

**Address to Congregation Beth El of Sudbury 5784**  
**Michelle Fineblum**

**Sept. 16, 2023**

Shana tova! I'm so glad you are all here, in person and on line! So much has happened since I stood here last Rosh Hashana, and the community has accomplished so much this past year.

Here is truly just a sampling:

We've established an innovative approach to Friday nights: on the first Friday of every month, services have been enriched by music and dinner, in a way that has attracted an excited crowd across generations.

Members have initiated a wonderful native plant garden, which you can find right along the road, here at Beth El.

We brought back the BBQ! It was a great success, with 100 people schmoozing and laughing together.

We had amazing member art shows. At the openings, the artists gave fascinating presentations about their work.

Members engaged in a vast array of Tikkun Olam activism and study, including actions involving the children and teens.

There were so, so many new opportunities for adult learning, such as learning with Rabbi Tiferet Berenbaum, and the Orchestra of Exiles film.

You gave generously for a new ADA compliant bathroom to be built in the classroom wing, and we are working hard on improving the current bathrooms.

The enrollment at our high school is greater than it has been for at least 7 years. Our younger school has started the year with a spirit of music, Tikkun Olam and learning.

Rabbi Josh completed almost 2 full years as our sole clergy, serving us so generously with heart and mind, inspiring and guiding us with creativity and wisdom.

Finally, our community is beyond thrilled with the arrival of our new Cantor! Cantor Vera has jumped right in, already partnering beautifully with Rabbi Josh, and enriching the kids' educational experiences. She is bringing her many talents and extensive knowledge to us, with joy and with energy.

There is so much to LOVE about the past year at BETH EL!

In addition to enjoying all of the above with you, let me share some other personal moments of joy:

I LOVED sitting at one of the First Friday services, being enveloped by the singing all around, and then being delighted by a baby peeking up at me from the floor!

I loved dancing at Simchat Torah – with this community, the students from Haifa, and with the Torahs.

I loved hearing the powerful d'vars of the b'nai mitzvah, which brought back wonderful memories of my own children's experiences at Beth El.

I loved this year's Purim Shpiel, with the Monty Python theme.

I love how we learn, pray, and dance together.

And as president, I love working with my fellow lay leaders and the staff. I'm in awe of their dedication, wisdom and love for Beth El.

PLEASE CLOSE YOUR EYES FOR A MOMENT AND THINK ABOUT WHAT YOU HAVE LOVED ABOUT BETH EL THIS PAST YEAR.

[PLEASE OPEN YOUR EYES] ...

Your love for this place is so powerful, and it's what keeps Beth El going. So many of you give so much of yourselves. You give up your nights and weekends, your family time, even some of your work time, to keep this place you love alive, and to support your fellow members when they need you.

Our community literally could not function without you, and I would like to thank you now by recognizing you to the entire community.

Please stand when I call out a group that you are part of. If you are on Zoom or Livestream, please raise your virtual or physical hand, or stand up!

*I'll ask everyone to please refrain from applauding!*

Please stand if you are the Rabbi, Cantor, Beth, Scott or Shoni

Our very hard-working Board, this year or last year's

To all who worked to bring together our high holiday celebrations

Cantor Search committees – this year or last year's

If you have done anything related to Beautification, the art shows, the Building or our Gardens

You have been involved as a musician, in leading services or chanting

If you did zoom hosting, any AV work or anything to do with the Web, publicity or communications

You were involved in a Tikkun Olam activity ...

You did Finance or any committee work at all!

You brought food, organized social gatherings, **or you volunteered at all!**

If you attended any Beth El service or program this year, in person or on line! That includes this service.

THANK YOU! BETH EL WOULD NOT BE HERE WITHOUT YOU!

Please be seated.

IN THE PAST YEAR, you, our community, have shown up with your hearts, with your care for Beth El, and your care about one another in times of grief and mourning as well as joy.

Sometimes, because we care so much, we find ourselves in situations where we take passionate positions. SOMETIMES this means we disagree about how things should be done at Beth El. The important thing is that we argue for the sake of heaven, with Kavod, with mutual care and respect.

I am reminded of something that Rabbi Kushner said ...

“A mystic is anyone who has the gnawing suspicion that apparent discord and brokenness might conceal a hidden unity.” Rabbi Kushner was referring to the divine when he spoke here of unity. I believe that this hidden unity could easily be applied to the connectedness and love which define our community, and which draw us to Beth El. This unity does take loving care to maintain.

We have so much that bonds us together, beyond any disagreement.

AND SO MUCH TO LOOK FORWARD TO, INCLUDING THE BAR MITZVAH OF ELIJAH BREINDEL, a TRIO SEFARDI concert ON NOV. 6 and ... MATTHEW BLOCK'S CHOCOLATE TASTING on NOVEMBER 4!

LOTS OF OTHER GREAT THINGS TOO, so keep an eye on those weekly emails!

A SWEET AND HEALTHY NEW YEAR TO YOU AND YOUR FAMILIES!