

## YOM KIPPUR MORNING 5779

Every student who has gone through the sixth grade in our Religious School knows the story of Honi, a Jewish sage who lived more than two thousand years ago. As an elderly man, he was planting carob trees, which take a long time to produce their fruit. As the king passed by, he stared at this strange sight before calling out “old man, surely you do not expect to live long enough to eat the fruit from this tree?” Honi replied, “your majesty, when I came into this world, others had planted trees for me. I am now planting for those who will come after me.”

What are we passing on to future generations? While none of us will sing as gloriously as Aretha Franklin, hopefully we will make sure to write up a will, an action over which the Queen of Soul procrastinated far too long.

We can pass on our possessions to those who will come after us, but Judaism also has a beautiful concept, called an ethical will, in which we try to pass on the values we tried to live by to our descendants.

The value of talk, however, is limited without action. So, on this day when The Book of Life is sealed, we have to do more than talk if we want to ensure that our values and ideals live on well into the future.

For so many people locally and around the country, Beth Am Temple is a very special place, which has brought them feelings and fulfillment, unlike other synagogues they have experienced.

Thanks to the leadership of man and women, such as those who were passing our Torah scrolls at last night's Kol Nidray service, this temple at the end of a dead-end street, in an isolated, residential neighborhood in Irish-Catholic Pearl River, recently celebrated its 55<sup>th</sup> anniversary. That's quite an accomplishment!

I don't know if our first Temple president Al Loeb, of blessed memory and his contemporaries could have foreseen the success that Beth Am has enjoyed since April, 1963. However, success does not come from looking at where one is; success comes from looking to the future.

On the High Holy Days, we pray as a community, in the plural. We confess our sins as a community; we ask forgiveness as a community; we seek the betterment of the community by working to ensure that its values and goals will live on through us and after us.

That is why this morning, I am announcing the creation of BethAm@60, a campaign designed to ensure that in April, 2023, just after we celebrate Passover, we at Beth Am will be able to declare our freedom from mortgage payments and debt on the sixtieth anniversary of our founding.

This morning, I want to make sure that the Jewish communities of northern Bergen and southern Rockland counties have a place for the issues of the day to be addressed in a Reform Jewish context. I want to ensure that there is a place for Reform Jewish worship to thrive, for Jewish kids to be educated, for *tikkun olam* to improve the world. I want there to be a site for Reform Jews to have their weddings, funerals, b'nai mitzvah and covenant celebrations. I want there to be a Reform Jewish center for our holidays to be celebrated and observed. Above all, I want to ensure that the unique niche which Beth Am occupies remains a constant in our area.

We all know that our area is going through a demographic shift. The Orthodox and Hasidic communities are slowly expanding throughout the county. The surest way to ensure that a neighborhood retains its character is for the institutions of that community to remain. Orthodox and even Hasidic synagogues are not a threat to us in this area . . . as long as there are also Reform and Conservative synagogues here. Diversity strengthens a community.

At our Selikhot program two weeks ago, veteran member Bill Kremer told the story of a synagogue which had very short board meetings, because a prominent billionaire was an active member of the synagogue. When the

synagogue had a need, the board described that need to the philanthropist's secretary, who nodded his head and the meeting was over.

While it may sound like a wonderful synagogue, I prefer the Beth Am model, where no one person has that kind of power over the community. Beth Am Temple has members from a wide range of economic situations. We are the house of the people, not the house built by one person. And those people, ladies and gentlemen, are us.

And so tonight, I am asking everyone here today to make a commitment to BethAm@60. For those who are blessed with the ability to do so, I am requesting that you donate \$60 a week to the future of this congregation for the next five years.

For those of us who would love to give that gift, but just can't, I am asking you to donate \$60 a month to BethAm@60. If you are not able to do that, please consider \$60 per quarter, every six months or per year.

I believe that if we all do what we can and what we should, we can raise \$250,000. A Beth Am Temple, no longer saddled with monthly mortgage payments, will be in a wonderful position to profoundly impact the lives of hundreds of families in our area, while providing the religious stability which may become increasingly important.

On these High Holy Days, we are asked not just to do, but to do our best. Tradition says that we pray, we repent and we give with extra vigor at this time of year, so that our names will be written and sealed in the Book of Life. In that spirit, I am asking everyone here, including non members who take advantage of and value what Beth Am offers them, to do all that you can.

In keeping with the simplicity of this day, we have not prepared a snazzy fundraising brochure. Instead, there is a blue sheet of paper on a table in the lobby with the name of every Temple family and blank sheets for visitors. Please take the paper, select your level and put it in the box in the lobby or mail it in after Yom Kippur. With your help and only with your help can we ensure that what is there for you will be there for others.

This synagogue has a spirit, an ideal, which goes beyond its clergy, it's board and more. It is the house of the people. We are not a smooth-running institution. We are a group of people constantly trying to do better and to be better and we often succeed, but sometimes we don't.

We strive to approach one another as people, not as members, not as numbers. We seek to bring a Reform Jewish vision of our incredible Jewish heritage to those of all ages, backgrounds and experiences.

We hope to make everyone feel comfortable, like they are in their second home, rather than being in a “house of worship.” For that reason, most of our members are not here for a Bar/Bat Mitzvah, they are here to be part of a welcoming community.

Beth Am Temple began more than 55 years ago when the waiting list for membership at Spring Valley’s Temple Beth El was years long. Rabbi Louis Frishman encouraged a group of visitors from Pearl River to start their own congregation and gave them some valuable assistance.

Today, that thriving Temple Beth El no longer exists. The edgy and creative Reform Temple of Suffern is gone. The YJCC in Bergen County has lost its building and is a shell of its former self. Temple Beth Or in the Township of Washington and Temple Beth El in Closter are merging and moving to Oradell.

Yet Beth Am continues to do its thing. We are not thriving financially to put it mildly . . . but we’re getting by and with your help, we’ll continue to do so.

Today, I am asking you to take a meaningful step to ensure that five years from now, ten years from now and beyond, regardless of who the rabbi is, the cantor is, the principal is and whatever color the High Holy Day tickets

may be, Reform Judaism will be active and, hopefully, thriving in our corner of Rockland and Bergen County. I am asking you to look beyond yourself and make a commitment to the Jewish future.

Today, I am pledging \$60 a month for the next five years to the future of Beth Am Temple. This is an act of solidarity with the goal of a diverse Jewish community in Rockland and Bergen counties five, ten and twenty years from now.

BethAm@60 will be an exciting opportunity to celebrate our Jewish heritage during a glorious weekend in April, 2023. Like most success stories, it begins with planning. And this success story will begin with you, with me, with all of us together. Kol Yisrael areveim zeh lazeh, “the entirety of the Jewish people is intertwined with one another.”

On this day, like Honi Hamaagal, we commit to the Jewish community in and around Pearl River five years from now, wherever we may be. Every participant will be honored with a tree planted in Israel in their honor, thus ensuring that the benefit of this tzedakah extends all the way to Israel.

Yom Kippur begins with the powerful words of Kol Nidray, asking God’s forgiveness for promises we have been unable to keep. This morning, by contrast, is the day to back up our words and our ideals with action.

Yom Kippur is not an easy day, but it is vitally important. Similarly, this is not an easy request, but it is vitally important to our future as a community.

Working together, may we all be privileged to come together in under five years to celebrate our success. Ken y'hi ratzon, may it be God's will.

AMEN