

Marla Shwartz
Erev Rosh Hashanah
September 16, 2012 / 1 Tishri, 5773
Temple Beth El, San Pedro CA

It is with a full heart that I welcome you to Erev Rosh Hashanah and to Temple Beth El on behalf of your Board of Directors. I am so proud to serve as your temple president and I find this opportunity to speak with you to be humbling, full of responsibility, and would you believe, a joy. You might question this last comment. Yes, I did say a joy. It is a real joy to look out into this congregation and see a big family who love one another, who love to practice our faith, and who love our temple. It is all good. In fact, it is a blessing. It is not a chore to share these warm feelings with you. It is really our good fortune to greet a familiar face and to welcome the stranger, to create family here at Temple Beth El that is enriched by one another, to be present in front of the Torah, and to make important commitments. And we get to do all this with beautiful music, song, and ritual.

Sometimes I think that Judaism is just one very large and very smart idea and when we learn about its teachings we truly benefit as individuals and as a family. It is this time of year where we do lots of thinking, lots of introspection, and lots of asking and answering questions. We spend orchestrated and committed time reflecting upon that which is greater than ourselves, Torah, and the Divine. We require honesty, even action, and very importantly we deal with forgiveness, restoration, wholeness, respect, and unity. Our tasks are as awesome as the thoughts, prayers, and feelings behind them. We take the notion of responsibility to a new level, a personal, and a monumental level that impacts others who we might have taken for granted or for whom we forgot to respond to in a kind and mutually respectful manner. We get a second chance. We receive an opportunity to do better.

I understand each of us is here for different reasons. Perhaps because we always do so. Perhaps because we choose to do so. Perhaps because of this particular holiday. Perhaps because we are supposed to be here. Perhaps because we think we should be here. I have learned to appreciate us all being here, for any reason. Isn't it terrific that our faith provides us this opportunity to nurture our spirits? To do *tikkun olam*, acts of loving kindness? To enjoy the liturgy and the familiar melodies? To pledge ourselves to continuing our people, our traditions, and our commitment efforts at sustaining our temple through worship, through giving, through commitment, and through our wonderful Endowment Program?

We are Temple Beth El and it is a joy to speak about you.

There is sweetness that abounds at Rosh HaShanah. For me, the apples and the honey represent the blending of the fruits of our labors and the sweetness of what it means to be together as one community, as one family, as one people, as one who strives for what we can do to become better as individuals.

You are a captive audience, but I still would like to ask you to please indulge me for a few minutes as I reflect upon our Temple Beth El community as we begin a new year together. My relationship began nine years ago with you. Just two years later we were praying for a good and happy retirement to a wise and veteran rabbi and we were welcoming an energetic, compassionate, and learned new rabbi to lead our community. We wrestled outright with the new rabbi's request that we wear name tags until more recent times, when we crave our new name tags and find that wearing them does more than identify us, they are a connection piece to our religious home and family. I joined Temple Beth El in order to attend services and learn about Judaism, but to my surprise I discovered that being Jewish is more than what I had assumed and I have learned that through example from you what it means to experience life at Temple Beth El.

Just think about the following and what we can do here if we choose:

Make a new friend

Take a class

Support the teaching and learning of the Torah School Program for youth

Learn to read Hebrew

Become an adult bar or bat mitzvah

Work on temple membership

Learn about Judaism and yourself at a Selihot Service

Help with temple publicity

Receive a birthday blessing from the Rabbi

Participate in social action and serve the world

Suggest ideas to our religious living practices

Observe a yahrzeit of a loved one of yours or of someone you care about

Visit and discover our temple library upstairs

Walk around upstairs and visit the offices of the Rabbi, the Cantor, and the Education Director

Attend a Shabbat service on Friday night or Saturday morning

Sing in the temple choir

Enjoy Hanukah with more than a hundred other people at the Sisterhood Latke Dinner

Observe Shabbat morning at a meditation service

Drive someone in need to services and to other temple events

Learn and enjoy at a Taus Lecture

Make a donation to remember and honor your loved ones

Play games, eat, learn, and pray at a park during Shabbat across the Peninsula

Discover Torah on the Trails and find something holy where and when you least expect it

Learn about wine; drink a lot of wine

Celebrate Shabbat with the Moody Jews

Eat and schmooze at a temple family Shabbat dinner

Learn a lot at a Scholar in Residence Program

Buy Opportunity Tickets to help us achieve financial stability

Learn from our confirmation students as they share their Torah School experiences

Pray at the annual Sisterhood Shabbat Service

Enjoy a summer musical concert under the stars

Gather strength for yourself and for your loved ones at a Shabbat healing service

Come to a 5:30 Thursday afternoon Torah School service where the students lead you in prayer and read Torah to you

Party like a rock star at an Adult Purim Party

Work on temple finances to insure our stability

Travel to Israel with your Rabbi and your Cantor

Buy dozens and dozens and dozens of hamentachen

Play on a coed softball team led by Rabbi Chuck

Browse and then buy wonderful Judaica in the Temple Gift Shop

Build a house with Michael Sherman and his buddies

Lead a service on Shabbat morning

Cook with the Cantor

Celebrate the b'nai mitzvah of our youth

Volunteer in the temple office

Build the sukkah in the temple patio

Write, read, and learn about one another in our Elul Reflections

Participate in our amazing Endowment Program to sustain our existence for all the generations.

I will stop now. Not because there is no more to tell you, but because there is **so** much more about Temple Beth El to tell you.

I am especially grateful to tell you that we can acknowledge all of what I have mentioned as we make this new year most memorable as we celebrate the ninetieth year of Temple Beth El. This is a year of wonderful activities and opportunities to grow and reinforce all that is good about our spiritual home. Linda Belzer and her committee are diligently working to provide us with the greatest activities that culminate with a gala in April.

So yes, this is our new year. This is our time to renew ourselves. This is our year to celebrate our beloved temple with generosity, with exuberance, with commitment, with involvement, and with appreciation.

No matter the number of these activities, no matter their value, they would be nothing without your participation and energy.

Let us treasure what we have here together.

Let us do what we do for ourselves and for what is best for our temple.

Let us do this for the future generations of Jews.

Thank you for being you and for sharing yourselves with one another and with me.

Thank you for indulging me.

I remain more grateful than you can know.

I wish you a year filled with health and contentment.

L'Shanah tovah.

Marla Shwartz, President