



**A Welcoming Reform Jewish Congregation serving
Chantilly, Virginia and the surrounding area.**

www.bethtorah.net



Fall 2021

Back From the Wilderness

Howard Sulkin

TBT Facility Chair, Religious School Teacher, Past President

Think Back to Spring 2019:

With the first shut down of schools and Houses of Worship throughout our State and Counties, TBT curtailed worship services, school, and access to the building. With the exception of a very small group of individuals who emptied the refrigerator of perishables and took out the trash, the team turned off the lights and walked away.

School resumed on-line. Discussion groups and Shabbat services started up on Zoom. We even conducted a social event and fund raiser with – yes – toilet paper as the theme.

With the threat of COVID 19, we followed the CDC, State and County guidelines, as well as advice from our resident medical experts. We stayed out of the building, delayed annual cleaning and maintenance, and only entered the building to maintain the alarm, prepare school materials for our students, broadcast the blowing of the shofar, and host a couple of “family bubble only” b’nai mitzvahs – with Rabbi and Cantor always remote.

Flash Forward to Spring and Summer 2021:



We faced another challenge. We were approaching the end of our ten-year lease. The board, aided by several TBT members began to explore options. The discussions were not easy or quick. We needed to weigh carefully our ability, in the face of the pandemic, to maintain the membership numbers and revenue needed to commit to a facility; this facility, or possibly another.

Investigation, calculation, and deliberation took place over several weeks. The decision was made to open negotiations to extend our lease. We achieved a very fair agreement to keep this our home for the next decade.

I am incredibly proud of the board’s commitment to TBT’s future. That said...it was not enough. We also needed to make our members, our families, our community, want to return to our facility.

Spring of this year, I presented a recommendation, documenting steps needed to return the building to operations. The list included the typical summer shut down work (packing away school materials, de-cluttering, spring cleaning), as well as:

- ◆Painting
- ◆Replacing toilets and plumbing valves
- ◆Repurposing our art/resource room and small back classroom
- ◆Deep cleaning carpets
- ◆Replacing the stage wiring for the sound system
- ◆Retrofitting the sanctuary’s halogen lights to LED
- ◆Repairs as needed (the Sanctuary book shelf)
- ◆Purchasing and installing a remote system for services and school



The rationale...After 10 years of school, class dinners, holidays, post-shabbat onegs, b'nai mitzvahs, casino nights, art auctions, theatrical performances, concerts, special celebrations, a murder mystery dinner, and yes, scotch-bourbon-tequila-wine-beer tastings (not on the same night)...the carpet and the paint were in desperate need of a makeover.

The two rooms (art/resource and small classroom) in need of a makeover, had become ad hoc storage for too many things in all the wrong places - we needed to get them back into use.

The microphone connectors in the stage were damaged from 9 years of being walked on.

Reducing the electricity and heat from the halogen lights, was just the right thing to do; Tikun Olam.

The toilets were past end of life, and...well let's not go there.

The remote solution...was a topic of discussion several times over the past years. If the pandemic has taught us anything it is remote participation will continue to be an avenue for engagement.

The board appointed (and drafted) a design committee to walk through facility and consider the recommendations. Concurrently, we were offered an Eagle Scout project from one of member families and former students. With it, the opportunity to transform one of the two misused rooms. The board elected to allocate the necessary funds and proceed with all of the projects.

Paints were painstakingly chosen. Bids were received and reviewed. Work was scheduled. Which meant the actual heavy lifting was about to begin. You all know what that is like - painting and carpet cleaning. It's the same here. We needed to take everything off the walls, everything off the carpets.

We packed up the art room, packed away art work, removed displays, removed our Tree of Life, removed parts of the Memorial wall, relocated our Torahs, racked and stacked all of the tables and chairs, took apart the Bimah, piled things into the middle classrooms, and cleared out the office.

The first project was the Eric Klaiman Eagle Scout project. A team of scout volunteers and family members, following covid protocols, hauled old unusable computers and monitors to e-cycle, repaired walls, and built a large storage unit and counter. In few weeks we will see the payoff from this transformation project as prepacked boxes for student projects, holiday observances, and general art supplies will be stocked, labeled and placed in the custom storage unit, making them easily accessible to teachers and students

As soon as the scouts completed their work, a handful of TBT volunteers worked quickly over a few weekends to prepare the building for painting, as well as removing and replacing stage boxes and the wiring under the Bimah.

Once the painting was completed the same volunteers came back in on weeknights and weekends to re-install the Tree of Life, re-install the Memorial Wall, re-install the letters over the sanctuary doors, and rehang the artwork. During the days, electricians were in the building to begin retrofitting lights to LED/low energy consumption bulbs.

