

## **January 20, 2023**

I've been playing with a new branding idea for Temple and thought I'd run it by you this evening. Temple Beth-El – San Antonio's home for Reform Judaism, Wellness and Wellbeing. No, we're not adding a clinic, spa, yoga studio or juice bar – although I do think some of those things would be awesome additions to our space (in case anyone would like to make a capital donation). And no, Rabbi Nathan has not greenlighted some new age spin to our ritual practices.

What's driving my cheeky marketing idea is a TED Talk I recently came across by Robert Waldinger. He's the director of the Harvard Study of Adult Development, the longest longitudinal study in history. In his work, Waldinger found that people who turned out to be the happiest and healthiest have good, warm connections to others AND that these warm relationships kept people physically stronger and mentally sharper. Perhaps most telling, the research asked octogenarians what they were proudest of in their lives. They didn't talk about their social status, financial wealth, or accomplishments. Rather, they spoke about friendships, children, and roles they played in others' lives. The power and warmth of people's connections is never more important or evaluated than toward the end of a person's mortal journey.

Waldinger's study further finds that happiness makes people age more slowly and keeps people able longer. Why? Because relationships – even casual ones – are stress regulators. When our bodies remain in chronic stress mode, we maintain prolonged levels of inflammation and circulate stress hormones that decompose both our happiness and various body systems. Relationships help keep stress in check.

So what does all this have to do with Temple Beth-El? Everything. Our clergy are both trained and called to walk with us through life's most stressful milestones: weddings, birth of a child, b'nai mitzvah, illness, divorce, death. But it's the in-between-ness of these milestones that also makes Temple the perfect home of Wellness and Wellbeing. It's the place lifetime friendships are fashioned in our consecration class. It's where future business and life partners meet in confirmation and the Purim carnival. It's where mahjong friends are connected by having joined the same committee. And it's where Shabbat buddies are made who check on you when you miss a Friday night. With 971 families equating to nearly 3,000 members, Temple Beth-El is a veritable fountainhead of relationships. It is a veritable fountainhead of wellness and wellbeing.

While I will not be asking the Board or the Rabbi to change either our mission or our tag line, I will ask you to engage in two exercises. First, think of a person you miss or haven't had contact with in a while, particularly a Temple member. Send them a note just to let them know you're thinking about them. (If you'd like to text them while I'm reading announcements, I'm okay with that – that's how serious I am about the invitation!). See what comes back. Second, please introduce yourself to 2 new people before you leave. We have some amazing guests this evening, and I know what charming hosts our Temple family can be. And just think, everyone will be improving their health in the process. As much as I'd really like that yoga

studio and juice bar, I will be elated to have a sanctuary full of chatty people long after the closing benediction. Here's to your health!

### **January 27, 2023**

In 1981, singer / songwriter Debbie Friedman wrote the following lyrics: "And the old shall dream dreams, and the youth shall see visions, and our hopes shall rise up to the sky." I've long been a fan of this song, knowing that at one point I was the youthful visioner, but that I am now closer to the older dreamer that she was speaking about. As we picked Cole up from the airport late Monday night from his L'Taken trip, and he enthusiastically shared all that he and his friends experienced, my hopes absolutely rose to the sky: here was the next generation of Jewish youth seeing their vision.

Being a Jewish teen in San Antonio isn't easy. You wanna talk about being a minority? It takes work to establish and re-establish that Jewish identity so that our kids always know – at their core – who they are. As Friedman says, "we must live for today, we must build for tomorrow." Thanks to Rabbis Nathan and Yergin, Billy Bloomberg, Ross Halfant, Ellen Barshop and a slew of others – including us parents -- , Temple helps us live and build so that our youth can envision a Jewish tomorrow.

You've already heard a lot from one Roos tonight so I'll defer to his and his colleagues' much better speeches. But I'll leave you with the last stanza of Friedman's song that reflects what I believe is the path these kids have started down. As such our hopes really will rise up to the sky.

Today's the day I take my stand, the future's mine to hold.  
Commitments that I make today are dreams from days of old.  
I have to make the way for generations come and go.  
I'll have to teach them what I've learned so they will come to know.

That the old shall dream dreams, and the youth shall see visions...