

President Board Report: February 16, 2017

URJ Board Training: Sunday, May 7: We will be holding our URJ facilitated Board Training on May 7. Jim Cherney of Denver will be arriving on Saturday, May 6, and we plan to hold a Board reception for him either here at the Temple or at someone's home. We have some funds to pay for food and wine. Then on Sunday, we plan to meet at 10:30 am here in the Social Hall to begin our work together. He has contacted some of you to get your input, and we look forward to working together to build unity and move forward as a Board team. This is very important work that we will do together to help us unify our goals, our mission, and our vision, and I appreciate you taking the time to participate. We have 80% of us committed to attend, along with Jim Rosenthal. I have asked him to join us due to his history with the temple, with the nominating committee, and with the Board. I believe his participation is invaluable. Those unable to participate are Allen Blum, Pearie Bruder, and possibly Susan Michelson. We cannot afford to have anyone else missing, so please plan to attend. I ask that we all bring food for a potluck lunch. We can discuss that later as we get closer to May. This training is specifically designated for current Board members only, per Mr. Cherney's request, so we will not be inviting other individuals at this time, except for Jim Rosenthal. Our ad hoc Leadership Team, however, plans to continue meeting after Mr. Cherney's visit and plans to develop a Leadership training for newer Board members and any continuing Board members as well.

Mike Batkin: Mike Batkin will be meeting me, the Rabbi, and Allen, to discuss the Batkin fund. This is set for Sunday, February 26 at 1:00 pm here at TBE. We'll report what is discussed at the March Board meeting.

Scheidt Seminar: I attended the URJ's Scheidt Seminar for Temple Presidents on February 9-12 in San Diego. I learned a lot of much needed, valuable information and made contacts to help us into the future. Here are some of my reflections, prayerful thoughts, and sharings.

Connection

In the beginning
God rebelled against solitary existence
With Creation of stunning variety
Which, ancient words say,
Was divine reflection.
We are meant to be different.
We are meant for connection.
Love me, says God,
And love each other.
Remember: oneness does not mean same.
So listen, Israel,
To what you know best:
In the beginning, there is God;
At the end, there is God;
And in between, there is us—
With God
And that first breath
Joins us forever.

I participated in many activities, including the following:

1. The opening talk by Rick Jacobs, President of URJ, speaking on Being Part of the Reform Movement and its significance worldwide
2. A beautiful Kabbalat Shabbat outdoors.
3. Listening to a panel discussion with Reform Movement Leaders, moderated by URJ VP of Strengthening Congregations, Amy Asin. The leaders included Daryl Messinger, Chair of the URJ North American Board, Rabbi Aaron Panken, President, Hebrew Union College—Jewish Institute of Religion, and Rabbi Rick Jacobs, President of the URJ
4. Participating in group workshops, including the following
 - A. Workshop on the Principles that Drive Strong Congregations: Start with Why and Sacred Partnerships facilitated by Amy Asin.
 - B. Workshop on Achieving Financial Stability by Creating a Culture of Philanthropy, facilitated by Lou Feldstein.
 - C. Workshop on Engaging NextGen: What Congregations Can Do for YOUth, facilitated by Miriam Chilton.
 - D. Workshop on How to Think Like a Synagogue President: What Should I Care About, facilitated by Rabbi Sam Joseph of Hebrew Union College.
5. We heard a talk on the Future of Reform Judaism—Four Ideas from the Talmud, by Rabbi Aaron Panken, President of Hebrew Union College—Jewish Institute of Religion.
6. I had a one-on-one conversation with Rabbi Aaron Panken.
7. Saturday morning Torah Study
8. Shabbat Morning T'filah service led by Rabbi Rick Jacobs and Cantor Rosalie Boxt.
9. Shabbat Conversation with Rabbi Sam Joseph: Continuing the Conversation: How to Think Like a Synagogue President and What Should I Care About?
10. Governance: Who is Responsible and Who Can Approve
11. A one-on-one conversation with Rabbi Lou Feldstein about Synagogue Finance
12. Personal Torah of Leadership Workshop and Havdalah.
13. Staying Connected to Our Learning activity
14. Final Reflections on Our Learning
15. We set up a Small Group Brit, with several Chevruta (support partners)

The overall theme of the four days was “Building a Sacred Partnership” and Understanding the Why—we are here for the why, not the what.

