

TBT PRESIDENT'S HIGH HOLIDAY SPEECH 5778

Jeffrey Babbin

Sept. 29, 2017 (Kol Nidre service)

Shana Tova.

We've come together to celebrate the High Holidays in what is the 41st year of Temple Beth Tikvah. But is it the 41st year of our congregation? The history of our congregation lists 1970 as the year when a number of families came together to form the Shoreline Community Jewish Organization. They didn't require a building to be a congregation. Yet, then why do we mark our existence from the opening of a building in 1977?

Undoubtedly, a building is a tangible sign of our presence on the shoreline, our dedication to nurturing a shoreline Jewish community. It is an expression of hope – our house of hope or Beth Tikvah – where our congregants came together to dream and plan for themselves, their children, and their future congregants.

So, perhaps the building is indeed the focus of our congregation. Yet, when I think of TBT and what I value from being a member, is it the physical plant that immediately comes to mind? The driveway with its hairpin turns and fading lines in gravel? The patio with its wavy, uneven flooring? Perhaps not.

Instead, the images that come to mind when I think of TBT are its people and their spirit. I think of my fellow Board and committee members who volunteer out of their love for this place and work together on a sacred mission. I think of Kim and Bonnie in the office who brilliantly and tirelessly keep this place running and serve new and old members. I think of Len and Dyanna who maintain our physical plant and make us comfortable when we're at services or TBT events. And of course I think of our clergy, the Rabbi and Cantor, who pour their heart and soul – and their brains, too – into creating meaningful experiences, worship, education, and counseling. And who give us services like the one on Erev Rosh Hashanah where their words and song, mixed in with the choir, gave me spiritual goose bumps. Hearing the choir and congregation sing Avinu Malkeinu on Wednesday evening last week made me think that I was definitely in the right building – the right place.

So, as we go forward in this anniversary year, should we focus on the building or focus on the people and their spiritual needs? Will it surprise you that I say we need to do both? This reminds me, believe it or not, of a story I once heard about the making of Pink Floyd's classic 1973 album *Dark Side of the Moon*. The lyricist (who played bass) wanted to emphasize the words and themes. The guitarist wanted to focus on the music, as the vehicle to carry the words – to get people to tune in and hear the lyrics. The creative collaboration resulted in just the right combination of elements to create the most enduring rock album of all time, spending 14 consecutive years on the Billboard Top 200 chart of album sales.

We have the opportunity at TBT to attain something similar, albeit on a much smaller and more personal scale: the *words* of prayer, education, and community – and a *building* to *carry* those words forward and ensure they are heard for another 40 or more years. The first phase of that

project, under the leadership of Sandy Brand and Paul Beckman, brought us together to gather your ideas for how we envision our building over the decades to come. We are now in the next phase, with Bruce Topolosky organizing our building project and Suzy Frisch, Shaun Glazier, and others too numerous to name overseeing the framework to determine what we need the building to do, and what *we* want to do *in* the building – and to grow our endowment to create a secure foundation for many consecutive years of success on the Billboard chart of top synagogues.

But none of this is any good if we build walls just to hide behind them and focus only on ourselves. At a time when progressive, pluralistic societies are facing challenges, whether here or in Israel, it would be easy to turn inward, and take refuge in our own homes and synagogues. While these are of course not to be ignored, it's also all the more reason to be reaching outward, to not shy from the challenge. We must emphasize social justice in the U.S., Israel, and elsewhere. That is why our clergy and many of our congregants have supported organizations in Israel promoting egalitarian worship and civil rights. And it is why our clergy and congregants have reached out to other faiths in this area, to work collaboratively on several projects, from resettling refugees to combatting prejudice. The different faiths all have their own buildings, but they are not edifices; they are not fortresses. TBT has developed strong ties to the greater Shoreline religious community, celebrating our shared values and working together toward *tikkun olam* or repairing the world.

Our mission statement is about interconnected community, but we cannot stay connected if the outside world's own connections are beginning to rot. There are politicians who say we must look only inward. Yet, to borrow the name of a song on the album I mentioned, there is no "us and them." Everyone is "us." Let us use this day of atonement, this day of reflection and thinking about the year ahead, to consider how to make our space here on the shoreline work to promote tolerance, diversity, respect, friendship, and community.

There will be several opportunities over the next year to shape our building and endowment efforts so they reflect the goals *you* all are setting for this congregation. As part of that effort, some of us will write lyrics; and some will make music – and some will put them together to create a cohesive and enduring masterwork. That effort will take what appears only to be walls, floors, and a roof and truly make it a synagogue.

On behalf of our Board of Directors, myself, and my family – my wife, Marlene Schwartz, and our daughters Anna, Charlotte & Molly – we wish you a sweet, healthy, and productive new year. G'mar Tov.