

Yom Kippur 2026/5787 Chapel Reflection

Barbara Herman

Good afternoon. I'm honored to be speaking to you today.

Many of you are accustomed to seeing me in a pew in this beautiful Rudin Chapel or engaged in volunteer activities. The bimah presents a new perspective for me. Today, I also want to speak with you from the perspective of someone who didn't know what to expect when my family joined Temple Beth-El, 44 years ago; from the perspective of someone who has gained so much from our synagogue during those 44 years; and from the perspective of someone who has viewed so many aspects of the life of our synagogue and its congregants through the lens of my camera.

Our daughter, Amy was five years old, and our son Benjamin was two years old when we joined TBE in the summer of 1982. My husband Howard and I were both the children of parents who sent their children to Hebrew School and who had no other connection to their synagogues. We joined TBE to ensure that our children would receive a comprehensive Jewish education. We also wanted to be able to attend services that had meaning for us. We didn't expect more because we didn't know how much more a synagogue could offer.

The temple's monthly bulletin, usually 24 pages long, introduced us to a world of social, religious, educational, family, and other opportunities that TBE offered. We began to take advantage of them. We met congregants of all ages, backgrounds, and interests; we joined groups within the temple; with my own background as an early childhood educator, I became a first-grade teacher in our Religious School; and I engaged as a participant, and eventually as a leader in numerous volunteer activities. I took on the role as the temple's unofficial volunteer photographer. Through the lens of my camera, I have seen congregants and clergy who care about our members in times of joy and times of sorrow, who care about our neighbors, and who walk through life's journeys together.

My camera has captured much of the history of our synagogue. Some activities are a thing of the past; some have evolved into current-day versions; some continue; and some are new. Please listen for how those activities brought me into contact with hundreds of congregants, often at times of joy or sadness.

As Chair of Care Cards, I was proud to work with the founder of TBE's Caring Community, Carole Safenowitz, of blessed memory. Carole and her husband Aaron, of blessed memory, both of whom contributed so much to this synagogue, were neighbors of ours who influenced our decision to join TBE. As Chair of Care Cards, I wrote and mailed cards to congregants for happy lifecycle events, such as births, weddings and anniversaries; and for sad ones too, such as illnesses and deaths.

Just as Abraham and Sarah welcomed strangers into their tent, hospitality and the joy of partaking in food together are important components of a strong temple community. I served as Sisterhood's Vice President for Hospitality for 12 years, ordering desserts and assigning hostesses for every Oneg

Shabbat. I have many photos and memories of families with b'nei mitzvah cakes. For special Shabbatot like MLK Shabbat or a Shabbat with a guest of honor, members of Sisterhood provided home baked goods as well. For Pride Shabbat, we always had a specially inscribed carrot sheet cake, the favorite of John Hirsch and Herb Leiman, both of blessed memory, who were leaders in the LGBTQ+ movement, at TBE and nationally. I have many photos of those events as well as photos of the day we and other TBE members supported John and Herb when they served as Grand Marshals of the Long Island Pride Parade in Huntington. John also organized Shabbat Eve potluck dinners at TBE a few times a year.

Much of that kind of hospitality continues at TBE. Now our bakers provide us with homemade desserts at every Oneg Shabbat, and we greatly appreciate their dedication and contributions. Roberta Lulov and Donna Ganzer, both of blessed memory, who contributed to our temple in so many ways, could always be counted on to bring us delicious home baked cakes, cookies, and pies.

We have also introduced packing and delivery of Purim Shalach Manot bags to our older members, and we just completed a new "Honey Hugs" project for Rosh Hashanah.

Our synagogue has always recognized the importance of bringing Judaism into its members' homes. I was a proud member of Sisterhood's floral delivery corps that delivered bimah flowers to homebound temple members on Shabbat afternoons. The group was chaired by our fellow congregant Harriet Feldmann, of blessed memory. At the start of each Jewish year, Harriet would host a luncheon at her home to welcome the volunteers and assign dates for the coming year. After every Shabbat morning service, a Sisterhood volunteer would break down the bimah floral arrangement into smaller arrangements, and make deliveries to congregants whose names and addresses had been supplied to us by our rabbis.

The commitment of our members to our civic and humanitarian responsibilities is portrayed in numerous photos I have taken.

I have a collection of photos of TBE members donating blood, from the 12 blood drives that I ran at TBE for the New York Blood Center during a four-year period.

For three years, Howard and I co-chaired Brotherhood's Easter at the Interfaith Nutrition Network soup kitchen in Hempstead. Dozens of temple volunteers prepared and served turkeys and side dishes to the guests of the INN. If anybody needs a photo of a Brotherhood member slicing a turkey, I'm the one to ask.

Today, TBE continues to observe the mitzvah of feeding the hungry. Brotherhood's annual High Holidays drive in support of the Interfaith Food Pantry at St. Aloysius Church in Great Neck is well underway. Stuart Lubert, of blessed memory, not only helped launch our partnership with the food pantry; Stuart also initiated the former Easter at the INN program in Hempstead. Our members also support the Tzedakah Project that provides holiday meals each winter, and we distribute food to the families of less fortunate students during school vacations. Such projects also serve as community

building events and as opportunities to meet fellow congregants. My work and the work of other Sisterhood members in TBE's former Braille Bindery also honored our responsibility to serve the greater community.

Because I wanted others to experience the benefits of TBE membership, I joined the Membership Committee and participated in, and photographed many new members' events.

Our temple's values are depicted in more than 10,000 photos that I've taken over more than four decades. In addition to the activities I've already mentioned, my photos include Religious School activities; Tashlich and other events at Steppingstone Park; Sisterhood events including Rosh Chodesh gatherings and Women's Seders; Sukkot; Simchat Torah; Hanukkah plays and dinners; Christmas Volunteers at North Shore University Hospital; MLK services; Purim shpiels and carnivals; Brotherhood's Interfaith Seders; concerts; Memorial Day parades and barbecues; fundraisers; some confirmation class photos; recent Boards of Trustees group photos; and more. The photos demonstrate our temple's commitment to our own sacred community and to the broader community.

Whoever said that when you volunteer, you get more than you give; was right. There have been times throughout the years when Howard and I have been seriously ill. This community provided love and encouragement to us every time.

Through all the activities, all the photos, and despite all the changes we have witnessed, there has been one constant: members who engage in the broad range of activities that support the pillars of our faith and who are present in the thousands of photos I have taken. When we joined TBE, we never thought about the connections we'd be making with hundreds of remarkable people, and how meaningful and deep some of those connections would become. With the passage of 44 years, many of those people are no longer with us, but they inspired Howard and me and the members of our generation with their service to our community. I'm so happy to see their smiling faces in my photos.

By the way, our original reasons for joining TBE

- To provide a Jewish education for our children and
 - To find a place for meaningful prayer
- were realized.

Amy and Benjamin attended Religious School from kindergarten onward and became b'nei mitzvah and confirmands at Temple Beth-El. Now **their** children attend Religious School. Our two oldest grandchildren became b'nei mitzvah last year, and we are looking forward to the b'not mitzvah of our two youngest granddaughters in the coming months. L'Dor V'Dor.

And . . . participating in services regularly at TBE is an important part of our lives.

Thank you

- to the leaders and members of this community,
- to Rabbi Stoller,

- to Music Director Shy Kedmi and Cantorial Soloist Stephanie Horowitz-Mulry who lift our spirits at services with their beautiful music,
- and to our temple's professional staff for enriching our lives.

G'mar Tov.