The next step was to move everything that was stacked up on the carpet, prior to painting, to make way for carpet cleaning. Once the carpets were cleaned and dried, another team of volunteers came in to put the sanctuary back together so we could be ready for a bar mitzvah on August 21.

Following the bar mitzvah, we set up our remote solution to make our High Holidays, a truly hybrid and blended service for worship, building community, and celebration. We needed to accomplish the intent of the holiday observance. We also needed to get our members and perspective members excited about our facility renovation and return to the building.

To accomplish this, we needed to feed 5 camera shots, an 8-mic audio mix (speaking, singing, instruments) to our remote participants, and approximately 10 remote readers, and one soloist, to everyone – remote and at TBT. Perhaps not a village...but it did take a Congregation.

Just to make certain we had enough to keep us busy, our amazing religious school team readied classrooms, and returned our school to operations (at TBT and on Zoom).





JUMP to Today

We are still waiting for delivery of all of the plumbing fixtures for that work to begin. The remodel is not yet complete, and yes, we still need volunteers.

Our next task is to increase the storage capacity and efficiency, of our trailer, building and installing a plywood platform. This means emptying the trailer, designing, building, and installing a wood storage platform, and repacking the trailer in an efficient accessible manner. We need a team of 4 or 5 volunteers to make this happen. Doing so will give us space needed to complete the resource room, as well as a student and adult library, study, and workspace for students and adults on Sunday mornings.

To date, only 17 of our member families have contributed volunteer hours toward this effort, and as I said, more volunteers are needed. The design committee decisions, and the volunteer hours and projects, have gone a long way to minimize the costs to reopen, without sacrificing quality.

While the invoices for this project are being paid with operational reserves, the funds must be covered by fund raising. Yes, we have gotten to that part of the article.

This year's High Holiday appeal is focused on covering the cost to re-open and refresh our home, as well as covering a portion of our annual operating budget. Our annual fundraising target for this year is \$33,900 by June 2022. This donation is over and above fees currently paid for membership and school. Divided across 10 months, this is \$3,390 per month.

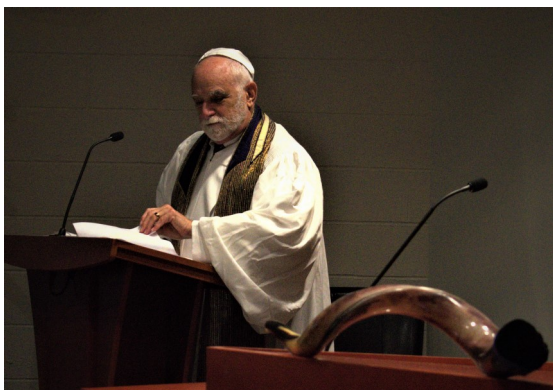
To date, we have received cash contributions totaling \$8,700. This is a great start, and only leaves us a balance of \$25,200.

Those of you who have compared our membership and school fees with other Temples and Synagogues know we have worked hard to maintain lower fees and to keep TBT more accessible.

We also know that, for many of our members, these past few years have not been easy. If all you can afford to give is some volunteer time, we get it, we understand, we will take what time you can offer, and we are grateful. If you are able to make a financial contribution, an investment in our home, it is needed, it will be leveraged efficiently, and it is appreciated.

Finally, to those who have shared a few or many of the 180 hours we have invested into this project...your fellowship and contribution is truly appreciated. It has been a lot of work, but it has been fun! We demo'd stuff, we used power tools and climbed on ladders, we found the sacramental bourbon cabinet, and no one was injured. That is building community.

So, there it is. We are open. We are back in the building. We want you to participate in whichever way makes you comfortable. We need your support. Welcome home!



Your Voice, Your TBT

The Summer 2021 TBT Congregation Survey was a real success! With an amazing response from the congregation, over 70 respondents, your feedback will help inform and prioritize Temple activities. A big thank you to everyone for taking a few moments to participate in the survey as your voice really does count and your feedback helps drive our focus for the next year. Here are some of the key takeaways from the survey:

Connecting Online and In Person: There is continued interest in hosting virtual TBT events while also recognizing that some of us are totally "Zoomed-out" and are ready to meet face to face. To enable our congregation members to join in Temple activities from the comfort of their home (or car at a soccer game) or in person, TBT will host as many activities as possible concurrently via Zoom and in person. Some events you are already familiar with, including Shabbat and Kabbalat Shabbat services, as well as Adult learning events. Based on your feedback, it is also clear there is a hunger for more, with 40 percent of respondents looking for virtual adult Jewish learning events and over 20 percent interested in virtual options for cultural offerings. So, in the coming year we are looking into hosting more events, so stay tuned. Most importantly, Rabbi has also recently announced a new "Judaism 101" six part course, taught both in person and concurrently real-time on Zoom. This class will cover many aspects of both Jewish religion and culture.