A sacred partnership is a commitment to building and nurturing relationships that elevate the work of leadership to a level of holiness. Sacred partnerships recognize each of us as individuals and our desire to inspire sacred action in our communities. Sacred partnerships are built and nurtured through the Jewish values of mutual respect, trust, honesty, listening, and communication, transparency, confidentiality, flexibility, and reflection.

The Pirkei Avot (3:2) says: When two people sit together and there are words of Torah between them, the Divine Presence dwells among them.

Rabbi Rick Jacobs shared the following verses with us, and we discussed what they meant. Listen:

The Place Where We Are Right

By Yehuda Amichai

From the place where we are right
Flowers will never grow
In the spring.

The place where we are right
Is hard and trampled
Like a yard.

But doubts and loves
Dig up the world
Like a mole, a plow
And a whisper will be heard in the place
Where the ruined
House once stood.

From Ecclesiastes Zuta:

Two people are better than one. Two who toil in Torah are better than each working alone.
For if they fall, one will help his companion up. If one partner forgets, the other sets him right and reminds him.

Two are better off than one, in that they have a greater benefit from their earnings. For should they fall, one can raise the other; but woe betide him who is alone and falls with no companion to raise him! Further, when two lie together, they are warm; but how can he who is alone get warm? Also, if one attacks, two can stand up to him. A threefold cord is not readily broken!

Being Part of the Reform Movement: Inspire the Sacred to Be Sacred Leaders (my notes from Rick Jacobs' opening talk and the following panel discussion)

We need to share each other's inspirational stories.

The Reform Movement is inclusive, diverse, we practice pluralism, interfaith families, Jews by choice, LGBTQ, Jews of color, people with disabilities, friends and allies, believe in equality between men and women as a core value.

We need to grow and nurture new members. This is where our leaders will come from. How do we make our synagogues more attractive, meaningful, and engaging?

We need to be humble, to have humility, to build bridges and grow our community. We can't be rigid and arrogant.

Two is better than one.

Sacredness is being welcoming, empowering the next generation to take the reigns of Judaism. We have a different role, serve a different purpose. Our sacred partnership is to build a community purpose. We need to develop a relationship with each other that is a partnership of trust—between Board members and the congregation, Board member to Board member, Board member to the Rabbi, President to the Rabbi, President to the Board members. It's holy work if we do our work right. It's not only what we are trying to do, but how we do it!

What makes a person a leader? What makes a person a sacred leader? It's how you work, not where you work. We need to view every part of our work with a sacred dimension. We need to hold each other accountable. What calls us into leadership?

We need to engage in a sacred welcome. We need to change the culture to welcome everyone and see it as a sacred duty.

What are some of the biggest challenges in the Reform Movement today? What's the challenge of being a person of faith or being Jewish in the 21st Century?

We need to be the people who will keep reforming and imaging. We need to be inclusive and innovative, but not be shallow. Give people the stuff that enriches their lives. How do we grow deeper, not just wider? We are the Reform Movement (not reformed), however, we are still reforming. People want to feel loveable and capable, we want to feel loved and capable. We can learn from other faith-based communities.

How do we stand for something with integrity and still make room for dissenters with whom we may disagree? How do we hold our communities together when we think differently? (Should we have people wear red and blue kippot?—just a joke). There can be passion and conviction and still be understanding among us.

We need to create a window of opportunity for dissenters to see themselves in a good and fair light. We need to create a safe place for dialogue.