

December 2, 2022

In 2002 author Malcom Gladwell published a book called the Tipping Point. His thesis about tipping points is that they are these magic moments when an idea, trend, or social behavior cross some threshold and suddenly take off, spreading like wildfire. While criticized for the lack of scientific evidence, Gladwell garnered endless praise from both the masses and business community for his insights, compelling storytelling, and practical implications.

We've all seen examples of tipping points. Who can forget Pokemon Go. Tik Tok. Rubik's cube – twice. The TV show *Friends*. Ring doorbells. If we're not careful, antisemitism.

As I considered tonight's remarks, I questioned my purpose for saying more than the highlights of Temple's upcoming calendar. Why am I compelled to share more? Because this congregation asked me to lead. And by my count, I've eaten into ¼ of the 104 Shabbats of my term to help build some of the momentum for Temple Beth-El's own tipping point.

That you are here tonight already makes you part of the solution, the lifeblood, the momentum. Perhaps you are a Connector, someone who knows a lot of people or is not afraid to know a lot of people. Please, be Temple's glue. Maybe you're what Gladwell calls a Maven – someone who has expertise and can provide specialized knowledge. Please tell us where you'd like to play. Or perhaps you're Gladwell's Salesperson – someone who can get others to say YES. Have I got some roles for you!

This sanctuary holds nearly 1,000 souls. What stops us from filling it 1/3, 2/3 or even all the way full every Shabbat? Yes, that is a challenge. But we're Temple Beth-El. If Temple is a good idea, which I believe it is, and I suspect you do as well since you are here, let's spread that good idea – to our friends, to our family, to fellow congregants we haven't seen in a while, to our grown kids, to our grandparents. Temple IS a good idea, but right now it's also a pretty good secret.

One of Gladwell's key insights is that big changes begin with many small steps. I am candidly asking for your help with two specific small steps. 1. Without sacrificing personal safety, please take a livestream break and come to the synagogue. If you want to wear your slippers, no one will say a word! 2. Please invite 1-2 people each time you come to Shabbat services or any Temple program. It might take us the remainder of my term to fill this sanctuary – for Shabbat and many of our other amazing programs, but I believe Temple can experience its own Tipping Point phenomena.

December 9, 2022

The last two weeks I have spent quite a bit of time getting our new Interim Executive Director, Eric Ryniker, up to speed. While he is a smart, kind, and gifted administrator, he is new to this role, our initiatives and issues, our people, and to Judaism. It has been fascinating and fun to explain this sacred institution from a lay person's perspective. While most organizations have acronyms and short cuts for accelerating communication, I have found myself instinctively

leveraging one of our most powerful, yet inconspicuous devices: Yiddish. Each time this happens, Eric looks appropriately confused, and I do my best to translate. But it's not just me. Other congregants and leaders have added to Eric's lexicon over the last 10 workdays as well.

On Eric's Yiddish vocabulary list so far are *mensch*, *mishpocheh*, *alta cocker*, and my favorite, *bubbe meise*. I'm sure we'll quickly get to *nosh*, *oy vey*, *shlep* and *chutzpah*. But I don't want to make him *meshuggeneh* by throwing too much at him too soon. As it is, we're already a lot.

I say all this not only to share my excitement (and humor) over Eric's early days, but also to remind us about the magic of our tradition – even the culturally informal stuff that is found nowhere in our prayer books or in the Torah scrolls. Yiddish is just one of the things that glues us together throughout the world, hopefully through the generations, and for sure through our synagogue. So go pull out a few of your favorite Yiddish phrases -- fine, even the off color ones -- and see what happens... you might get a little *verklemt* as they might remind you of your *bubbe* or your *zayde*. But you'll have me *kvelling* over the fact that you are continuing one of our greatest traditions and modeling what it means to be a good ancestor.

December 13, 2022

The Sixth Night of Hanukkah

By Debbie Roos, President – Temple Beth-El December 23, 2022 (Shabbat Message)

Tis the sixth night of Hanukkah, and under our dome,
The candles are lit, and in every home
We celebrate the Maccabees and miracles, too
As well as Shabbat, cuz that's what Jews do.

The children are gathered, delight in their eyes
With gelt in their hands, expecting a surprise
Wrapped presents await while the tall shamash
blazes Menorahs are glowing as we sing Rock of Ages.

