll said, “When you don't know where you're going, any road will take you there.” Or perhaps even more relevant, Yogi Berra's version: “If you don't know where you're going, you'll probably end up somewhere else.” As we pause to reflect and celebrate the last 40 years of TBT, we also look ahead to the next 40; your goals and desires for the future of our synagogue will shape our work in the months and years to come. We will solicit your opinions, dreams, and goals in multiple ways this year – events, surveys, conversations both formal and informal; please be vocal and participatory. Tell us what TBT means to you, how it influences your life; how it doesn't; what you want our physical space to reflect; what you want our values to reflect, in what you would invest. Let us continue the work started over 40 years ago to make this our House of Hope.

On behalf of our TBT Board of Directors, my wife Jodie, my girls Becca and Ellie, and Mimi the wonderdog, I would like to wish you and your loved ones L'shanah tovah, and G'mar hatimah tovah, may you be inscribed for a good year.

Stu Weinzimer,

President, TBT Board of Directors