

I am thrilled to be able to address all of you face to face. I am very excited about the future of Temple Beth Am and I welcome this opportunity to share some of my thoughts and ideas with you.

Our numbers now hover around 400+ families. My primary goal, as the spiritual leader of this congregation which has been my family's home for over two decades, is to create the kind of community in which each and every member has a valued place. And I have specific plans on how to reach that goal.

When we all return after the summer, the first thing that will greet us is the High Holidays. I'm sure there are those that are wondering what Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur will look like this year. Well my friends, they will be very similar to what they were before. We will pray from the Gates of Repentance. We will say the familiar words of the *Un'taneh Tokef* and *B'rosh Hashana* that remind us of the awesomeness of the days. We will hear sermons that hope to inspire and provoke thoughtful discussion. We will see friends and reconnect with our greater temple family. I will deliver sermons with the intent to inspire and provoke thought. We will sing the beautiful melodies that are reserved for only these holidays. And we will welcome the year 5771 as a community with Jews all over the world. Our high holidays will be a time for reflection, renewal and rejuvenation.

Additionally, on Yom Kippur afternoon, we will replace some of the readings with a healing service. We will have the chance to come together to pray for the well-being of friends and family. While we still rely on the medical community for the physical procedures to cure our illnesses and manage our pain, our collective voices praying and singing are a source of healing for all of our souls, and Yom Kippur afternoon is the perfect time for us to share in that universal need.

Our Shabbat evening worship will include all the familiar rituals that give us the comfort we are seeking when we go to temple. We will continue to pray in the same style that we have been praying for the last few years as we encourage involvement from more of our members. I will bestow more honors, including carrying the Torah scrolls around the sanctuary, opening and closing the ark and leading

text study discussions, to make the services more participatory and encourage greater attendance.

Our Saturday morning minyan continues to be one of the hidden gems of Temple Beth Am. This warm and welcoming group will continue to meet every week in the library and will be led by Rabbi Splansky and me on alternating weeks. Regular members of the minyan have also expressed an interest in leading the services themselves more often, so I have made sure to build that into the calendar for next year as well.

Once a month, our Shabbat evening worship includes a Tot Shabbat, a Shabbat dinner and a Family Service. Our new Tot Shabbat service will be updated from what was done in the past. At the last URJ biennial in Toronto, I participated in a workshop on making Tot Shabbat more meaningful for our youngest members, and I plan to incorporate the lessons from that workshop into our own Tot Shabbat services.

The Shabbat dinner which falls in between Tot Shabbat and the Family Service will now be run by room parents from every grade who will organize one dinner per year for their own child's grade. I have appointed a Room Parent Coordinator, and she will prepare the room parents and give them instructions on how to coordinate the parents' responsibilities. We saw this work beautifully this past year when some of the Jr. Choir parents organized the food for the *Zimriyah*. In addition to the beautiful music in the sanctuary, there was a flurry of activity behind the scenes as the Jr. Choir parents and Sisterhood members overwhelmingly responded with baked goods and snacks and volunteered their time and energy to help set everything up so that our choir and our guests could have a lovely dessert buffet after the performances. It was volunteerism at its best, and this is the kind of community-building activity that we can easily incorporate into our monthly Shabbat dinners. Not only will more of our members be involved, but it will be an opportunity for those members who do not know the parents of their children's classmates to meet others and make new friends in the process.

And the increased participation of our members is not only for those with children. Our seniors make up a very important group at TBA. I

will be initiating a monthly luncheon for those members who would like come to the temple and enjoy some camaraderie. Each attendee will bring his/her own lunch and we will sit together in the social hall and have discussions on various topics that are of interest to all. There will be opportunities to ask questions about the changes that have taken place in our worship styles and the trends in the Reform movement, and engage in meaningful discussions and lively conversations about relevant Jewish topics. I see these Cantor's Coffees as an opportunity to include our long-time members in the process of moving our temple forward, as well as to learn from their wisdom and experience.

In 2008, our maestro, Stan Schertzer, began writing original music for the prayers to our Shabbat Unplugged service. Every couple of months for the last year and a half, we have introduced a new piece that Stan has written into our regular Shabbat Unplugged service. On April 11<sup>th</sup>, our Shabbat Unplugged band made a recording of all of Stan's Friday evening music. That CD is currently being printed and we will soon have copies available for sale as a fundraiser for the temple, and more importantly, so that our members can listen to the CD's at home or in their cars and learn the music so they can participate even more actively in our Shabbat Unplugged services. Additionally, the CD will become a wonderful gift to give to our new temple members as we welcome them into our community. Once the CD is out and available and people have the chance to learn all the new music whenever they want, we will be able to switch some of the Shabbat Unplugged music around on Friday evenings, doing some of Stan's pieces and some of the older pieces each month, so that everyone hears and has an opportunity to sing along with their favorites.

While we were recording the CD, I also recorded two prayers of healing (Heal us Now by Cantor Leon Sher and Mi Shebeirakh by Debbie Friedman) and the studio has provided me with professional MP3 files of them. When I hear of a member of our community who is ill, I will not only be able to call or visit them, but give them a CD of these healing prayers for them to listen to when I am not there. In times of distress, the power of music and prayer is incredible and I hope this will serve as one more way to personally reach out to each and every member of our temple community.

I am very grateful to the lay leadership of this congregation for the support they have shown during this past year, and for the support guidance I know they will continue to provide as we move forward. President Rick Davis has led our congregation through the year 5770 and we are all grateful to him for his unwavering leadership. I am confident that Temple Beth Am will come through this time as a strong, vibrant and welcoming community. I am fortunate to have my colleague and my friend, Rabbi Don Splansky, in the community and I know I will rely on him for scholarly advice. Our Director of Education, Rabbi Amanda Lurer, is a tremendous asset, not only to our religious school, but to our entire temple. I am very excited that our b'nei mitzvah students will have the chance to study with her as they prepare their *divrei Torah*. Her knowledge of Torah and her passion for teaching will truly shine in the coming year. Our Youth Educator, Jaime Brody, continually amazes me with her energy for our kids, and I must say how lucky we are to have her at the helm of our youth groups. Our school will continue to run smoothly in all ways administrative because of Jami Schultz's skills. Her dedication goes far beyond that of a typical part-time employee, and she combines organizational abilities with humor to make the school run well and be a fun place for our teachers and our students.

The one person that I have leaned upon the most and will be relying on during this next year is our Administrator, Ellen Jagher. Ellen provides the friendly voice to those who call on the phone and the warm welcome to those who walk in the front door. She is knowledgeable, capable and warm, and has shown extraordinary dedication to Temple Beth Am. I am most grateful that she will be by my side throughout this transition and that she will provide continuity and experience to the daily running of this temple.

My friends, this is truly an opportunity for all of us. I have heard the feedback from the Community Conversations and I want you to know that I have taken your comments to heart. I am listening to what you want and what you need, and combining that with my years of schooling and experience. I love this temple with all my heart, and I pledge to do everything within my power, to use all the resources that my education and experience have provided me, to work with all of

you to create a place of strength and beauty, of spirituality and learning, a place filled with God's spirit and human kindness.

My hope is that one year from now, Temple Beth Am will be known as the temple where people reach out to one another during times of celebration and sadness, the temple with programming for **all** of its members, the temple where prayer is participatory and powerful and the temple where one can live one's Jewish values as a part of a *kehillah kedoshah*, a holy community.

Warmly,

Cantor Jodi Schechtman