

Rosh Hashanah 2010-President's State of the Temple Address

Shanah Tovah!

On behalf of the Board of Directors, it is my pleasure to welcome our congregants, their families and all of our guests to Temple Beth Shalom. Thank you Rabbi Cohen for your words of inspiration and reflection, encouraging us to open up our minds and our hearts. A special welcome to Cantor Reinwald. Thank you for guiding us and connecting us to moments of prayer, meditation, and majesty with the beauty of your voice and the music of our tradition. And thank you to our High Holy Day Choir for your dedication and the splendor of your voices. Together, you have all ushered in the New Year with sweetness and radiance for all of us.

It truly an honor to stand before you again this year. I would like to express my appreciation to all of you for the opportunity you have given me to serve as your president. The warmth and genuine friendship I have received from so many of you has made this past year so special.

A few weeks ago, I came across the following headline "After storm, Anne Frank's tree sprouts new life."

In her diary, Anne Frank wrote about a now 150-year-old chestnut tree. She could see it from the attic window of the secret annex where her family hid for two years. "From my favorite spot on the floor I look up at the blue sky and the bare chestnut tree, on whose branches little raindrops shine, appearing like silver, and at the seagulls and other birds as they glide on the wind," she wrote in 1944. "As long as this exists, and it certainly always will, I know that then there will always be comfort for every sorrow, whatever the circumstances may be."

The three year campaign to save the dying tree contributed to global efforts to preserve this symbol of strength and hope. Chestnuts were collected from the tree to grow seedlings, so that pieces of the original tree could take root and flourish elsewhere. Its saplings are being planted at Yad Vashem, the White House, and many international parks and schools. On August 24th, the day after the tree had fallen, a green shoot was seen growing from its splintered trunk, and the trunk is now being preserved.

Elaine Schwartz
September 9, 2010

We have an empowering history, a history filled with examples of men and women who revitalize Judaism and change the course of Jewish life by shaping events, establishing and maintaining communities, and responding to challenges.

How do WE contribute to Jewish revitalization? I believe we do so by making the choice to belong to a Jewish community. Many of us did not grow up in this area and we do not have family or roots in Orange County. We also live in a world of increasing complexity. With the rise of technology, it's easier to send an e-mail or check your facebook status than to pick up the phone and call someone to make a personal connection. We have to make conscious choices about what's important in our lives. When we become part of a community, we become part of something much larger than ourselves.

What we have here, here at Temple Beth Sholom, is truly special. Temple Beth Sholom is our proverbial chestnut tree providing a safe haven from the pressures of the world, a place where we can develop close friendships, a spiritual life, and a way to infuse our lives with a richness not found any other way.

Underlying everything we do is a set of values and beliefs, a sense of connection, a conviction that Jewish continuity matters and that transmitting Judaism to the next generation is important. We believe that taking care of each other is essential and that we can help change the world and make it a better place. Like family, we're here to help each other celebrate happy times and life cycle events, be it a new baby, a Bar or Bat Mitzvah, a graduation, or a wedding. And like Anne's tree, Temple Beth Sholom is here to provide comfort for every sorrow, whatever the circumstances may be.

As a congregation this year, we knew that our congregants needed special care as they coped with the financial crises around them. Sharing the hardship, looking out for the well-being of those around us, finding creative alternatives to the "we've always done it that way" syndrome, and never forgetting the fundamental holiness of our synagogue's mission formed the foundation of our management approach in these difficult times. With the philosophy that it is our responsibility and our Jewish obligation to support congregants in need, we fully retained our temple membership, keeping each family connected to the synagogue and the Jewish community.

And MANY, MANY in our congregation have been generous with their time and resources! I would like to take a moment to recognize and express our gratitude to Sisterhood, Brotherhood, the Professional and support Staff, and the angels within this congregation as well as the Jewish Federation and Family Services of Orange County for their hard work in fundraising and applying for grants, as well as extreme generosity in providing MANY scholarships for preschool, religious school, and camp this past year AND have pledged, YET AGAIN, to do the same in the year to come. We are extremely grateful to those in our Rabbi's Circle who each year contribute greater than basic dues to help offset those who are unable to pay full dues. All of these angels within our midst have allowed us to weather the storm so that our families and our precious children can have identity-building and memorable experiences in our programs, as well as those in the greater Jewish community.

Rabbi Hesch Sommer teaches us, "The real issue is not the challenge we had to face, but rather when this challenge is over did we behave in the most ethical and moral tradition of our Jewish faith?"

