

Thank you, Rabbi, for that wonderful introduction. Thank you Cantor Butensky for joining us once again for these High Holidays and leading us in song. It is our honor to have you with us once again, this our third straight year together.

It is heartwarming, as always, to see so much of our Beth El family here today! I wish you all a happy, healthy, sweet New Year and an easy fast today. I hope everyone was able to get through the storms of the last week relatively unscathed.

I also welcome all of our new members and families as they join us as part of our family here today. I've said it before, and I guess I will say it again, the feeling of warmth and community in this building when we gather together like this with family and friends is gratifying.

As we enter the year 5777, we reflect back on another year of tranquility and growth here at Beth El. In fact, we have welcomed 20 new members and families to our congregation and 19 new kids in our school in just the last three months!

For many of us it was also a year of new beginnings and for many of us it was a year of significant loss as well. That is what this time of year is about. We take the time to reflect upon who we are, the significant changes that have occurred and how to grow as we head into what we hope will be a sweeter year.

As I finish up my 3½ years as President in June of next year, I am often reminded as to why this is supposed to be a 2-year position. Just kidding. Maybe. But, boy have we come far in the almost 3 years to date.

However, I do not deceive myself. I do not do any of this alone. Our Rabbi, the extraordinary Rabbi Matuson, has become my close friend and confidant over the last few years. I could not imagine working with a better partner. I thank you for the guidance and friendship you provide every day, not only to me, but to our entire congregation. I look forward to working together in the years ahead. Rabbi is not only our spiritual leader, but our emotional and intellectual leader as well. Services continue to grow thanks to his heartfelt, funny, insightful and deeply personal leadership. He is the most valuable member of our family and the most indispensable. Thank you again, my dear friend, for all that you do and for all that you are.

We also need to recognize so many others who have answered our call in the last year. Jacquie Sinder has stepped up this year as our Office Manager and has taken on our myriad of administrative tasks with an efficiency and professionalism we should all admire. Thank you Jacquie, for all that you do for us on a daily basis.

Thanks as well to Beth Brenner, who has become our Education Director, communications specialist, and occasional cantorial soloist. She loves our kids and tolerates us adults as best she can. Thank you, Beth, on behalf of our kids and all of their parents.

I would like to thank Michael Kuhr and Laurie Simmons, our Cantorial soloists, for their joyous voices as they help lead our weekly services and try to keep us all on key, no matter how determined we are to stray off course.

A few weeks ago, Rabbi showed me (and I passed along to the Board) a very humorous YouTube clip from a friend of his at a congregation in Cincinnati, titled “Be Someone Else”. This very funny video is based on the all too true condition at many synagogues and other charitable organizations, where it is always incumbent that an unpaid “Someone Else” do all the large and small jobs that are needed every day to make things run smoothly for everyone else. The female lead in the video, named, of course, “Someone Else”, takes pride in her thankless role and relishes the fact that no one else needs to have the “burden” of having to thank her. Someone Else is always “the first to Chair a new committee, the first to donate to an important new fund”. She “writes a comprehensive new plan for the future of the synagogue, finds innovative new programming, analyzes how to change the dues structure, and even solves Morty Stern’s issue with the temperature of the water fountain.” It’s a very funny clip, primarily because it is so very spot-on.

We at Beth El are blessed to have so many Someone Else’s amongst us, who take time from their own busy lives to do the work that sustains this synagogue. But our Someone Else’s must never go unthanked. Please join me in taking a few moments to recognize them (and I apologize in advance and issue a blanket thank you to anyone I inadvertently overlook).

Thank you to Vickie Kennedy, Cathy Winterfield, and all of our Sisterhood for all that you do both on a weekly basis with our onegs and Kiddush’s, and at all of our special events, to make Beth El the warm and welcoming place we all enjoy. You may not think that we notice all of your hard work, but we do.

Thank you to Charlie Frohman and our Brotherhood for your camaraderie and for being the broad shoulders that this congregation knows it can rely upon.

And a quick thank you also to Lou Arab and all of our ushers and greeters for their work ensuring that these High Holidays services are welcoming and run so smoothly.

