

RH Day 5777

Oct 3, 2016

Vision

During the Days of Awe we are able to reflect and ask ourselves, "What kind of life do I strive to live?" The High Holy Days are a time when we recognize how mortal we are, and the fragile nature of the human experience. Our life at moments can feel eternal, but yet we know that we are on this earth for only a whisper of time. As the Book of Ecclesiastes states, "One generation goes, another comes, but the earth remains the same forever." We are reminded that life is not counted in years, rather by sacred encounters. Leading us to reflect and ask, "What will our legacy be?"

My dear mentor, Dr. Carol Ochs, explains that we humans yearn to leave an inheritance of meaning in the world as testament to our life's work. She teaches: "In the prime of life we seek a place to leave our mark. We want the world to be different as a result of our having lived...we may strive to leave a physical mark...But even elaborate buildings crumble. But if our understanding of work expands to include personal transformation and growth, then at least some of our undertakings can never be undone. The most satisfying realm in which we can make our mark/ is in the lives of the people we have touched in some significant way, through the work of loving, nurturing, and teaching."

Therefore, how do we ensure our community's legacy? How do we protect Beth El's future? I believe it is by having a vision and purpose that ensures not only a future of survival, but a thriving community. No longer are we to only focus on structure, programs, and finances. We will begin to protect our heritage by creating a home of "Big Tent Judaism." A synagogue that makes room for all Jews, those who are observant of tradition, as well as those who are looking to explore and reconnect. There are many people who are seeking spirituality, but do not feel comfortable in Jewish life; or may not have been raised in a way that gave them the resources or tools to be an active and confident Jewish adult. And for younger Jews, there are some who disagree with traditional teachings or do not feel bound by Jewish customs and law. Therefore, how do we create a community that allows for a full array of practices and observances within one synagogue? I believe the answer is by making sure our temple is a community where values are our core, allowing room for diverse personal traditions and practices to take place together.

This is a challenge and like most synagogues, in the 21st century, we at Monroe Temple are facing many obstacles. Today, we are tested by smaller membership and tighter finances. In addition, we are seeing a generation of young Jewish adults question their connection to Judaism and their need for Jewish institutions. And we live in a geographical area where non-Orthodox Judaism is shrinking and Jewish institutions are struggling. And yet when we step

back to look at the big picture, we know our temple-community is a special place. We have a sacred legacy in which to build upon, helping us to continue to move forward and thrive.

Like I explained last night, it is vital that we transform our synagogue into what I like to call a *Kehilat Lev*, a congregation of the heart: focusing on Jewish living, in a welcoming and caring way, carrying forth a mission of audacious hospitality. What is “audacious hospitality?” Simply, it means to exude our values of warmth, care, and community; where the energy of our hospitality radiates, reaching both to those who see Beth El as their home, and to all Jews, especially those who feel disconnected from the Jewish world.

By helping and strengthening the greater community through supporting relations with other synagogues, initiatives to engage interfaith families, and by being aware of our institutional stumbling blocks/ where people can feel excluded or unwelcomed, we can help strengthen Monroe Temple and Jewish life in Orange County.

In addition, to be vital and thriving going forward, we also have a calling to be the hub of Jewish life! A home that has multiple doors and entry points. We have great programs, such as Mensch Makers, Torah School, MAC, and Sisterhood. And yet, we need to ensure that our future meets the needs of this new millennium. Our activities and programs need to be top-notch, and our focus needs to be holistic and personally relevant. For example, beyond having a great preschool, we also need to make sure we have the opportunity to engage and serve all Jewish toddlers and preschoolers in Orange County. To be strong, we as a temple, need to ask, “How do we support our families with youth from birth through college?” Instead of asking people to attend or participate in specific activities and programs. Our purpose and future is dependent on our ability to create a vibrant center for youth and their families. We need to create a Jewish family institute.

It is our mission to look at the multiple ways youth develop identity and create community. Once we are able to develop a multi-layered approach/ then we will better meet the needs of Jewish families in the 21st century. This way of functioning as a temple extends beyond our youth. We are challenged to strengthen our relationship with adults as well, especially those without children in the home. Monroe Temple will continue to offer many different types of programs like movies, book groups, and social programs. As well as continuing adult education like “Introduction to Judaism” and Adult B’nai Mitzvah. We will make sure to offer engaging opportunities for members to participate.

However, Personally, I think that there is a clear sign in the world today that programming is only part of Jewish life. We are more than an activity center! What has made Judaism strong for thousands of years is that we are a community that shares life together. And this is what Monroe Temple of Liberal Judaism’s legacy has been. We are a *hamisha* home with a heart! This warm and caring, down to earth nature is core to our health and future. By protecting this

heritage and making it core to our future, will ensure our strength and health. And to do this we need you!

When congregants have more ownership on the happenings in our synagogue we will be able to achieve all of our goals. There are so many talented and gifted people in our Temple. Let's work together to make Judaism fun, relevant, and meaningful. And for this to happen successfully means that we need you!

For Monroe Temple to survive, and ideally thrive in the 21st century, we need to all be invested in retooling our synagogue to be the hub of Liberal Judaism in the county. It is going to take lots of energy, time, and will even take capital. Look around, this is our legacy. Not the wall or the sanctuary, rather our purpose is people and living a vibrant and beautiful Judaism/ that we share as one community. We are to ensure our future by thinking beyond our needs as Temple Beth El, and rather developing a center for Jewish life, welcoming in all who seek a warm, caring, diverse, and accepting Judaism. A home in Orange County that teaches values and celebrates Jewish life in the modern world.

Ken Yehi Ratzon, may this be God's will!