

6.2.2023

Even as a former group fitness instructor, there are some days I don't feel like working out. I know what's in store, I even know I'll feel better when I'm done, and yet I just don't feel like exercising. Today was one of those days. Fortunately, I was already dressed from having walked the dog. I had my gym shoes on which meant I was ready to do either kickboxing or weight training vs. cycling or yoga where I'd have to change my shoes or take them off entirely. Inertia ruled and kickboxing won the day.

As expected, the first few minutes were annoying, so much so that I considered stopping and just going to get coffee. But I stuck with it. Somewhere along the way I quit fighting and settled into the program. Don't get me wrong – there was still a lot of hard work ahead, but I was engaged. Within the hour, I was a lot sweatier, a lot more awake, and done – with the emphasis on done.

For me, exercise is a habit, not always passion. I plan on living to be 104, and to do so, I need to take care of the vessel that I occupy. So, with exercise, sometimes just showing up is the achievement, not necessarily the quality or duration of the workout... just simply showing up.

By now you're likely asking, what on earth does this have to do with Temple life? In my transition from annoyance to engagement this morning, I realized I periodically experience a similar transition to Shabbat. The go go go of my week with its challenges and interactions with people fill my mind with problems to solve, things to unpack, and questions to answer. This is my natural state. And there are some days I just don't feel like slowing down, being peaceful or even chatting with God... I've clearly got too much to do. I know what's in store at Shabbat, I even know I'll feel better when I'm done, and yet I just don't feel like coming.

Sometimes I find myself fidgeting in the first few minutes. It's too much work to sing, especially if it's a tune I'm unfamiliar with. And I'm sure there are 5 emails I've forgotten to respond to. But I stick with it. Somewhere along the way, I quit fighting and settle in. Don't get me wrong – there's still portions of the service that I'm working on or find myself pondering the rabbi's sermon, but I find myself engaged. Within the hour, I am more relaxed, more receptive, and yes, peacefully done.

Like exercise, Shabbat has become a habit for me. Some days I can't wait to get here, greet everyone, feel the energy, and dive right in. Other days, just showing up is the achievement.

Perhaps some of you share my transitioning experience or perhaps you are "all in" once you enter the sanctuary. Perhaps you are a Shabbat frequent flyer or perhaps you are a periodic participant. Either way, all are welcome and accepted under our dome because simply showing up is more than enough.

6.9.2023

Earlier this week our board took a tour of the building. While it may seem like an odd thing to do as it's a place many of know well, it was important that as Trustees, we looked at it through our fiduciary lenses and not simply as congregants.

I won't share the countless things I learned about our building as I hope you'll collect a group of friends and schedule a tour for yourself. Just in this sacred space alone, I learned some things that make me see it differently and appreciate it even more. I encourage you to have this opportunity for yourself – perhaps as a pesach sheni, or a second chance, a second look to see something you look at every day, as Rabbi Nathan shared in her d'var in this week's announcements.

Throughout our tour, we talked about the ways Reform Judaism and Temple Beth-El has evolved over the years. We discussed the design intentionality of the sanctuary and chapel, modeled after the protestant churches of the day, inclusive of the beautiful organ. Trustees shared personal stories where b'nai mitzvahs were not a thing, and reading Torah was not in style. Services were entirely – and intentionally, in English, often with great opposition to Hebrew and anything remotely Zionist. The wearing of talit and yamulkas ranged from explicitly not welcomed to passively tolerated.

The fascinating thing is that these, and so many more, re-formations, have occurred within a couple of generations. We have congregants who don't recognize today's Temple, who don't feel at home because there's too much Hebrew, too many instruments, and too many religious artifacts. It's simultaneously understandable and fixable. It's understandable because I know how uncomfortable I am when I return to my childhood home. It doesn't feel like home anymore. My mom is gone, it's not my room anymore, I'm a guest. In contrast, it's fixable. First, humans are by nature resilient, learning creatures. Our congregation's changes are evolutionary not revolutionary. But acquiring knowledge and skills comes with practice. The more practice people have, the more comfortable they are. Secondly, while our traditions may have changed, being a warm, welcoming, inclusive place for Reform Jews to cultivate their Jewish lives has not. WE are Temple Beth-El through the ages, because we choose each other as a community, as fellow congregants and as a holy people.

