

**Lorna Siepser  
President's Greeting  
Rosh Hashanah Morning 5771**

Welcome and Shana Tova,

It gives me great joy to see our 700 plus Beth El families together this morning. This is one of a few days each year when we can count on us all being together. For some of you, today and Yom Kippur may be the only times you are here. For others, your children bring you here for classes, B'nai Mitzvah celebrations, youth group activities. Still others follow our religious tradition attending Erev Shabbat services and reciting Kaddish annually for loved ones. But, many of you have tapped into the great open secret about our temple. It's a great place to spend time, be inspired and feel the joy of participation in something important, a place where you as a Jew or a member of a Jewish family can feel safe, where you can feel true connection, and where you can choose from an enormous array of social, cultural, intellectual, religious and spiritual activities in which to participate. This temple is a place like none other. Our school volunteer days pass as our children grow, sports clubs and activities pass as our interests change, our friends may move away, our pastimes through-out life ebb and flow....but your temple, your faith community will always be here for you...period.

So I guess what I'm saying is: this ain't your Bubbe's temple of yester year!

What do I mean by that? Of course, this is a religious organization, we mark the important life events here – births, deaths b'nai mitzvahs, weddings, confirmation, and our beloved holidays and festivals. But there is so much more going on today than in Bubbe's time and I'd like to brag about PTBE for a moment!

1. With five enormous and effective social action programs, Beth El is helping to heal the world inside and outside our temple's walls. Hundreds of us are involved in these programs, giving us a meaningful connection to our temple, while tying us to similarly-minded friends. Last year we hosted the working poor through our Home and Hope Committee. With two, two week sessions, we fed, sheltered, entertained and helped folks get back on their feet, and gave them the knowledge that there were caring people at PTBE who were not only rooting for them but standing side by side with them. Our Sunday Sandwich Hevre Program

combined the children and parents from our Education Programs with our Committees members to make 400 lunches twice a month for the hungry served by Samaritan House. Our Civic Interreligious Outreach Committee's ground-breaking friendship making activities with the Muslim and Christian communities was so respected that we had visits to assist both the Consul General of Israel in P.R. ideas, and the Jewish Community Relations Council who asked us to help them write a manual for other faith houses on how to make friends and help ensure peace for Jews in the SF Bay Area. Turning to Tikkun Olam in our own house, our Caring Committee, provided meals, comfort, written notes and their personal support to our members who needed help after illnesses, hospital stays, new babies' arrivals and deaths of loved ones. Our amazing Members Helping Members PTBE Employment Network helped many who found themselves unemployed, or looking for a first job with coaching, interview practice, resume writing, networking and in sixty cases...a new job! Bubbe would be *kvelling!*

2. Our children's Education Programs (what Bubbe used to call Sunday School) have been thoughtfully and professionally developed by our clergy and education experts. We have a tiger by the tail, folks! We even have a new alternative education program for families that meets on specific Friday evenings, Saturday and Sunday mornings. It is called Gesher, or Bridge, and granting foundations have been generous with us as they've seen the potential for ground-breaking advances in Jewish education.
3. Under our clergy team's vision and direction over the past two years, Erev Shabbat is back and thriving at PTBE. Last year we had 300 + temple members join us for our Shabbat Hallelu services the first Friday each month. And our Synaplex Shabbat week-ends were all sold out affairs with a variety of dinners, speakers, parties, and meaningful themed programs.
4. Our community is in an enviable position in comparison to so many other faith communities. We are 750+ families strong and growing, while many temples are facing declines in areas of membership and funding. Thanks to the dedicated work on budget, reporting and systems COO Blair Brown along with our board's treasurer has helped us to better manage our financials each month.

OK...But enough with the bragging!

With a stable and excellent clergy, stable and caring admin. and facilities staff, a growing membership of excited and interested members of all ages, and past leadership that has through dedicated work brought us to this blessed place, we can now look towards creatively executing on ideas that improve how we serve you, how you can connect better to PTBE, and how we improve our temple's facilities, because that is an essential ingredient in all of this. We still do have Bubbe's kitchen, and it needs updating to fully meet today's needs.

