

President's Remarks
Annual Meeting – June 6, 2016
29 Iyar 5776

Thank you Judy and thanks to everyone who participated in the congregation-wide self-study. It speaks volumes that we had such a high degree of involvement in both the Community Conversations and the online survey.

So, thank you all for coming out this evening to hear about our temple's work and to participate in temple governance.

I have been thinking of this analogy that describes both the work to date and vision for the future here at Shir Tikva. Our liturgy assures us that the Torah is a tree of life to those who hold fast to it. But what are the “roots” of this tree of life? In Hebrew the word for root is “shoresh.” We learn that all Hebrew words have a three-letter root, where additional letters add context and meaning. Our Jewish *identity* has a shoresh: the belief that the world depends on three things: Torah (worship and learning), Tikkun Olam, (repairing the world), and Gemilut Chasadim, (acts of loving kindness.)

But the shoreshim alone are neither a language nor an ethos. The three-letter roots of Hebrew only become a language when other letters are added. And Jewish identity only has meaning when **people** are added.

Every member of this community contributes to strengthening our roots, the roots from which our connections to Jewish life grow here at Shir Tikva. You do this by deepening your connections to Judaism, to one another, and to the world beyond the four walls of our building. We contribute to the health of our vibrant and diverse temple life whenever we participate in some way that feels good to us. And usually we get back even more than we put in.

My task tonight, in part, is to highlight some of the ways in which our community has strengthened our roots during a year filled with growth, change and positive momentum

At the conclusion of last year's Annual Meeting, Jay Gainsboro shared an outline of what we would be doing this year to prepare for a rabbinic transition. There was an enormous amount of work required to ensure that every congregant's needs would be met, not only in the short term, but that we would also conduct a self-study to incorporate every participant's input into the process for finding a new senior rabbi. We were so pleased that so many of you offered to help in so many ways. I must thank Jay, Matt Langweber and Sander Rikleen who led the Transition Team. Without their roadmap, we couldn't have achieved such a thorough process. We established three primary task forces: **Operations**, led by Cathy and Alan Regensberger, which managed the logistics of day-to-day temple life including staffing coverage,

scheduling, budgeting and overall continuity of services;

Congregational Engagement, led by Peter and Jill Abend – which planned and helped execute the 15 peer group meetings to provide the key inputs to the Rabbinic Search Committee and also planned many of the congregational social events; and the **Rabbi Search** team led by Judy Kaye. Each of these teams has done an outstanding job thanks in large part to the skill and dedication of their leaders and volunteers.

There are so many other highlights of the year to share with you, and I will try to cover them quickly. First, our lay leaders needed support, and in October we started our year with a Leadership Kallah where Rabbi Jan Offel, an expert in change management from the URJ, came to speak with us about best practices during a transition. In November, David Trietsch, the Founding Director of the Leadership Development Institute at CJP led our Board of Trustees through an exercise to help us better understand our own personal experience so that we could better lead the congregation. In December we had a beautiful celebration of Chanukah, and we honored Rabbi Gold's gifts to our community as we said good bye.

As you may recall, we had several discussions about the benefits of hiring an interim rabbi rather than heading straight into a new senior rabbi search. We received consistent advice that hiring a professional interim rabbi to help us navigate the transition and then be fully ready to

search for a new senior rabbi was the best choice for many reasons. By mid-December our Interim Rabbi Search Committee had selected a stellar candidate, and as you all now know, the congregation voted on January 11th to accept the recommendation that Rabbi Douglas Kohn join us **next month** as our Interim Rabbi. The Search Committee's work will continue, as Judy just described, to find a new senior rabbi for next year.

And while all of this was happening, our Education Task Force led by Rabbi Gubitz continued to develop its cornerstones for learning and innovation for our religious school; and the Early Learning Center continued growing thanks to Sandy Gold's leadership and the hard work of the ELC task force led by Amanda Sonis Glynn and Stefanie Janoff. That group is now transitioning into a more strategic Advisory Panel as the school matures.

