

**Rosh Hashanah Evening, 5770**  
**September 18, 2009 / 1 Tishrei, 5770**  
**Eliot Swartz, Temple Beth El President**

I want to extend a warm TBE welcome to our members, friends, family, guests and our wonderful choir. Whether this is your first year or your 50<sup>th</sup>, I know you join me in thanking the past generations of leaders, volunteers, and professionals that have given us our proud history and Jewish values.

In my talk this evening, I will share with you a day of the week that is very special to me. I will also discuss my view of the major difference between a business and our temple.

If you had the opportunity to read my article in *Kol Beit El* this month, you would have learned I turned 51 eight days ago. This birthday had special meaning for me, as this was the same age my mother had been when she passed away.

My family and friends mourned my mother's death. Back then, however, I did not belong to a synagogue; therefore we did not have the sense of love and support of the community that is so prevalent here at Temple Beth El. What a blessing it would have been to have had extended TBE family, like Frankee and Bunky Victor, chairs of our *Hevra Kadisha* committee, be available to turn to in our time of need.

My birthday fell on a Thursday this year. This past year, Thursday's have been a special time for sharing, learning, friendship, good food and becoming a more knowledgeable Jew. I followed the same routine as I have for the past year.

I have breakfast with a dear friend. The decision on what to enjoy comes first: will we stick to our diets? Or pinky swear to not tell each other's wife what we really had for breakfast? We share intimate details of our lives that we know will stay just between us. We both savor this time as two good friends getting together before we get down to business.

The tone changes and the business dialogue begins. How was the executive meeting last night? "I have a new song I want to sing. I am so excited; it's going to be great." Cantor Davidson and I are on the same page, if for only that moment. I now must get across town to have my next meeting.

Tall, black, two sugars—if it's Starbucks. You guessed it: my meeting is with Rabbi Chuck. I often thought I would come early and water down rabbi's coffee, as it is 11:00 in the morning and I have a sneaky suspicion, based on his perkiness, this is not his first cup. I have learned to go first or I might not get a chance to go at all.

"So Chuck, that's what I have. What about you?" Now, I must tell you I am amazed to see the rabbi's enthusiasm week after week. The rabbi is excited to share his thoughts and there are many. "What if we do this or that? Do we have the money?" This is usually in the conversation where I stop referring to the rabbi as "Chuck." "Well, Rabbi, that all sounds really good. How about we pick just a quarter of those ideas for now, as eighteen is a really good Jewish number?"

I have come to highly value this time with Rabbi Chuck. I learn from his teachings how we can use Jewish values to tackle the issues we face as a community. I see the empathy he has for our members and his struggle to meet their needs and high expectations.

We both check our watches and we realize its time to move on. We walk together to the next part of our day while the rabbi makes sure I understood all eighteen of his ideas.

How special noon on Thursday's have become for me! This is my gift to myself. We read and discuss Torah and I am humbled by the knowledge and participation each gives to this hour of sacred learning.

As I listen to the voices I cannot help but think I have so much to learn. This is the shortest hour of the week; just when it seems we are just getting into deep discussion, rabbi tells us he will see us next week.

This is one of the two Thursdays a month I have a standing lunch date

Once we get the temple issues resolved...I get to ask the questions about which I really want to know. You see Debi Rowe, down in her *kishkes*, is a true educator and I never feel the least bit embarrassed asking her anything I think I really should have already known about being Jewish. Debi does this without judgment, for this and all that she does for TBE, I am very grateful.

I am now ready to meet with others for our class called Maimonides' *Mishneh Torah*. This is where we learn about the legal text of Judaism encompassing many aspects of Jewish law.

We must finish no later than 5:30, as at 5:35 our children will conduct prayers in the sanctuary. The children will read from the Torah and beautifully, I might add. I invite you to join us and I promise you will leave with a smile on your face and in your heart.

I sometimes hear it said that a temple is a business; this I must tell you bothers me some. Like a business, the temple must pay its employees, vendors, and enter into contracts. So what's the difference between a business and a temple?