Make no mistake, we need you, each of you involved in this process....and you'll see how we're going to do that.

Your Board of Trustees Strategic Planning Committee began addressing these issues well over a year ago when we published our Mission, Values, Goals and our 5 Year Goal. That goal is to have a fully functioning facility that will empower our community to meet the expressed needs and desires of our members as you experience life at PTBE. Of equal importance, we need our members to connect with the temple community in more meaningful and enjoyable activities. We have amazing members with many unique talents, training, qualifications – and we just need to figure out how to have all of us connect and participate in the rich ways of this community...This is not about what you can do for us...this is all about what we can do for you to find a deeper connection here.

These two enormous projects are the focus of our Board's work in the coming year.

This past spring we moved on to Step No. 2 in our Strategic Planning process. We developed a Membership Survey that would give our community information about who we actually are, what we want, what we like and don't like and what we need at PTBE to have the most positive experience in our Jewish lives. Receiving 250 responses for a community of our size would have been a terrific return.

So... we, of course, blew through that number thanks to the 400 of you that returned your membership surveys!

We learned some very interesting facts about our temple community from the Survey, it was a treasure trove of information. We are

delighted with the extraordinarily positive results and plan on addressing other areas in which we could serve you better. I'll give a few teaser high-lights now, but we'll be holding parlor meetings in the later Fall which I hope you'll attend.

1. We are a generous and diverse community. 61% of us were not raised in the Reform movement, and of that group, 23% of us were not raised with a Jewish tradition.
2. Over 70 % of us give gifts to the temple community in addition to our annual dues. Almost 90% of us stated that the motivation for giving was that giving Tzedakah is important to who we are.
3. Our community's overall satisfaction with our temple was very strong!  
Over 91% of the respondents are satisfied and more than satisfied with our temple. Those folks cited first our clergy and then our Shabbat Hallelu and Synaplex services, including our music and cantorial soloist as reasons for their satisfaction.
4. Where we had a great deal of dissatisfaction noted was in our facilities. More than half said that they would not consider using the temple for any life cycle events due to our facilities present state. Folks ranked our Sanctuary as fully meeting their needs, and from there we went down hill. Our Fellowship Hall, other gathering spaces and classrooms were the top areas where your needs are not being satisfied.
5. Even given the number for respondents with children, most said that the bar or bat mitzvah is not a "on/off" switch for membership status at PTBE....many members have a loyalty to our community regardless of their children's age.

At the Parlor meetings in the later Fall we will present more details on our Survey results and you'll be asked to flesh out your answers on key questions for us. We need to know as much as we can in order to move our community forward on the right path for all of us. (this now explains why it took Moses 40 years to get his people to the Promised Land !)

There are life stages to faith communities just as there are stages in our own lives. There is a continuum from building, to growing,

thriving, and yes sometimes, crumbling. There can be renewal, new energy, growth, and re-building with dynamic lay leadership, with clergy who care deeply about their congregants' quality of life, and with community members who are generous in spirit and are willing to financially support the present and future for their children and grandchildren.

With that in mind, I think we all know we are very blessed. I want to thank our visionary senior Rabbi Dennis Eisner, and our clergy team of Rabbi Karen Citrin, Rabbi Micah Citrin, and Cantorial soloist Elana Jagoda for their steadfast devotion to seeing us all as we can be, a preeminent Reform Jewish community where we have a special place to be with each other.

PTBE is the center of our Jewish life. It's not always easy to be Jewish in today's volatile world. We need to stand together to create the strongest community possible. So please contribute to our community's HHD Appeal this year. Our goal is to have us all, at whatever level, contribute to the welfare of our community. Our Board and clergy are 100% in and we'd like you to join us. We will honor all donors in our next edition of the Kolenu. You didn't think you were going to get away without an Ask from your president, did you? Thank you so much for your generosity!

PTBE is an amazing place, we are poised to become all and more of our potential; there is no stopping us now! We are a hot ticket in our world and we have ALL worked hard to get here... come and be a part of this amazing community...You will make your bubbe proud!

Shanah Tovah, our entire board of trustees wishes you a sweet new year!