We've got dreidels and latkes and donuts with jelly
Not some red suited guy with a great big fat
belly. It was Judah, and Jonathan, Eleazar and John,
Simon and others who fought thru til dawn.

A temple destroyed, a flame threatening to go out.
Yet one pot of oil proved God's miracle, no doubt.
Not one day, not two days, not three days, not four,
Seven days the flame burned and still
lasted one more.

Our Festival of Lights gives hope for tomorrow
That joy and prosperity will always trump sorrow.
Happy Hanukkah to you all as you head to
your home And it goes without saying, I wish you Shabbat Shalom.

December 16, 2022

As a person with a bachelor's degree in English, I am fascinated by words. Some of the words I ponder most these days are Beth-El, House of God. Part of it, I'm sure, is because I say Beth-El no less than 30-40 times a day or refer to it in some form or fashion: TBE, Temple, Temple Beth-El, the synagogue. But truly, it's the House of God part that really has me most absorbed. Sometimes I'm in awe of the literalness of the translation. This is God's House. God lives here. The majesty of our dome, the grandeur of our sanctuary, the beauty of our stained-glass windows intend to honor and reflect the heavenly tenant. There is no mistaking the work that takes place under this roof.

Before 211 Belknap, God lived on Jefferson & Travis streets. This building is actually our second home. This factoid caught my attention and shifted my perspective. Beth-El. *Home* of God. That singular word change – while jarring on one hand because it sounds so foreign, really got me thinking. What's the difference between a house and a home? According to Ralph Waldo Emerson, "A house is made with walls and beams; a home is built with love and dreams." That could not be more fitting for Temple Beth-El. We are more than the structures surrounding us. We are more than the fixtures and the decorations. We are the relationships and the stories. We are the arguments and the apologies. We are the laughter and the tears. And we are most certainly the love and the dreams.

While I am sure Beth-El, Home of God will not catch on as our new nomenclature, I do find that it feels more accessible, more personal, more inviting. And don't we all crave accessible, personal, inviting? God's earthly real estate investment is most certainly precious to us all, but it is fractionally as valuable as what has been and what is being built inside it. WE are Temple Beth-El and we are the warmth, the color, and the spirit that makes this place our sacred home.

December 30, 2022

Welcome, everyone. I'm glad you could join us in the sanctuary or in your own sacred space. Thank you to all who took part in our service tonight, including Cory Palmer who lit our shabbat candles.

On many levels, 2022 has been like a Charles Dickens novel for me: it was the best of times, it was the worst of times. There was so much laughter that I cried, and so much crying that I couldn't help but laugh. I won't bore you with the details as I know we all have our own entries this annual ledger.

While I reflected on the highs and lows of my year, I realized that they collectively took up only a fraction of my time around the sun. So what the heck did I do with the rest of my time? For you musical aficionados, you'll appreciate this question: 525,600 minutes: How do you measure a year? So I did some thinking. Where did the rest of my minutes go?

1. **Sleep.** This is critical. Not enough of it, or enough quality sleep provides shaky ground for just about everything else: my work product, my attitude, my physical health. So sleep was a key investment.
2. **Exercise.** I'm a former group fitness instructor. And I'd still prefer to be a couch potato. However, moving my body, especially when I don't want to, makes sleeping better and supports my work product, my attitude, and my physical health.
3. **Temple and work.** No explanation needed here! This stuff gets a lot of my time and attention.
4. **Family and friends.** As I got to this item, I struggled. David Foster Wallace's address to Kenyon College, however, gave me some perspective. He wrote,

"There are these two young fish swimming along and they happen to meet an older fish swimming the other way, who nods at them and says "Morning, boys. How's the water?" And the two young fish swim on for a bit, and then eventually one of them looks over at the other and goes "What the hell is water?"

Family and friends. They've been my water through these best of times and these worst of times. I could not have breathed without them. Where did I spend the rest of my 2022? Swimming among some amazing people, and perhaps not recognizing the lifeline they provided me, like when my 5'8", 140-pound baby lays his head on my shoulder, or when my sweet husband buys white cake with white icing just because... Or when a friend writes me a note that makes my whole day.

This is water and that's where the rest of my minutes went. While the highs and lows got my attention because they required and absorbed so much energy, these little moments are the ones that carried me along, filled my aching lungs and heart with life-giving oxygen, and ensured my existence.

As we enter the new year, I invite you to notice the water and more of the individual 525,600 minutes that are waiting ahead of each of us.