

## Yom Kippur Appeal - Michael Fishkow

Did you ever notice how small children name people by the task they see them doing? You have the Lunch Lady, the Ice Cream Man, the Bank Lady, and so on.... If I had to guess what a young person might name me in my role as President, I think it would be Thank You Man. That's what I seem to do most.

So let me start doing my job: Thank you for the honor and trust you have put in me in electing me as President.

- Thank you to Rabbi Linda, who has agreed to be our rabbi for the next 8 years.
- Thank you to Cantor Juliet and Rabbi Linda and for leading us in communal prayer, and guiding us through these "Days of Awe".
- Thank you to our prayer leaders readers, musicians, and participants who inspiring us in our personal reflection.
- Thank you to the greeters, baby-sitters, parkers, and to everyone who has volunteered their time for the good of the community.
- Special Thank you's go to Laura Lee Blechner and Randy Tiffany, our RPC co-chairs, who worked tirelessly to organize our High Holiday services.
- Thank you, members of the congregation, for your generous support in the past year.

Part of the President's job that a child might not recognize, is the leaders charge to tell the BI story. I've been involved in a lot of startup companies over the years. From my observation, it seems the best leaders are those who focus the organization by repetitively articulating "how we got here", "where we are", and "where are we going?"

As a community, the story of "how we got here " is in fact Each of our individual stories. I'd like to share a little of my own story.

I grew up in a large congregation in Connecticut that seemed heavy on the form, but light on spirituality. The Judaism I learned about seemed to be more about what you could NOT do, and very little about Jews should do.

By my teens and twenties, my Jewish identity consisted of being tied to a group of people who were generally kind; who contributed more than their

share of smart influential people to the world; and who were often misunderstood, discriminated against, or oppressed.

As so it went. In my twenties, my Jewish experience consisted of two days a year in synagogue, and spending every weekend in awe as I explored the Cascade Mountains and Puget Sound.

It was there I met Leslie. We moved to this area, and married. Although Leslie is not Jewish, my family traditions are important to me, and we agreed to raise our children as Jews. We joined Beth Israel, which we both found warm and welcoming.

And then, everything changed. Our daughter Claire was born. Despite months to get used to the idea of being a parent, you are never really prepared for what's to come. It was not so much the miracle of birth, it's what happened a couple of day later that really shook me.

So we are leaving the hospital to take our infant home. The nurse hands us the baby and waves goodbye. And then it was just us. It was terrifying. In that moment, I realized that I was responsible for this little person. Well fortunately Leslie was there, and actually it was the two of us who were responsible. But I still remember the feeling, "I can't believe someone trusted us to raise this child." And "if we don't do it, who will?" It was the most responsibility I had ever had to face.

A few years later, I had another one of those defining moments. When it was time to sign-up Claire for Hebrew school, Leslie gave me the push I needed, she told me. "Look, if being Jewish is important to you, you had better make it happen," because Leslie was certainly not able to do it for me. So off Claire and I went to begin our Beth Israel journey.

As I have learned from my children Jake and Claire, kids are very perceptive. They gauge how important something is by what they see you doing, not by what you tell them is important. As they say, "monkey see, monkey do." So as our children attended Hebrew school, I tried to relearn what I had missed in my own Hebrew School days. I was very proud to read torah at my children's bat and bar mitzvahs.

So how did this reluctant Jew end up in front of you as your President?

A teacher once told me, "The more you put into this class, the more you'll get out of it." I've found to be true both of education and also of life in general.

So, I took a few of small steps.... I attended a couple of adult Ed courses, I volunteered for some building projects, I prepared a Kavohat once or twice, We hosted a few Progressive dinners..... Essentially, I said "Yes" whenever someone asked for help. And now, here I am.

My experience at Beth Israel has changed the way I think about my Jewish identity. I learned that we don't have to define ourselves as victims. We can be builders of a vibrant community. We can be do'ers of good deeds, spiritual seekers, and advocates for social justice. We can be leaders, and mentors, volunteers, and teachers.

Over the last 3 years, I've had the honor of working with the BI Board of Directors. Unlike business, where decisions are guided by growth in market-share and profits, the Board's decision-making is guided by our Jewish values. This shift in guiding principles has made my time working with the Board into a truly unique and rewarding experience.

Each year, we struggle to find the right balance of how we should allocate our funds. On one hand, we fund expanded programs that nurture our community and cultivate our spiritual, intellectual, and cultural Jewish heritage. On the other hand, we must pay the salaries, mortgages, and maintenance expenses necessary to make these programs possible. In most years, the balance tips to the programs that nurture our community, leaving a little more deferred maintenance to the next year. Unfortunately, these little "tips" add up.

On September 30, Beth Israel will celebrate 10 years in this building. Through generous contributions to the capital campaigns in the years leading up to and following the move, the congregation was able to purchase this building and construct this beautiful sanctuary. There are still improvements we would like to make: We would like to make our driveway entrance safer and rebuild the parking lot. We would like to improve the condition of our Hebrew School classrooms. And then there is the deferred maintenance -- of replacing floors and lighting, and painting. These all require more money than we currently have.

At the same time, Beth Israel continues to extend its presence into the wider community. We have become a beacon for social consciousness in Delaware County. In addition to the feeding the hungry at the Upper Darby Life Center, we collect coats and hats and reading books. Through the organizational efforts of Louis Friedler, our Social Action Chair, we began

engaging the families in Chester directly -- bringing families to Linvella to the 4H Farm, to Borders to buy books, and engaging them in Martin Luther King day events with Ohev Shalom. In partnership with the UU congregation, we hosted a program to bring attention to the crisis in Darfur.

Our educational programs have expanded as well. - We are starting our second year of Torah Treks, and have added an intermediate level of the popular Jewish Alive and America. We are also hosting a class called "A Taste of Judaism," aimed at attracting unaffiliated Jews.

We have been applying for and receiving more grants than ever before. With these grants and your continued generous support, we have achieved more than we have ever before.

As we look to the year ahead, please recall that this is your congregation and that we all - you included -- are responsible for sustaining it. As my teacher said, The more you put into it, the more you'll get out of it.

As I wrap-up, I've told you two of the leader's three stories. I've told you how I got here, I've told you about where Beth Israel is today. On this day, when our fate for the next year is written and sealed -- It seems appropriate that I ask for your help in defining where Beth Israel is going from here.

So as I get ready to become Thank You Man again,

May we be sealed for a year of happiness, peace, purpose, and fulfillment.

And may we continue to build this wonderful community together.

And Finally, Thank you for your generous contribution and for helping to make Beth Israel what it is.