

Tzohoraim tovim, good afternoon.

I am so happy to greet you all, whether in person or remotely as we come together in prayer to reflect on the past year, and to anticipate the year ahead.

Let me first acknowledge those responsible for our shared religious experience and those who facilitate all we do at Beth David. Thanks to our wonderful clergy, staff and volunteers for making the High Holy Days so creative, moving, and meaningful – especially considering what we all know has been a particularly challenging year. All of this is a result of months of planning and hard work by Rabbi Kalisch, Cantor Goodlev, Rabbi Koppel, and Executive Director Jill Cooper. Behind the scenes and seemingly in constant motion are Facilities Manager Tony Artis and his wife Suzie; Chedva Steranko and Alicia Ludwig complete the administrative team. Our amazing accompanist Pavel Zarukin, along with the professional choir, instrumentalists (including shofar blowers), and volunteer choir and ensemble vocalists have given us soul-stirring music. The tech crew has handled all aspects of our sound and video needs, including the Zoom connection. To all the service participants, ushers, and finally those congregants who spent hours recruiting, assigning and orienting over 70 individuals you've seen or will see on the bima: Dinah Engel, Eric Klinger-Wilensky, Rachel Finkelman, Jay Margolis, and Andrew Saltz --None of this would have been possible without your help.

That was the easy part of why I'm up here speaking to the congregation. As Beth David's new President, with big shoes to fill after serving as Executive Vice President under the capable leadership of Rodd Bender, this is my last chance to make a first impression. Winston Churchill's phrase *Perfection is the enemy of progress* should be my tag line. It's kind of ridiculous, given all there is to be concerned and upset about in today's world, that what's been waking me up in the middle of the night is composing and delivering this address!! How daunting, on this holiest of days, to be charged with inspiring my fellow congregants to rally in support of this congregation.

Along with my husband Richard and our now grown daughters Libby and Sarah, I've been a Beth David congregant for 36 years. Maybe some of you remember me from my days as the Religious School's music teacher and perhaps picture me playing guitar from the other side of the bima. It's even been suggested that I should set this annual President's address to a Yom Kippur melody, but I'll allow wisdom to prevail and say it rather than sing it.

I assume you know I'm about to make an appeal, and I'm going to take advantage of my platform to eventually ask you to take not one – but four action steps. But first, let's set the mood. Take a moment and think about your initial connection to Beth David. What made you choose this synagogue in particular? For my family, it was a combination of factors: the congregation's size, a sanctuary surrounded by trees, the transformative music of Cantor Lilia Kazansky and the recommendation of our Havertown next-door neighbors. We were looking for community – specifically a Jewish community. What were you looking for?

Now think about how that connection has changed, or might change, over time. If you're anything like me, chances are what brought you here in the first place is not what has kept or will keep you here. We change and grow as individuals and as families, and so our needs evolve as well.

Synagogues create and sustain communities. While some are defined by their physical structures, it is our relationships, guided by shared Jewish values, which help us to express our beliefs through activities, common interests and ritual practices. We join for spiritual fulfillment, for our children's Jewish education, to feel connected and safe, and to be part of

something larger than ourselves. While I'm going to speak some more about the need for growth in the size of our congregation, I'm fond of saying that people shouldn't join this synagogue and then develop a feeling of belonging, but instead they should feel like they belong and then decide to join. This is a paradigm shift that will serve as a cornerstone of what I want to accomplish as your President.

So, what does the year ahead look like? Your Board of Trustees (which includes clergy and senior staff) has begun to articulate a vision of success -- a set of goals not just for this year, but one for a 3-to-5-year horizon as well. Briefly stated, they are to

- Increase financial stability
- Build community
- Provide space and support for differences

Here is where you come in – the 4-part appeal:

First, I'm asking you to consider a financial contribution to help make up the difference between projected income and expenses in our annual operating budget. Why do we need this, given that the mortgage is paid off (we own this building) and we have recently established an endowment fund to provide investment income through ongoing philanthropy in the future? The short answer:

- The current yearly cost of running the synagogue significantly exceeds annual income and we do not think we can charge the amount per paying family that would get us to break even.
- Our revenue is overly reliant on dues, religious school tuition and other fees as compared to other congregations of ALL sizes.
- While increasing the size of the congregation will help offset the problem and needs to happen, generating revenue from additional sources, including earned income through alternative use of our facilities and other resources, is essential.