Culture: Speaking of Jewish culture, over 50 percent of the survey respondents noted their connection to Judaism is both Religious and Cultural, with an additional 20 percent strongly connecting their Jewish identity to their cultural roots. What does this mean for TBT? Well, we need to serve our community's religious and cultural needs. In the coming months, you will see new events on offer, to help you expand your knowledge and exposure to the arts, food, and Jewish history. Some ideas on tap are virtual Jewish cooking classes, winter cookie exchange, and The Great TBT Kugle Cook-off. We are also looking into hosting an outdoor Jewish film festival in the new year.

Connecting With Family: With the past year keeping us apart from loved ones and family members, we were interested to know if you all wanted to invite your family outside of the DC metro area to connect with our virtual services and learning events. With almost 80 percent of the survey respondents stating potential interest connecting virtually with family during TBT events, we are going to generate cost estimates for "virtual memberships" or "guest passes" so your family can join in on all the TBT fun! If you are interested in having your family members join into virtual TBT events, and would like more information about this option, please stay tuned to the Blast for more information in the coming month.

Hebrew is Not Just for Kids: For those of us who did not have the opportunity to learn Hebrew or the only thing one can recall from Hebrew school were the mountains of hamantaschen during Purim celebrations, we hear you! Almost 50 percent of survey respondents noted interest in learning or improving their Hebrew skills. Now, since "Hebrew skills" can run the gamut, we will be sending out a short survey asking for additional details from folks who are interested in learning Hebrew. As learning Hebrew means different things to different people, we want to make sure we understand the needs of the congregation so we can seek appropriate teachers to help with Hebrew learning. So again, stay tuned for more!

Service Co-Op: With all that is going on in the world and within our local area, many of us want to help and give back to those in need, and help create a welcoming community. Many TBT members have already stepped up and participated in food and clothing drives, as well as recently donating much needed items for the Afghan refugees. Howard and Joe have pulled together some events over the course of the last couple years, and we are looking to expand activities as well as participants to help us expand our reach and impact. With 17 people responding to the survey with interest in supporting our community service efforts, we are looking to create a more interactive community service and social action outreach plan, with multiple ways for people to volunteer and nominate causes for community service and outreach. Think of it as a Co-Op, and consider donating your time or resources to assist. Look out for more information in the Blast and Howard will be contacting those folks who signed up during the survey.

As you can see from above, the survey questions and your feedback have already helped us get going with a few new ideas, but we are of course, always looking for those members who want to help organize and participate in various events. Please contact any one of the Board members with an idea or if you wish to volunteer to host or lead an event, please get in touch. Looking forward to seeing you all virtually, and/or in person at TBT!

Thoughts From Rabbi Kenneth Block

The Rabbi & I



Before the pandemic, Joe Sutliff created a YouTube channel called *The Rabbi & I*. We recorded a few segments after Religious School on Sundays but they were far and in between. The pandemic changed our production schedule, and we now have almost one hundred segments recorded! Every segment could be a Newsletter article.

Rather than reading about various topics that you may or may not be interested in, you can watch and listen to many of the topics that interest you. Rather than my writing an article that you may or may not be interested in, you can actually choose a topic that interests you.

But wait, there is more! If you suggest a topic Joe will ask me your question and we will discuss it. Any topic you have is fair game and I will address it.

But wait, there is more! You can be a guest on our YouTube channel. That's right, just let me know your topic and you can be my guest. You will not appear on screen just as Joe does not appear on screen. We will introduce you however you would like to be introduced, by first name, last name, or no name.

But wait, there is more! If 1000 people subscribe, Google will pay us for every click, and we will donate the money to Temple Beth Torah. Even if you intend never to watch another episode, subscribe to our YouTube channel so that Google will support TBT.

But wait, there is more! I have two websites: www.Rabbionthego.com and www.EveryOneNeedsaRabbi.com. If they cannot host the audio of *The Rabbi and I*, then I will specifically set up a web site to host *The Rabbi & I* podcasts.

But wait, no don't wait! TBT needs you to listen and subscribe to *The Rabbi & I*.

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCrGzwWwGKWrgKfU53XPjYbA>

HIGH HOLIDAY SPEECHES

The following excerpts are from remarks shared during the High Holidays from Past President Jayne Ayers, and a few of our newest and most exciting additions to TBT leadership!