Temple Beth-El will continue to change. This building will continue to change. For like any thriving institution, change ensures our growth and our future. L'dor v'dor is part of our tradition, even if it's not always easy.

6.23.2023

Yesterday I came across a quote that I couldn't quite get out of my head. "Knowing me and knowing **of** me are two totally different things. Don't confuse the two." The addition of that one little word "of" forced me to slow down my processing speed to truly understand the admonition. In slowing down, I considered both parts of the challenge.

To know me, or to know someone is to see them for their whole self. It's to consider and appreciate what they think, feel, and believe. It's to have a sense of their perspective, their interests, their likes and dislikes, their fears, and their aspirations. To truly know someone takes a level of vulnerability on the part of the known person and a willingness to engage on the part of the knower.

To know "of" someone, in contrast, is topical, often situational, casual. Perhaps it leads to making assumptions or drawing inferences based on limited experience. It's about creating plausible narratives and short stories based on shards of data. To know "of" someone can breed either curiosity or stereotyping.

Yet knowing "of" someone is how most relationships begin. We know nothing about someone and gather information over time. Humans are judging creatures. We evaluate pieces of data quickly and often subconsciously, literally in the blink of an eye – assessing t-rex or tabby cat, kinfolk or outcast, friend or foe. So, knowing "of" someone isn't necessarily bad.

It's when this superficial knowledge about a person – and the judgement of that knowledge -- is the whole truth and nothing but the truth that gets people into trouble. As Jews, I'm sure many of us have had an experience or two where someone claimed to "know" us because of our faith. They were clearly confused.

At Temple Beth-El, we have an obligation to one another to chip away at that little word "of." We owe it to each other to create a place of sacred belonging, where each person is known – by their name, their gifts, their perspectives – even when, or especially when, they differ from our own. In so doing we create a safe space for each of us to be our most vulnerable selves and we turn our House of God into a Home of God where everyone feels comfortable.

On this Pride Shabbat, I'm grateful that 5 of our members were vulnerable enough to share parts of their respective stories. And I'm grateful that we are a congregation that is willing to engage in hearing them.

6.30.2023

The Temple heartbeat runs a little *off* beat to our secular one. Our fiscal year begins in June vs. January, and our administrative and programming years follow suit. While most of us are vacationing, relaxing, and trying to stay cool, Temple is already in pre-season. Our clergy and staff have already been working on the gameplan for the upcoming year. Endless amounts of planning for religious school, adult education, and worship events have already taken place. Ideas for special musical, spiritual and intellectual opportunities have been both workshopped and even scheduled. Why am I telling you this? Because I've seen some of what's on the books and it's awesome. And I've heard about some stuff that's not yet been formalized, and it's super cool, too. I am very proud of and grateful for the innovative work of our clergy and staff and am extremely excited for our members. Temple Beth-El is the place to be, now and in the future.

In our *very* near future, as in next week, we will officially welcome Cantor Sharon Kohn as our Interim Cantor. She has already been in close communication with our rabbis, Erin McAdams and me as we begin our transition. We're excited for Cantor Kohn's experience, leadership, and sacred partnership in this next year. And we're excited for Cantor Kohn to serve as both an advocate and a bridge as we seek out our permanent cantorial partner.

While today's 97 degrees and heat index of 103 make it hard to think about fall, much of Temple is already working on the High Holidays. We're thinking about sermons and music; security and prayer books. We're thinking about childcare and ways to make services generationally inclusive. We're thinking about all of this and more to ensure that Temple Beth-El is the place people want to be, now and in the future.

The beginning of our fiscal and programming year is off to a good start, as we sweat out the middle of our calendar year and work toward the end of our Jewish year. Regardless of how you're keeping time, know that Temple is alive and well, and full of amazing things yet to come. We look forward to sharing experiences with you in this next year and to building new opportunities with you. WE are Temple Beth-El and Temple Beth-El is the place to be, now and in the future.