

Yom Kippur 2009 Speech
Sheila Freed

G'mar Tov...

The fact that this special day brings so many of us to temple to worship, creates a unique opportunity to look back together on the year that has passed and take a few moments to feel good about all that we have accomplished. As a new year approaches, this is a marvelous chance to reflect on our progress as a congregation, and to make resolutions and goals for the year ahead.

Despite the fact that it was one of the most difficult years that the country, our community and our congregation have faced, we have moved forward. For as Will Rogers once said:

"Even if you're on the right track, you'll get run over if you just sit there."

I am proud to report that we have made significant achievements over the course of this past year,

- Our membership had reached an all-time high number of 610 members and so far this year we are rapidly approaching this number again.
- As those sitting toward the rear have noticed, we have the addition of a state-of-the-art video system graciously donated by a temple family. I am afraid that the 16 foot screen is removing any visual advantage I had with the folks seated in the back half of the room. Everything on the bima should now be larger than life. We will use the system to show films, run programs and it will be available for all your simcha celebrations.
- We completed a video history to commemorate Temple Judea's 60th Anniversary. The first installment covers the years between 1948 and 1972, and you will have many opportunities to view this living tribute to our congregation. By now you have received the invitation to the Premier, scheduled for October 14th, and sponsored by our adult education program.
- In the spring, Temple Judea held our first-ever interactive cooking fund-raiser event called, "Look Who's Cooking", which was a huge, sold out success.
- Our "curb appeal" has improved with increased landscaping to enhance our beautiful sanctuary. If you haven't already visited the Simon Memorial Garden, take a few moments to go outside and experience the peace and serenity that has transformed this space.
- In recognition of the times in which we live, we have taken steps to increase security around our temple campus, including more cameras, more secure gates and alarms, and an increase in police presence. I'd like to tell you more about the security, but I am afraid that my actions are being closely monitored.

Perhaps the project most near and dear to my heart, is "L'dor V'dor" :

At the beginning of last year, we put forth a plan and a dedicated committee led by Lee Mandell to embark on this special project. The goal of "L'dor V'dor is to design a structure with spaces and services to address every segment of our temple family - - from modernizing and expanding our highly successful pre-school; to creating designated space for our religious school and adult education programs; to designing areas for our youth and senior citizens to gather, socialize, learn and grow...all while improving the Temple Judea Vision.

We are now funded for the L'Dor Vador preliminary analysis, and working to prepare a careful and prudent blueprint for the future of this project. The analysis will give us a pulse on zoning and other city issues and requirements, and will provide us with realistic financial and physical parameters that will allow us to move forward when the time is right.

The architect, Jorge Hernandez has prepared a suggested schematic that could facilitate all the needs and wants of our staff, congregants, temple leaders and various consultants. This analysis has been presented to city officials, and we are feeling confident that we will be able to achieve our goal in the near future.

Let me assure you that we are not going into a Capital Campaign at this time. We are moving ahead responsibly and with great sensitivity to the current economic environment. Even in difficult times, it is important to ensure that the future needs of our temple family will be met. Again, as Will Rodgers said: *"Even if you're on the right track, you'll get run over if you just sit there."*

Looking toward to the year ahead, there are many exciting happenings coming our way:

- We have started a very unique and popular program for our young families called *Mishpacha Moments*. One member, who was part of our test pilot program, commented that this program alone was worth his annual membership! Families spend 3 hours together every Saturday morning on activities that enrich their Jewish identity, while strengthening their family bonds.
- Temple Judea was awarded a grant that has allowed us to hire a part time Caring Committee coordinator to ensure that our members' needs are met physically, emotionally and spiritually. Additionally, we will also be facilitating support groups within our community.
- It is my personal goal to hold a Haderech or Leadership Class this coming year, to work on the next generation of temple leaders. I am currently assembling names for those who may be interested in participating in the class.
- We will hold our first-ever "Bike-a-thon", which will allow Rabbi Goldberg to show off his Lance Armstrong- like expertise!! Training sessions with the Rabbi will begin in October.
- Our development committee is working on several fundraising functions, the largest of which will be our amazing Purim Event. Save the date of February 27th for a fun and fundraising happening!!
- As you saw in the October issue of the Tidings, there is virtually something for everyone planned at Temple Judea this coming year - - social, cultural, religious and enrichment programs designed to meet the needs of our diverse and active community.