Liad Akronowitz, High Holiday Chair

Hello TBT family

My name is Liad Akronowitz and I am Temple Beth Torah's High Holiday Chair. I grew up in a suburb of Dallas, met my husband 22 years ago on JDate (which I believe still exists today) and we have 2 boys - Gavin, who was Bar Mitzvahed at TBT back in March, and Bryce who will be Bar Mitzvahed at TBT in about 3 years.

Two years ago our family was in search of a Temple that was small, but mighty, that would enrich our kids Jewish identity. That is exactly what we found during a TBT open house in 2019 when we were immediately embraced with open arms. And we haven't looked back!

Gavin got started prepping for his bar mitzvah and I eventually started teaching 4th grade Judaica. In fact, Bryce was in my first year of teaching here and, after a few classes, told me Mommy, you're doing a good job. Naturally, his approval was all the motivation I needed because I'm back again this year teaching 4th grade Judaica.

In the short time our family has been members, we have learned quickly how much TBT has to offer and how strong the bonds are here. Our family has morphed from saying the congregation where we belong to our congregation because we feel like we're home here.

And although we are a small, yet mighty, congregation, we thrive off of the energy from the hearts and souls of volunteers and off of the funding made possible by generous hearts all with one goal in mind - the same goal we have for our family - enriching this community strong Jewish identity. Our connection to TBT is what is steering our kids towards that goal and we hope you feel the same.

Please consider being part of the future of our small but mighty tribe by contributing in any way you can so that we can grow stronger together.

Jayne Ayers, TBT Past President

Thank you and Good yuntif. For those that I haven't had the pleasure of meeting, my name is Jayne Ayers, and I am the Immediate Past President of TBT. I am sorry that I am not in person with all of you, but based on some recent travel for work, I thought it was best to stay at home. I'm not good at keeping my distance and not hugging.

Many of our past, present, and future leaders have shared heart felt and important messages with you over the last week. It is amazing to hear the words of love and admiration for our TBT Community and Family.

My message (FYI...it's tough being the clean up batter) is quite simple. It is critical for each one of us to engage, re-engage, step up and raise our hand – to volunteer to be an active member of TBT. I don't want to sound trite – but it DOES take a village.

A reminder that TBT is a Chavarah – a community that is managed by its members. We EACH need to help – if even just a little. We have simple tasks (picking up supplies at Costco) and fun tasks (helping to plan and implement a bourbon tasting) and lending a hand in Religious School.

You may not be aware, but a very small (and I mean small) group of volunteers single handedly managed and did the hard physical labor of taking apart our Synagogue, managing the different contractors and putting the Synagogue back together so that we can all enjoy (and be proud of) our TBT Building. The truth is – we needed more help, asked for more help, and only a few people stepped up. To those that did – MANY THANKS!!

We have discussed as a Board, and with our Past Presidents, the idea of re-writing our Bylaws. The idea is that instead of having “positions” that need to be filled, we will create working “groups” which will allow each of us to bring our talents to the table and work together to manage the many tasks it takes to make TBT run smoothly.

I know we are all busy. I get that. But just like we set aside time to help at our children's schools, our neighbor hoods, a cause we are passionate about, we ask that you also set aside a little bit of time to help at TBT.

We will be sending out a survey and/or sign up with tasks that need to be completed in the coming months/year. We ask that EACH ONE of you sign up for something. Anything. We ask that you involve your family members. As it is said, many hands make the work easier/faster and frankly, it is ALWAYS enjoyable to get to know each other better through our participation and camaraderie.

It's been said a million times – what a weird almost 2 years it's been. I know we have all adjusted in our lives to make sure we stay positive and figure out other ways to keep our families happy and fulfilled. I know that I have missed interacting and celebrating with our TBT family. With the right protocols in place, we can slowly return to some in person events and hopefully soon, we can enjoy ALL the activities that we have grown to look forward to and have great memories of. Not sure about you – but I sure could use a good Murder Mystery Dinner or Sushi making event.

I wish you ALL a wonderful year and I look forward to seeing you ALL at TBT.



Stacy Brand, Recording Secretary

"Hello everyone, my name is Stacy and I am a relatively new member to TBT. I joined TBT right around High Holidays in 2020 after moving to Virginia the previous summer. Now a few of you might be asking, why did I join a Temple in the middle of a pandemic? If I could not attend Temple events in person, and I did not know anyone at TBT, how on earth could I begin to build a connection to a new place and congregation. Well, as isolating as 2020 was, prior to last year, I felt I was missing something in my life and in my community. I could not put my finger on it, but it had nothing to do with being locked up at home because of Covid.