I'm pretty sure most of you are aware of our long-held dream of establishing a preschool to make more use of the physical plant, serve as a feeder for new family memberships and perhaps even generate an operating surplus. I want you to know how hard we've been working to break through the barriers we've faced due to our zoning regulations and am pleased to report that we've been approved for this use by the Lower Merion Board of Commissioners. Unfortunately, we're still dealing with resistance from the neighboring church's leadership which has been opposed to these changes in our operation. We are responding on multiple fronts. All of this goes to say that the growth we were hoping for is not yet within our grasp, and we need to try and fill in the financial operating gap by asking for the congregation's support through fund-raising efforts. Currently, this happens primarily twice annually: this Fall Yom Kippur Appeal and again at the Spring celebration event, which this past year marked the 10th year anniversary of Rabbi Kalisch's leadership of our congregation. There will be other opportunities to support special initiatives during the next 12 months - watch for details soon.

Here are the mechanics: The preferred method is to contribute via the pledge form found on our website's High Holiday Resource page, also accessible by using the QR code in your program (or in the chat if you're on Zoom) when you get home. For a less technological method, pick up your pledge card on your way out and return it with your contribution to the office after the holiday. Please do what you can.

Second, building community requires good communication. Beth David uses Shul Cloud, an on-line platform specifically designed for synagogues to manage these functions. I'm a self-professed Shul Cloud nerd, and we need more congregants to get into it. It's where you should go to find someone's contact information when you want to get in touch with others – our on-line directory. It's also where I go to learn more about who YOU are. So please take the time to update your account with current information – change of email address, your work status -- even add a picture to help us put faces to names. We'll be posting easy-to-use tutorials soon, and I'm also available for private lessons on Zoom as well.

Third, while I'd rather not think about it, I remind myself that we're still coming out of the Pandemic era. This has made getting back up to speed with programming challenging – both in terms of participation and leadership. When we get together, we clearly enjoy each other's company, so do come around! And please give of yourselves... there are lots of opportunities for congregants of any age to get involved in all aspects of Synagogue life including building and sustaining membership, engaging in social action initiatives -- many of them tasks which can be completed without an ongoing time commitment. Here's an example – and my chance to pitch one of my pet projects: through the generosity of Pennsylvania Interfaith Power and Light, the organization that mobilizes people of faith to take bold and just action on climate change, Beth David will be taking ownership of 477 native VERY SMALL trees and shrubs to plant on our campus. We'll need lots of hands and backs for this one in early November! And that's just a preview of coming attractions – we'll be breaking ground soon on our outdoor nature play and social space to be located outside the sanctuary and hope to implement this as a community build project. Please stay tuned.

Here's my 4th and final appeal - I hope it's one you will really think about and respond to. Let us know how we can serve you, your families...how we can make Beth David Reform Congregation more relevant in your lives. How can we enrich your lives spiritually, religiously, intellectually, educationally and make you feel more a part of this community because that's at the core of what we're all about? Remember the final goal I enumerated earlier? – providing space and support for differences – how can we be better listeners, respectful of each other's strongly held opinions and beliefs, agreeing to disagree even when it's highly emotionally charged? Your clergy, staff and Board are all committed to these values. I'm available to talk and really enjoy going out for coffee. Just email me after the holiday.

Whatever you chose to do, I appreciate your generous spirit. Thank you for joining me, your community, our temple. Thank you for stepping into 5785 and being part of the effort to achieve our vision for Beth David. It is my great honor and an immense privilege to lead our beloved congregation. I pray that we all will have a year filled with joy, good health and peace. Gamar hatimah tova, may we all be inscribed in the Book of Life.