You can choose from the

- **Adult Education roster of classes** *to the*
- **Books Reviews** here by Madaline Albright, Andy Williams, Seth Bramson & Ginger Emas *to the*
- **Sukkot Skip progressive dinner** and **holiday celebrations at temple**, *to an*
- **Interfaith Thanksgiving Service** and an **Outreach Scavenger Hunt** for our own Interfaith members, *to*
- The opening of this year's **Soup Kitchen** and our April **Mitzvah Day**, *to the*

- **Rabbi's Tisch discussion groups**, and our **Book Club Meetings** .

It is a tribute to the strength of the bottom line of this temple and to the management team in place, that we have been able to ride out this uncertain time knowing definitely that our bottom line operational needs were intact.

- We have been able to keep, or in the case of the staff position I mentioned, increase our staffing, while holding our salary costs flat. Those staff members with contracts have all voluntarily agreed to not take their increases this year.
- I was quite impressed when our clergy, who are contractually bound for salary increases, reluctantly accepted this additional money – only to return it to the temple in the form of donations!
- Our vigilance in controlling costs has included a great deal of behind the scenes work, increasing controls and ensuring that our house is in order.
 1. We are instituting more accountability with office procedures, plus more checks & balances within our temple's operational infrastructure
 2. We have just finished our Finance Policy Manual, which will safeguard our financial future by guiding all of our finances, budgets and investment policies.

Of course, nothing that I have mentioned would have been possible without the extraordinary contributions of our dedicated clergy, our amazing staff and department heads and the lay leadership that comprises our Executive Committee, Board of Trustees, working committees, parents organizations and the Sisterhood.

This past year, our leadership agreed upon a "vision" statement for Temple Judea: *Temple Judea prides itself in being a congregation where membership is an integral part of our everyday life. We worship together. Study together. Play together. We are young together and we grow old together. We are there for each other through good times and bad times. Together we honor, share and celebrate our rich Jewish heritage from generation to generation, L'Dor Vador.*

In addition to our long list of accomplishments and the significance of maintaining our stability and financial well-being, there is another way, altogether to measure our progress as a temple community, and that is by listening carefully to the collective voice of our congregation. The theme for our temple this coming year is "sharing our stories." It is through the stories that we can understand whether we are fulfilling our mission and truly meeting our members' needs.

And so, I would like to end by quickly sharing a cross-section, anonymously, of the types of stories that have inspired me over this past year – and that I hope will resonate with each of you.

- There is the touching story of a single father raising his young children, who has been overwhelmed by appreciation for the support he has had at Temple Judea, both in the school and spiritually.

- I recently heard about a young family who were presented an excellent professional opportunity outside of Miami, but chose to stay here specifically because of their attachments to Temple Judea.
- There is an elderly woman living alone, with no family and few surviving friends, whom our congregants essentially adopted, by organizing to bring meals and provide transportation and companionship for her.
- One of our fathers who regularly brought his children to Sunday religious school decided to stop eating bagels and start a Sunday Morning Torah Trotters Club that has grown into a weekly event supported by several of our parents. Walk or run...their choice.
- We have a member, a charter member at that, who, after she lost her husband 18 years ago, began cooking every Monday for our Temple Judea soup kitchen as a way to help others. Actually, the whole Monday cooking group is an remarkably dedicated crew that has become like a family over the years.
- A new member couple have not just found spiritual comfort at Temple Judea, but an outlet for their musical talents as well - - she in our choir and he playing percussion in our band.
- We hear so many stories about non-Jewish individuals who found their way to our congregation and then found themselves drawn to convert. They speak gratefully about Temple Judea providing a new path and direction in their lives.

This is just a small sampling of the ways in which Temple Judea plays a personal role in the lives of its members, and enriches their own lives.

How will the story of your life during the year 5770 change because of Temple Judea? How will your involvement change the course of our congregation's history?

On this dawn of a new and promising year ahead, let us commit to creating a best-seller together. Let's top the charts with a collective story that is much greater than the sum of our individual tales - and let us write it together over the course of the year ahead.

L'shana tova to each of you. May you and those you love be written in the book of life for another healthy and happy New Year, and may your books be filled with wonderful stories.