With full confidence, I can answer Rabbi Sommer's question with a definitive yes, we did our best AND CONTINUE TO DO OUR BEST to do right by our Jewish tradition, and by doing so we also made this difficult year less stressful and painful for our families and for each other.

We continue carefully balancing the "need to do business" with an understanding heart. Congregants have asked me how has the Temple fared financially through this year of recession. It is a multipronged answer. The words I would like to put forth are stable, conservative, and monumental efforts. With a great deal of diligence to keep expenses down and a tremendously successful, not to mention fabulously enjoyable fundraiser honoring our executive director Susie Amster, we were able to end the year with less than half the deficit originally projected. We were able to cover our expenses and put some funds into our reserve accounts. We have weathered this past year's storm with assiduous planning and a watchful eye.

Because economic forecasts reflect more of the same, this coming fiscal year we are again conservatively projecting a deficit, while maintaining a lean operation and an industrious approach to fundraising. With a congregational team approach, our hope is to exceed last year's

success. We held a Bingo volunteer training session this past winter that has helped with staffing our financially critical Bingo game on Thursday nights. But with the need for a consistent stream of volunteers, Bingo poses a perpetual challenge for us. Please call the Temple office to volunteer a couple of hours a month to help us meet this critical need.

We are off to a great start this year with the success of Camp Sholom and our summer garage sale. In the area of membership, our Temple family has grown a bit. Our net membership count has increased by 12 families to 540 family units. As can be seen within these walls, we are a congregation of great demographic diversity. We continue to attract young families, but we have also appealed to more single young professionals and young married couples than ever. We are overjoyed! AND we have a plethora of innovative and creative programs that I am excited to share with you during my remarks on Yom Kippur morning.

We have a vibrant caring community that reaches out to our congregants. Led by our amazing clergy, Rabbi Cohen and now Cantor Reinwald, our team of unsung Nightingales, Keshet L'Bayit, reach out to us during our times of need. In the past few weeks we have expanded our reach in an exciting new dimension. In an effort to connect those who cannot get to services because of illness or inability to travel, and to enable family members from across the country or overseas to share joyous occasions and lifecycle events, we are streaming services LIVE via the web. All you have to do is click on the link on our website www.tbsoc.com at the precise time when services are taking place.

What I've learned during the last year is that nothing is as fragile as certainty. During fragile times, our congregants can feel isolated for a variety of reasons. It is our hope that the Temple Beth Sholom community can be there for each of us. If you know of anyone in need, please take a moment to contact us and let us know. Let Temple Beth Sholom be part of your healing and recovery.

I believe our congregation as a whole has always placed doing acts of loving kindness at the top of the priority list, both within our walls and out in the greater community. But social action and social justice at Temple Beth Sholom has really evolved into a mitzvah-machine. Sunday Night Soup Kitchens, Mitzvah Day, Adopt-a-social worker, Adopt-a-soldier, food drives, the Silver Streak bus, Jewish Education for the Prentice School, Walk for Darfur, collecting

tzedakah for various causes at every meeting, every service, every gathering, and many more. You get the picture. We heard last night about a new and exciting social action program called Mitzvah Meals. By joining with pre-existing and successful programs, we will cook and serve Sunday night meals for those in need. If you have not done so already, please pick up a Mitzvah Meals brochure on your way out so that you can find out more about how you can take part. Also members of the Social Action Committee will be available after the service to take names for Mitzvah Meals volunteers. And our work doesn't stop there. We are hoping to spearhead a partnership with Jewish Federation and Family Services of Orange County to form the first Jewish community wide coalition to feed the hungry.

Empowered to do more. That is what Temple Beth Sholom is all about!

Temple Beth Sholom is a place that is welcoming, a place where we can build intimate relationships, a place where we are supportive of each other, a place that addresses profound spiritual yearnings, and a place where we can connect with Jewish tradition. Every day we revitalize Judaism by shaping events, maintaining our community, and responding to challenges.

As we celebrate the New Year, I'm reminded of the Jewish tradition that says if we were limited to having only one prayer to satisfy our daily spiritual needs, it would be the **Modim**, the elegant prayer of thanksgiving. Why? Because thankfulness is central to the Jewish spiritual essence.

I am thankful for our Temple Beth Sholom community and to all of you, my family.

May you all be inscribed in the Book of Life for the coming Year.

Juliet, Mark, Jason, Mike and I wish everyone a sweet, happy and healthy new year.