

When I was first approached about being president of Beth El, I sought out several friends for advice. They all gave me reasons why not to do it. It will soak up all of your free time; you will constantly be in meetings; the only people who will talk to you will do so to complain; things are always going wrong; [PAUSE] Boy, were they right! [PAUSE] Okay, L'havdil – on the contrary after 4 months as Beth El's president, I have found the role to be quite fulfilling, and I do look forward to continuing along this path.

I am told that it is traditional for the synagogue President to address the Congregation on Rosh Hashanah with a "state of synagogue" presentation. I do recall many years where the president would recite facts and figures about all of the wonderful activities we host – the number of students, the adult education classes, and on and on. I don't want to talk about facts and figures. In fact, our staff and volunteers have compiled all of the facts and figures into an Annual Report which was distributed this past August. In 24 pages it describes many of the highlights of the past year, and I recommend that if you haven't read it, you do so. If you can't locate the email, you can find THE Annual Report on the Synagogue's website. It points out that the "State" of Beth El is great.

In thinking about this address, I found that I wanted to speak about why it is that you choose to come to Beth El. Why come to big events, like today, or concerts like Eden Golan or a capella group "613". What brings you to the synagogue throughout the year to the smaller events like daily services or a class? The word that resonated with me is Community.

There are many reasons why you may join a synagogue. But whether you want to educate children, grow spiritually or just meet friends with similar interests, when you join you find community. Whether it's here during services, in a classroom, baking challah, on the softball field or virtually anywhere in between, our members are the foundation for a vibrant community.

When you participate, you tend to stay committed. Most of us contribute some combination of time, talent and/or money to support Beth El. As strong as our staff, clergy and volunteers are, we are only as strong as the bonds we make with each other.

What makes a synagogue community different from other social organizations is the comfort it can provide its members. Community has always been found here, but I don't think it has ever been more important than during these trying times that we live in. Rising antisemitism, the war

in Israel and increasing political divisions here at home create daily stress. Our members come to Beth El to find comfort – during times of individual loss and struggle, and at times of communal strife as well.

We are also different because the community is based on our Jewish faith and tradition. The Judaism that Beth El observes is based on joy. Through song and melody, personal connection and celebration of life's milestones and the annual calendar, we reflect the joy our clergy brings to our ritual observance. This shouldn't be taken for granted – the rituals will always be observed, but the joy we experience is special.

So, without hearing the statistics, I think you can agree with me that the state of Beth El is great. I would suggest that our strength will increase with the increased participation of our members. Whether it is a service, a class, a concert, a big event or small – come back after the High Holidays and see what you can find. Our members generally find that when they participate, they receive much more than they contribute.

I would like to take this opportunity again on behalf of my wife, Sandy Starkman, my sons Uri and Avram Pachter, the entire Board of Directors and Board of Trustees, to wish you all a Happy, Healthy and Sweet New Year filled with Peace.