I moved around a lot most of my life, since my dad was in the military and my job also has me moving every few years. I wonder how many of you have moved a lot in your life? In any case, last year was really the first year where I had the opportunity to choose where I was going to live, the community I participated in and the lifestyle I wanted. Pondering more about what I felt I was missing and why Northern Virginia felt a little and disconnected, it dawned on me. I was missing my connection to Temple and Judaism. I needed a Jewish community connection in my life, so I got in touch with TBT, and the rest is history.

From weekly Jewish learning events, to Torah study, and the famous Purim Pantomime, and of course, wonderful virtual services, I have been able to actively participate and rekindle my love of Jewish culture, heritage, and my faith. Judaism to me is all about Love, Remembrance, and of course, Food. All of those things are best when shared with someone, either close family and friends or someone new! I enjoy learning about my faith and culture as well as connecting and sharing ideas.

I try to give back to the community, and in turn, it returns the favor. I volunteer on the Board and give what time I can in helping to continue to build a community I hope we can all enjoy for many years to come. I am really looking forward to the New Year and hope you and your family will continue to join us as we celebrate this season and the year ahead. I encourage you to join in and participate and let us know how we can make your year sweet and joyous."

Gordon Shankman, Database Coordinator

L'Shana Tovah everyone.

I'm Gordon Shankman, our membership database coordinator. We joined TBT when my kids were in Torah Tots and 1st grade to give them a religious school experience and help them form a Jewish identity. We had been looking for a synagogue in the area and I happened to run into Jen Harding, the Torah Tots teacher and an old coworker of mine in Starbucks! We started talking and she told me about TBT so we came out to Sunday School to check it out.

I am so happy for that chance meeting. From day one TBT has been one of the most welcoming communities I've ever been a part of. Marci and all of the Sunday School teachers did so much to help the kids feel comfortable in a new environment and it felt like we were part of the family before we even showed up. One thing I've learned in the past several years is that we are the synagogue and the synagogue is ours.

This congregation is what we make it. So far it has been a school for my kids, a source of Jewish community for our family, and a lifeline for virtual events during COVID. If Purim in person is anything like Purim on Zoom... All of these things don't happen without us, the members. When I first got the email about volunteering, I was a little hesitant. I wasn't sure how much time I had to give with two young kids at home! What I found out was every little bit counts! Working with the board the past two years has been very rewarding. I've been able to get to know more people and I'm excited to start coming back together in person soon.

If you're here for the first time, welcome! Please join our family and help make it your own. If you're already a member, reach out about volunteering!

We are the synagogue, and the synagogue is ours.

Judaism 101 Begins this November!

Beginning Saturday, November 20, from 10:30 am until noon, Rabbi Block will be teaching 6 sessions on Judaism. Classes will cover the basics on sacred documents, beliefs, prayer, the circle of life (*what ever happened to that cute little lion cub*), the holidays, and history.



Join the class to...

- improve your knowledge

- get a refresher

- get some Jewish trivia to stump your children or grandchildren

- spice up the conversation at your bourbon drinking competitive knitting team's afternoon tea parties

Hybrid and blended Classes will convene at TBT, in one of the large classrooms, and on Zoom to meet the needs of all of our adult learners. Sessions will be recorded and made available to any of our students who are forced to miss a session due to a soccer game, work travel, or the Maj Jong World Championships.

Note: Judaism 101 is required for all adults considering conversion and/or adult Bnai Mitzvah.

Sessions: (all sessions 9:30 am to noon)

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| 11/20/2021 | People of the Book: Judaism is a religion that values and centers around the contents of its sacred documents—each generation adding to the interpretation of its texts. |
| 12/04/2021 | What do Jews believe? To be a Jew means to struggle with one's understanding of God about which there are many different theological perspectives. |
| 01/15/2022 | How do Jews Pray? Music speaks louder than words. Join the dance as we choreograph fixed prayer and spontaneous prayer! |
| 01/29/2022 | The circle of life: In the circle of life it's the wheel of rituals that keeps our faith bound by hope. Then we find our place on the path unwinding in the circle, of life. |
| 02/12/2022 | The cycle of the year: Are they the High Holy Days or the High Holidays? What does that make the other seventy eleven, low holidays? |
| 02/26/2022 | History of The Jews Part 2: Jewish history can be understood as the story of Jewish resilience and adaptation. From the creation to the "Tree of Life" Synagogue Judaism has evolved and continues to progress today. |

Register at Temple Beth Torah or online here:

[https://www.signupgenius.com/
go/10c0f48adaa22a6f5c43-judaism](https://www.signupgenius.com/go/10c0f48adaa22a6f5c43-judaism)