To me, it is how we choose to measure ourselves. It is not about how much profit we have made, as is how a business is measured. Instead, it is how we have supported each other in our time of need.

We were comforted as we came together as a loving community to share in our sorrow, when so many of our loved ones this year said good-bye for the last time before any of us were ready. We will always have a place in our hearts for them and we miss them. We will tell stories and share our memories of times that brought laughter and joy to our lives.

We measure ourselves by how we choose to educate our children. It is our children who bring many of us to temple, some after many years away. We understand that embracing the love of Judaism is enhanced by the quality of our teachers and the importance of having an educator such as Debi Rowe.

We measure ourselves by the many cultural and educational programs we offer. The Taus Lecture Series, now in its 27<sup>th</sup> year. Concerts, such as the Argentinean Cantors who brought us Latin infused Jewish music, and our "Concerts Under The Stars" by Cantor

Davidson. Who can forget Jesters on the King's Court presented by the Mensch Club? Our Artist in Residence, Marylyn Price with her puppets and story telling. Our Scholar in Residence, Rabbi David Forman, whose talks were an inspiration to us all.

There are many more, but none more special than KindredSPIRITS this past June. Once again, it was a magical evening, as the vision of our Cantor Davidson came to life. A year in the making, the volunteers, led by the Chair of the committee Julie Orlov, spent countless hours to make this a spectacular event.

We measure ourselves by our *hamantaschen* - undoubtedly the best around anywhere! Just make sure you order the chocolate before Jodi Davidson buys them all.

Which leads me into Sisterhood, who, without a doubt, deserves their very own talk, as I can not in the time allotted me, tell you about all the wonderful and fun events, programs, gifts, fundraising from which we benefit each year. Sisterhood is a blessing to our community and we all value their dedication, support, and love for our temple.

There are so many areas in which we measure ourselves, and these are just a short list I am sharing with you this evening. I have not talked about the various worship services we offer or the social programs that have been started to feed children in our community. I have not talked about measuring ourselves by the many volunteers who give and give and give from their love of Temple Beth El.

We also measure ourselves by the friends we have made here at TBE. For me, friends like Kate Fink, who I can call one hour after having a triple root canal. Kate is ready and wants to know what she can do. "Do you need me to pick up some medicine?" "Can I get you something soft to eat?" "No," I say, "I just need some good news to make me feel better. Such as, I would like for you to chair the Opportunity Drawing this year, and I would like for you to start tomorrow." Kate says "yes," and its working—I feel a whole lot better.

George Mayer is also a dear friend, and has become a mentor to me. I think it fitting that he is the one among us who awakens us each year by the sounding of the shofar. His vision and understanding that the mission of TBE is reliant on having the resources to carry on *L'dor Vador* generation to generation has awakened a passion in him and in me. It is true that money will never be the way we measure ourselves, but it will be a necessary resource to ensure that our children and our children's children never need to fear that they will not have this sacred community. I cannot help but to be grateful for the many among us who share this vision and have given not for themselves but unselfishly for future generations, as they understand the legacy they leave behind.

As I close this evening I want to share with you something very personal to me. I have had many blessings in my life and have had the opportunity to celebrate some of them with my TBE family: my marriage to my beautiful wife Gale; our daughter Rebecca becoming Bat Mitzvah and then confirmed; and becoming president of this congregation that has been such a large part of my life.

This past June 4<sup>th</sup>, I have been blessed again and would like to share this blessing with my TBE family. I officially became a dad by adopting an 18-year-old teenager whom I have loved, nurtured, supported, cried over, and cherished for the past twelve years. Rebecca has spent her entire childhood and now adult life at her second home, Temple

Beth El, and Gale and I are eternally grateful for the love and support you have shown her. Here she has received so many of the values she will need as she takes on life's twist and turns.

May this New Year be as sweet for you, as this moment is for me.

*L'Shana Tovah*