Thank you to all of our volunteers every day, who help with our ever growing roster of events. Thanks to Gail Greenfield for leading our Adult Education events, Yoga Shalom and our Sunday movie and book events. Thank you to Abby Steele and her entire team for our wonderful Celebrate the Seasons and Annual Night of Giving events. Thanks to Karen Freeman, MG Orender, Tracey Westbrook and Bob Hersh for all they do putting together our annual golf tournament, and to the Siegals for their work on our annual Passover Seder. Thank you to Sherry Chait and Chris Arab for their dogged work on making our annual directory a success. Thank you to Denice Goldberg and all of our Corned Beef sandwich makers, sellers and drivers for a wonderful community event. Thanks to Bobbie and David Adler and our Caring Committee for creating a support system for our congregants in need. Thanks to all of those who pitched in to help with this year's Community Yom Hashoah service and also with the Survivors' Family Seder. And last, but certainly not least, to Jody Leiser, her Education Committee, our teachers and madrahim, thank you for caring about, and for, our kids and helping them learn where they came from and what they can achieve.

Even in a fairly tranquil year the tireless work of a Board of Trustees is never done. Our Board of Trustees leads with an atmosphere of integrity, compassion, engagement and respect; continuing the very high standard we have come to expect of our leaders.

Thank you to Abby Steele for stepping forward this year and accepting the position as our President-elect, insuring that Beth El will be in very good hands for many more years.

My thanks for their unsung, but never unappreciated, work goes to my Vice Presidents, Charlie Frohman and Cathy Winterfield, plus our entire Board of Chip Morris, Rachel Marcus-Hendry Mitchell, Marty Siegal, Vickie Kennedy, Lou Arab, Buzzy Klausner, Jody Leiser, Randy Levinson, David Marco, Ed Mercel, Donne' Ordile, MG Orender, Ron Van, and our departing member, David Adler. Please accept my gratitude for your congeniality, all of the honest and frank debates, the countless hours, and your determined efforts on our behalf, and in securing our future.

And, once again, after all of these friends, but actually before all of them, the people I need to thank most are the ones who bring me back here every day to work for their future and who brighten my day after some of my “other” meetings here. To my amazing wife Shari and my remarkable daughters, Jessica, Alyssa and Lindsay, thank you for your smiles, your love, your support, and for allowing me to spend all of the time necessary to have an impact here on our larger Beth El family.

Now, as we to turn more to the state of Beth El, I would like to take a moment to reflect on our continued progress. As I mentioned earlier, we have been adding members monthly. Our financial situation is stable. Again, in these days of congregational struggles around the country, this was not easy and is not to be taken for granted. The fact that we continue to grow is a reflection of our maturity as a congregation. As our membership continues to grow, school attendance is increasing, and participation at our events is at record levels.

So... in the last three years we have gone from a level of tumultuousness to a level of shalom -- a peacefulness in the congregation now that the many crises have passed. Now, it is incumbent on us to be very wary of complacency. It is too easy to come up with countless projects for Someone Else to implement, programs for Someone Else to run, and ideas for Someone Else to monetarily support.

Thanks to the work of so many, our future is bright. As Abby mentioned on Rosh Hashanah, we are beginning to investigate the possibility of adding a new school building, not just for Sundays, but as an everyday, multi-age pre-school for the whole community, providing us with another strong revenue stream. This is in the preliminary stages, with soil testing on the grounds behind the Social Hall having just been completed last week, and you should be seeing more details in the near future. This is not a small project, but we cannot keep spending money rehabilitating an older trailer building and neglecting to recognize the needs of a strongly growing congregation. To be done correctly, this will not be inexpensive, but will be handled fiscally conservatively and funded completely prior to commencement. We will need everyone’s help.

As parents and grandparents, we look at the bright eyes of our children and we see the future. We should be proud to roll up our sleeves and, yes, pull out our checkbooks when necessary to make sure that this synagogue is here for them, their children, and possibly even their grandchildren. Hurricanes may come and go around here, but generations from now people should be proud of the work we did here today, to make sure that the right foundation was set for their families to grow upon.

