

Congregation Beth Hatikvah

בית התקווה

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I read recently that there are three secrets to a successful High Holiday President's speech. The first two are to have a good beginning and ending –the third, is to have the first two as close together as possible.

This summer, as I started to think about my High Holiday address to the congregation, I read over my past speeches and a few other Temple president's speeches looking for inspiration. Today's address is a combination of my thoughts and those of others, woven together to express what I wanted to share with you here.

I would like to begin with a rhetorical question. The question is**Why?** It's a small word. It only has three letters. But the responses that can be generated by this question are infinite.

As many of you know, I have been involved at CBH for many years as a member, parent, teacher, school director, Board member, and most recently, Board President. **Why have I stayed committed to CBH all these years?** Before I answer, let me first define the term commitment. Oxford dictionary lists two distinct definitions:

1. the state or quality of being dedicated to a cause or activity
2. an engagement or obligation that restricts freedom of action

You'll notice the first definition has a more positive feel and implies CHOICE, the second sounds more like something you HAVE to do. The synonyms listed also sound and feel different. Dedication versus responsibility; devotion versus obligation; loyalty versus duty; and attentiveness versus burden.

Sometimes being committed can feel like the second definition and synonyms, especially around the holidays. But if you know me, then you know that I don't feel that way very often. My commitment to the CBH community is not restrictive or obligatory, it is pure of heart and a choice. So back to the **why**...

At CBH, we have created a space where we connect to something larger than ourselves. When our voices join together in song, we create a space where anything is possible; where ideas

can transform our world; where our children can have a future. Those voices come from an incredibly diverse group of individuals - age ranges, family structures, gender identities, political leanings, and religious backgrounds, just to name a few.

Some of us can read and recite the prayers fluently, while others may simply hum along. Some of us are Jews whose lives revolve around our Judaism, while others feel challenged to relate to our Jewish teachings. Some can't imagine not being a part of the Jewish community, while others may not see how what we do here is relevant to their lives. Some attend services and programs regularly, seeking to understand and enhance their Jewish heritage, identity, observance, and spirituality, while others may choose to attend just once or twice a year. So **WHY** are we all here - what is the common thread that keeps all of us renewing our commitment to CBH? I'll tell you **WHY**..

Regardless of where you may fall on that spectrum of Judaism and your connection to it, at CBH, our arms and hearts are wide open to greet you and to provide a hospitable tent to accommodate all who wish to join us, no matter how often. At CBH, it's about people, not programs. It's about relationships and not fee for service transactions. At CBH, we want our tent to be big enough for everyone. That's what we're trying to accomplish. We want all who enter to feel comfortable here.

How do we accomplish this? How do we create a space that appeals to such a broad range of people and experiences, given how very different all of us are. If I were in marketing, I'd tell you about this great product we have to offer. It can't be beat. It's the best deal in town. But membership at a synagogue is not like membership at the Y. We do not have a punch card and there is not a visible reward for attending regularly. **Then why join?**

Join because you believe in supporting Jewish institutions. Join because you care about the future of Judaism in our community. Join even if you don't attend regularly during the course of the year because despite your attendance record, your membership commitment truly supports our institution. There will come a time when you need the synagogue. Perhaps not this year, but the next. And you know what, because you were there for CBH, CBH will be able to be there for you.

If you commit to the kind of synagogue I've been describing, then membership dues are a bargain and not a burden. These intangible benefits of membership are the only ones that make the cost of being a synagogue member "worth it." The more you take part, the more you build those relationships, the more connected you feel. When we become part of the community, we become part of something much larger than ourselves. It certainly has been that way for me and for my family.

Back to why....

Passing through the doors, as I enter our sanctuary, I find myself at peace. There is no sanctuary like ours. This sense of peace is intangible. You can't touch it. But you can feel it. What we have here is truly special - CBH provides a safe haven from the pressures of the world, a place where you can develop close friendships, a spiritual life, and a way to infuse your life with a richness not found any other way. Underlying everything we do is a set of values and beliefs, a sense of connection, a belief that Jewish continuity matters and that transmitting Judaism to the next generation is important. We believe that taking care of each other is essential and that we can help change the world and make it a ... better place.

Like a family, we're here to help each other celebrate happy occasions such as baby namings, Bar and Bat Mitzvah, graduations, and weddings. And we're also here to help and support each other in times of sorrow or tragedy. The High Holidays are the time in which we reflect on the past year and renew our spiritual attachment. We also renew our commitments to ourselves, our families, friends, our synagogue and our community.

Now is the time to renew our commitment to CBH. This is your synagogue. This is your community. There is no better way to integrate yourself into your community than by getting involved. CBH is a dynamic place with energized people who want to make things happen. I encourage all of you to step forward to become more involved, even if it's only doing one more thing this year than you did last year. With your help we will be able to not only carry on the minhagim, or traditions, that have been established by those who have come before us, but we will be able to reach new and greater heights.

These "Days of Awe" from Rosh Hashanah to Yom Kippur are a gift to us – a chance to step back and look at our lives, a chance to examine the ways that we have gone on autopilot and forgotten that we have choices we make every day. We have a choice about how we want to act and how we want to think and how we want to live our lives. May we all choose well.

I thought about telling you all of the things that the Board and I want to accomplish this year, but I'd prefer that our actions speak louder than my words. What I do want to say is this:

Everyone hearing this speech is now on the CBH membership committee. Congratulations! Go tell you friends about us...better yet, bring them here.

May you and your family be sealed in the Book of Life for a good year.