

## Remarks from David Offer, President – Erev Rosh Hashanah 2022

As many of you know, this is not my first time serving as president of Temple Beth El. I was president nine years ago. I'm back again and that gives me an unusual perspective on what the Temple is doing and what we have done since my first term in office.

Things sure are different than they were back then.

I'd like to take a few minutes to review what this Temple has accomplished in those nine years and what that means for our future.

Let's start with the most important change.

In 2013, Rabbi Susan retired, and Rabbi Asch became our rabbi. That could have been a time of turmoil, but Rabbi Susan helped lead to an easy transition and Rabbi Asch worked hard to quickly meet as many members of the congregation as possible and to move us forward from the strong base created by Rabbi Susan.

We are truly blessed today to have Rabbi Susan – our rabbi emerita – as part of our congregation and to have the leadership Rabbi Asch provides.

The energy, dedication, and talent she has given us for nearly a decade is amazing and as your president I offer her our thanks.

Let's look at some of our other accomplishments in the past few years.

Start with real estate.

We bought the Powell property next door and turned it into expanded parking. We bought the house across the street and turned it into the Nancy and Charlie Schuman Center for Jewish Learning – a home for our Hebrew School and an office for our rabbi.

We remodeled the Temple, creating this beautiful place for worship.

And after all that, we have no debt. None! Our members – you – have provided generous support.

Next, let's look at programs.

Our Hebrew School has never been stronger. We have paid and volunteer staff. Kids are excited and parents are involved.

We have embraced social action. We are helping refugee families resettle in Augusta. Over the years we have been involved with Bridging the Gap and Addie's Attic to help needy families in our community. We have worked with the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism on a non-partisan get out the vote campaign.

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We have a strong outreach program led by Susan Bakeley Marshall to support members of our congregation who may need rides, help with meals or companionship during illness or loss.

We have become even more open to welcome people interested in conversion.

We have cooperated with Colby College and the Center for Small Town Jewish life in many interesting programs.

Our holiday observances have never been stronger. We celebrate together at Sukkot, Purim, Passover, Hanukkah and at other Jewish holidays. And our wine tasting party is always a blast, something to look forward to in a dreary Maine winter.

Using generous grants from the Goos and Hannaford families we now have programs to allow us to find joy from the arts and to bring a guest scholar to our congregation. You will hear more about that soon.

We work with – and gain much – from men and women studying to become rabbis.

We have eliminated dues and adopted a system of Terumah in which we rely on our members to contribute what they can to keep the Temple operating. This system of financing the congregation makes us more open and welcoming to those considering membership – but it comes with some built-in dangers. What if people decide that not getting a bill for dues means they don't need to support the Temple, or cut their contribution to a token amount?

I was a skeptical when Hildie Lipson proposed this approach to financing our operations. I underestimated your deep commitment to the Temple, to who we are and what we do. Your support proved that Hildie was right.

Let me mention another major accomplishment for this congregation. We have learned how to be together safely when possible and to use Zoom when it helps. Navigating in the world of Covid has not been easy – but we have all made it work. No virus can defeat Temple Beth El!

I could continue this list of what is going on at Temple Beth El, what we have done in the last nine or ten years. Suffice it to say, this congregation does more than anyone can expect from a small Temple with about 100 member families.

That is a tribute to our rabbi, to our lay leadership, and to all of you.

It is traditional for the Temple president to use this time at Rosh Hashanah to ask for your financial support. So, I'll do that.

In the spirit of Terumah, I ask you please do what you can. Stretch a bit if it's possible. Thank you for that.

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And please get involved in what we are doing at Temple Beth El. This is your Temple. Embrace it, love it. And grow with it.

I don't expect to be back to review our successes 10 years from now, but if the past is a guide, that future for our Temple is truly exciting.

Happy New Year.