Other accomplishments this year furthered our Chazon efforts. We created a "**Prayer Book Companion**" which explains our worship services to those who might not be familiar with Jewish liturgy. The Ritual Committee also created and published a **Shiva Minyan Prayer Book** for services in a time of mourning. We continued **Family Promise** led by Cindy Lombardo and Wendy Newman where TST hosts families in transition for several weeks during the year; we **selected an architectural firm** to listen to our space needs and present us with

various options thanks to the Building Improvement Committee led by Ed Perlman, Carole Bellman and Nancy Rossman; and we continued offering innovative programming through our **Center for Spirituality** led by Jeff Maimon, Caryl Shaw and Cantor Schachner. **Adult Learning** led by Marcus Cohn brought us inspirational speakers and opportunities for continuing education of all kinds.

Worth mentioning is one other committee that has been revived this year, the **Jewish Communal Relations** Committee led by Joyce Pastor. This team, based on a suggestion from Marilyn Newman, brought us one of the highlights of the year when we celebrated Shabbat with members from the Islamic Center of Boston and then observed prayer at the Mosque and ate dinner as one community. For anyone who participated, it was a truly historic and emotional experience. That night really *felt* like a tree of life. Didn't it?

We nurtured community in new ways this year. There were Sunday morning brunches where we simply schmoozed and ate bagels together. There was the Bernstein on Broadway concert which honored our founding choir members, and there was the Scotch and Brisket bake off which attracted a new group of participants... (And while nurturing a sense of "community" is a wonderful notion, nurturing it with 12 year old single malt is true genius.) It is worth noting that many of the events I just mentioned have been cross-congregational – not limited by one

group or another. The comradery and shared experience has brought our community closer together. And, here's a plug for the June 20th Family Golf and Tennis Outing. Please register soon!

It would not be possible for us to do so much of what we do without the financial support of our donors. I am so proud to note that 100% of our Board of Trustees have contributed to this year's annual fund. Thank you to Susan Benjamin and Laurene Sperling who have led our development effort this year.

Life at Shir Tikva is strong and growing stronger every day. You have asked for more transparency in temple operations and communications, and we've provided it. You asked us to announce when Board Meetings were being held, and we've been doing that too. And finally, when we learned this spring that Rabbi Gubitz would in fact be moving on, we reacted swiftly and found a phenomenal new Director of Education, Aviva Scheur, who will lead our religious school with professionalism and expertise.

I appreciate the hard work of all those I've mentioned, and I apologize if I didn't call you out by name, but please know I'm grateful to everyone who has contributed to making Shir Tikva so special. Thank you to Cantor Schachner, for whom the burden of this transition has been significant. You have handled it all with the grace and love of a

superstar. Thank you to Rabbi Gubitz who stepped up in so many important ways this spring – we wish you all the best in your new role at Temple Israel. I also wish to say a very special thank you to Rabbi Blumberg who has not only stepped up to help our families, but has also been a wonderful support to many of us during this time. And to Susan Altman, all of our office staff, our religious school leaders, ELC staff, our teachers, our facilities staff and everyone who makes this place work, thank you.

And to the Executive Council. You are a group of extraordinary talent and compassion. I cannot express in words how much I appreciate what you've taught me, how you've supported me, and how much you've given to TST. To Robin Kostin and Karen Miller, I thank you for everything. Thanks also to Larry Whitman who is stepping down as Assistant Treasurer. And to our incoming VPs Wendy Newman, and Ali Corton, and to our Assistant Treasurer Michael Abrahams, you have so much to look forward to in working with this group.

In closing, as you know, when I took on the role of president for this synagogue two years ago my aspiration was to live up to the standard of leadership and good work begun by my predecessor, Brian Levey. Brian helped us understand that we needed to move from a transactional to a relational congregation if we wanted to remain relevant in today's world. The process we have gone through this past year demonstrates the

degree to which our members have embraced the relational model, and I am so excited about our future.

Now... Matt. I could not be more pleased to be turning over the reins to someone of such deep knowledge and passion. Your leadership of the Ritual Committee during the Interfaith initiative sparked our community to truly practice inclusion in a profound way. If commitment to embracing an interfaith vision has become part of **our** shores at TST, it's because you helped make it so. Your role in making our new Shiva Prayer Book a reality has been critical. And your knowledge of best practices in business along with your prior experience as Treasurer will serve us well during your term.

So, it is my great honor and privilege to introduce our new president of Temple Shir Tikva, Matt Langweber.