

President's Remarks  
Rosh Hashana 2023/5784

Before I read Marla's remarks, she wanted me to be sure you knew she misses being with you this year at HPHS, her High Holiday home for the past 16 years. She's looking forward to being with you tomorrow and on Kol Nidre.

Shabbat shalom and Shana Tova. I'm so very excited and grateful to be here with you today. I'm excited because Rosh Hashanah is my absolute favorite holiday; being with family, seeing friends in shul and catching up with them (but not during the service!), reflecting on the good and bad of the past year, committing to a fresh start for the coming year. And although my grandma passed away a few years ago, I'm excited to enjoy all of the recipes she taught me how to make.

Not only am I excited to share Rosh Hashanah with all of you, I'm also excited to share the state of the synagogue with you. Spoiler alert: it's excellent!

Before telling you about all of the wonderful things in our synagogue, I'd like to briefly speak about gratitude because for me, the High Holidays are about gratitude. I've recently returned from a wonderful trip to Europe with my family; we went to Amsterdam, Copenhagen and Oslo. Of course, these cities are beautiful—filled with interesting things to see and do. But each also has a deep, lengthy history with the Jewish people. We visited synagogues in each city that were hundreds of years old, and I felt a strong connection among the familiar ritual objects used by our collective ancestors. The synagogues were arranged with the reading table in the center of the room like we did this past summer. There was a special bench where the president sat and I felt a connection to that person, wondering what it was like to lead a congregation in the 1800s. I saw a Torah that looked huge relative to our new Mitzvah 613 one and wondered how heavy it was, who had to carry it each Shabbat, and who read from it.

But we also saw the painful history Jews can never escape, that of persecution. In each city we learned about how Jews were forced to live in specific neighborhoods, had restrictions on what they could buy and do, and how thousands were sent to their deaths during the Holocaust. This was a painful but necessary reminder. It made me feel closer to my Jewish heritage and grateful to be here today.

As Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks z"l says, "part of the essence of gratitude is that it recognizes that we are not the sole authors of what is good in our lives". Our Jewish history, my ancestors, my family and friends, and Beth El are all authors of my story of gratitude. My brave ancestors left a bad situation with nothing more than hopes of something better for their children and their children's children. Standing here today, I believe their dreams came true: I have a wonderful family, I live in a beautiful community, have the religious freedoms to celebrate as I wish, and I'm part of a wonderful, caring, Jewish community. For all of these blessings, I'm truly grateful.

I'm also grateful you're here at Beth El, celebrating our oldest traditions of the High Holidays. Together, we are keeping the hopes and dreams of our ancestors alive and passing on our traditions to the next generations.

Speaking of Beth El, I'm excited to share with you how we're doing! Truth be told, I don't really have to say anything for you to know how we're doing; all you have to do is look around and see our thriving membership! Plus there are more than 400 in the family service and dozens more livestreaming. That's well more than 2,000 people celebrating with us! If you read the materials on the table, our newsletter, or walk the halls, you'll see the many programs, activities and learning opportunities. You'll see our all-star clergy team spiritually guiding us and being there for us for our lifecycle events. If you're here during the week, you'll see our thriving school wing, full of students from preschooler to high schooler. This year, educational programming is grounded in three points of one of the triangles of the Jewish star: learning, friendship and home. We have a full slate of b'nai mitzvah ahead. And, we are continuing our Team Torah challenge where we encourage as many unique Torah readers as possible to earn their cookie. 5783 saw more than 150 unique Torah readers. Wow! Our Sisterhood and Men's Club have a full year of activities planned; learning, tikkun olam, community, and food! Soon you'll see our brand-new sukkah using our tent space, there'll be Chanukah and Purim celebrations, and frequent rinat (musical) Shabbats on Friday nights. We'll be honoring Rabbi Schwab for his 20<sup>th</sup> year at here at a congregational Shabbat Dinner on December 8 and we'll be celebrating Beth El's 75<sup>th</sup> birthday on April 7. There's so much more going on! And, there's always food provided by our new catering partner, Zelda's.

In addition to all of the plans that are in place, the Board of Directors and I have two key goals for the next two years:

1. Strengthening our membership and engagement through programming, communication, learning, prayer. We will engage current members and perform outreach to welcome new families to Beth El.

2. Shoring up for the future through evolving the building itself to meet our future needs; we'll be moving plans along to modernize the school wing and renovate the lobby so there's a single point of entry, as well as develop a plan to identify and complete necessary infrastructure projects. Further, we will be executing plans for identifying and developing future leaders of Beth El. If you're interested in getting involved, please see me!

These things can't happen without being in strong financial shape. We have a balanced budget, strong cash flow, a healthy endowment fund, and staff and lay people committed to managing our monies in the best way possible. Our facilities and maintenance staff are outstanding. And, we have a new executive director who is off to a great start.

I'm humbled to have the opportunity to serve you and grateful for the passion, dedication, collaboration of Beth El's clergy, staff, congregants, and lay leaders—past, present, future—for creating our wonderful community. More on that before Neilah.

All in all, Beth El is thriving and is financially sound. As my son would say, "we're in a good spot". If you see a clergy, educator, office or maintenance staff, board member, or trustee, please thank them for getting us to where we are today.

Wishing you all the best for a sweet, happy and healthy 5784. Shabbat shalom and Shana Tova.

