



Shalom, and welcome congregants, friends and family. For those of you who don't know me already, my name is Staci Bagel, and I am the President of Temple Beth El. I would especially like to welcome our new members and their families....you have blessed us with your decision to make Temple Beth El your house of worship and a part of your extended family!

“He who goes questing for what he wants may discover, along the way, what he needs”.

“Ain't about how fast I get there, ain't about what's waiting on the other side...it's the climb”

On Rosh Hashanah, Rabbi Kaplan gave a sermon that started out with his enacting a search for G-d. He looked around corners, in the sanctuary, and even in prayer books. I thought a lot about that search and how it relates to us in the upcoming year. As we close the book on the past year, we begin anew and part of that renewal will involve our searching for the things in our lives that give us meaning. Maybe our search involves an area of our lives that we would like to enhance or change. Unfortunately, the path is not always easy, but the rewards can be monumental.

In the book *Eat Pray Love*, the protagonist dedicates three years of her life to seeking physical, emotional, and spiritual enlightenment. Her journeys are not always easy, but she winds up learning so much about herself in the process that the outcomes are always beneficial. She seeks spiritual enlightenment in an Ashram in India, and does not understand why she can't reach the higher plane that she seeks. At the Ashram, there is a particular chant that she finds tedious and cannot bear to sit through and surrender to. She resists and fights this particular activity, until she realizes that if she does not conquer it, she will never be where she wants to be. The eventual realization that she can conquer a difficult but necessary task allows her to ascend to the plane she seeks. Enlightenment is reached when her need is met.

As a congregation, we have begun a search that is also difficult but necessary for the coming year. Our beloved spiritual leader, Rabbi Kaplan, will retire at the end of this year. It is difficult for us to envision the search for a new leader and the change that this involves. Rabbi Kaplan has been so much more than just a Rabbi to us for all these years... he has been a friend to our children, a counselor to us during our times of need, a devoted husband, father and grandfather to his family, a shoulder to cry on and strong arms to offer a hug when it was needed. I have cried with Rabbi Kaplan, laughed with him, and will never forget his presence as he sat with me in the days after my husband's passing. His advice has helped me reach enlightenment in areas of my life that needed it. It is hard to envision that this is his last High Holiday service leading us in prayer. Rabbi Kaplan has always wanted what is best for our congregation, and even though he is retiring, that sentiment is still as strong as ever. Even though we search for a new spiritual leader, and that search is difficult and challenging, in the end that search can bring enlightenment to our congregation in the coming year. Bringing together congregants of differing backgrounds, ages, observance levels, and priorities has united us in our ultimate purpose: the continuation and growth of Temple Beth El. Sharing our hopes and dreams for our congregation, gathering that information and processing it, and trying to find a leader who will meet our needs is a difficult task; but ultimately one that can bring us together in a way that we may not have realized we needed until we have it.

As we wipe the slate clean on Yom Kippur, and start anew, this is the perfect opportunity for us to ponder what belonging to a congregation means to us. Participating in a Rabbi Search activity has already helped many of us to really dig deep and think about this question. I hope that you will all participate and tell us what your needs are, because this process can really bring us together and show us what we feel we can do to strengthen what is already an amazing house of worship. This year, let's pull together and make each and every activity at Temple Beth El a success and a cause for celebration. If you think back to last year, and just choose one thing you wish you had done but didn't, and participate this year, just think what that can mean for our energy and good will. Let's show a potential new leader that we are a congregation that is willing and eager to work together for the needs of the community. Let's show Rabbi Kaplan that his journey to this point has culminated in an upcoming year that is outstanding and meaningful to each and every one of us.

Rabbi, as President I get to sit up here with you and daven with you on Kol Nidre...next year, I hope to sit next to you in the congregation and again Daven with you on Kol Nidre...

Wishing you all a meaningful fast, and a final sealing in the Book of Life for a good and meaningful year.