

## Rabbi's Message

### Four Questions for a New Year

***Happy New Year!*** That's right, we are about to observe the "other" Jewish New Year. Did you know that there are no fewer than ***four*** "New Year's Days" in the Jewish calendar? We are about to celebrate what is arguably the most important one.

Most people recognize Rosh Hashana, the first of Tishrei, as the official New Year. But the Torah lists Rosh Hashana's month of Tishrei as the seventh month, and Nissan, which begins this year on March 12, as the first month. Spring is a time of renewal, and when the full moon is visible in Nissan, we celebrate the Passover *Seder*. The other Jewish New Years include the first of Elul, the month that precedes Rosh Hashana (the Mishna mentions this for animal tithing), and the 15<sup>th</sup> of Shevat, which is the New Year for Trees (Tu B'Shevat).

Why is this time of year so important? Passover celebrates newness. On the seder plate, we include an egg, representing new life, and green plants, representing growth. We tell the ancient, yet always timely story about generations of oppressive narrowness leading to a time of freedom. We remember by saying that we, ourselves, were all redeemed at that time in order to form our personal relationship with G-D. Each year, we our young people ask four questions that hopefully other, adult questions. I'll offer four to contemplate:

1. What outside factors limit me from achieving my full potential...and what can I do about it?
2. How can I strengthen my spiritual relationship with G-D and enhance my personal relationships with the people in my life?
3. In what ways do I accept narrow limitations, and in what ways do I encourage the growth of ideas?
4. How can I use this springtime Holiday of Passover to inspire me to create newness in my life?

The programming at Temple Beth Torah is going through its own springtime of rebirth. Regardless of your age or Judaic experience level, there is something new and exciting going on at Temple Beth Torah.

**Infants and Toddlers:** Our new babies, Aaron Blumin, Isaac Couch and Emilio Velasquez have a lot of activity for their young lives. Once a month is our Family Tot Shabbat; after I share a brief "service" with young families, they enjoy a pot-luck dinner and camaraderie together. Twice a month on Sundays, Stacey Blumin and Merissa Stein lead a parent-child class for little ones, getting them used to the synagogue and spending time with other children and parents.

**School-aged children:** Did you look forward to Religious School when you were a child? Our kids do! With our experienced principal, Carrie Keith, engaging teachers and an excellent curriculum, our kids are strengthening their Jewish identity and learning that it's fun to be Jewish! Older classes are preparing for leadership of student-led Shabbat services and delving into deep issues in the Torah while younger students explore the creative side of Jewish culture.

**Teenagers:** Our teen involvement has been more active than in several years. Susan Pollard leads a Shabbat discussion group twice a month, highlighting relevant topics for today's young Jewish men and women. Several of our teenagers are teachers and tutors in Religious School, helping motivate younger students by sharing their love of Judaism. And a TBT Youth Group is in the process of reviving!

**Adults:** Adults have never had so many options at TBT, and are really coming out to expand their minds! Wednesday evenings, our new Melton class (a baker's dozen of students) meets for sophisticated study of Genesis. Sunday afternoons, Ioana Bar teaches Hebrew to a variety of skill levels. Twice a month, Dick Amos leads an interactive, dynamic Torah study, applying sacred texts to everyday life. Our Learner's Service in February, "Inside Shabbat," had a full house, as did our annual "Jewish Night of Why." And weekdays are also have their crowd, with a monthly "Lunch and Learn" that has attracted new learners. Motivational speakers, like Rabbi Shalom Hammer in November and Michael Segal, upcoming in April as well as Holocaust Survivor Chaja Verveer keep our adults engaged and inspired.

**Elders:** *From Aging to Saging*, as Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi put it. We were delighted recently to bless Arnold and Manette Farber on FIFTY YEARS of marriage (a few years ago, Bernard and Hannah Lewis also celebrated a 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary at TBT). And the whole congregation was excited to wish Bill Denbina Happy Birthday as he celebrated number 90 in style.

The Israelites had a forty year journey through the wilderness to the Promised Land. TBT is now celebrating our thirtieth year – and ready to take the next steps toward an enriching future.

L'shalom,

*Dan Gordon*