So I continue to have the same ask of you that I do every year. Please come and be an active part of our family. Don't wait for Someone Else to pitch in, for Someone Else to roll up their sleeves and help with an event, for Someone Else to dedicate their time to serve on a committee or on the Board, for Someone Else to reach out and welcome another congregant, or for Someone Else to make the financial commitment to keep the synagogue you love running. Please don't take our lack of asking you directly for assistance to be a signal that we would not be appreciative of the support. A donation is a wonderful way to honor a friend, mark a Simcha, commemorate a loved one, or leave the legacy you want here at Beth El.

But, it is also up to you to make all of this pay off. The compensation does not come back in dollars. The reward is the feeling you get in your heart, the pride, the tears in your eyes, that lump in your throat; the heartfelt pride that being part of this synagogue brings to you and your family. The pride we feel when our B'nai Mitzvah kids come up here on their big day and finally understand what all of that hard work was for and that becoming a B'nai Mitzvah means more than just having a B'nai Mitzvah. The pride we feel when so many of them decide not to drift off afterwards, but stay on as madrahim to engage and help teach our younger students.

The pride we feel when others attend our services and comment on the warmth and congeniality of our congregation. I often tell new attendees at services that I view Beth El as the "Cheers" of synagogues. Hang around for a short while and everyone will reach out and know your name. We are our own best welcoming committee!

Join us in the very full slate of programming we have planned for the upcoming year. And trust me, as we grow this list keeps getting longer, so hang in with me.....

Join us in two weeks for our Celebrate the Season event on Saturday evening, October 29th, as we all get together to just nosh, drink and relax here at Beth El. This annual event is always a great opportunity for everyone to just get together, laugh and schmooze for a few hours.

Join us for the Sisterhood's always entertaining Game Day, book club and Girls Nights Out events. Join us for the hearty conversation and debate at the Brotherhood's Dinner with the Rabbi series. The deli food flown in from Katz' Deli in NY isn't bad either.

Join us on this Sunday for 'Pizza in the Hut' on Sukkot (sorry for yet another food reference of Yom Kippur) and later in the week as we unroll and all hold the Torah throughout the synagogue on Friday, the 21st, for Simchat Torah. Join us for our Break the Fast after Yom Kippur, our Hanukkah Dinner, our Purim celebration, our Spaghetti Bingo night, our Passover Seder. Come enjoy yourself, dine, schmooze and outbid each other at our Annual Night of Giving in the Spring.

Relax and let the week melt away at Friday evening and Saturday morning services. Help once again with sandwiches during our annual Corned Beef Sale. Hit golf balls into the sand and trees with me at our Golf outing. Engage in our Adult Education discussion series. Come learn Hebrew for adults. Stretch with friends at our weekly Shalom Yoga. Enjoy a book from our library or attend our monthly movie events. Join the weekly discussion group with the Rabbi on Thursday mornings. Discuss Torah on Saturday mornings.

Or, my favorite, just come and enjoy those smiling faces abounding here on Sunday mornings during Sunday school.

Invest your time and effort by participating on one of our committees, or talk to me about starting a committee that interests you and benefits us all.

Come help us establish the new traditions that will keep Beth El vital, relevant and engaging. Our family is growing and strengthening. Join us as we share and support each other through all of the joys, sorrows, hopes, struggles, and blessings that each New Year brings. Participate! Join us as we go forward to another great year! It's time to stop just being yourself, and time to start being Someone Else!

I joined this Board many years ago, and as I sit up here now after 3 years as President and look out at this growing family, I am still honored to lead this congregation. I am proud of who we are, how far we have come and amazed at how bright our future can be.

Finally, I would like to close once again with the same prayer we strive to make true here every day:

May the door of this synagogue be wide enough to receive all who hunger for love, all who are lonely for fellowship.

May it welcome all who have cares to unburden, thanks to express, hopes to nurture.

May the door of this synagogue be narrow enough to shut out pettiness and pride, envy and enmity.

May its threshold be no stumbling block to young or straying feet.

May it be too high to admit complacency, selfishness, and harshness.

May this synagogue be, for all who enter, the doorway to a richer and more meaningful life.

Shana Tovah u'metukah!