

Congregation Beth Yam
Erev Yom Kippur – October 7, 2011
by President Ted David

Good Evening, Shabbat Shalom and L'Shona Tova.

I am delighted to share the bimah tonight with Rabbi Bloom, Presiding Officer Mike Weingarten, our cantorial soloist Adriana Urato, and the wonderful choir. Thanks to our past presidents for participating in tonight's service. You are the foundation on which CBY was built. A special "thank you" to Carol Gimbel, daughter of Joe and Judy Gimbel, who played so beautifully tonight. And, again, thanks to all the volunteers who have made the HHDs so memorable.

It is great to look out at a full house of congregants and visitors observing Yom Kippur and celebrating Shabbat at the same time. The Rabbis call Yom Kippur the Shabbat of Shabbats. It is even a more sacred event when Yom Kipper and Shabbat fall on the same day. Interestingly, you may recall I said the same words last year. It's now 2 years in a row that Erev Yom Kipper has fallen on Shabbat.

We at CBY are indeed fortunate in our 30th year. We have a spiritual leader who will help us to achieve our "innermost point" (as Rabbi Bloom discussed last week), we have a physical infrastructure to serve as our house of worship, our house of learning, our house of caring, our house of Tikun Olam, our house of sociability, and a "big tent" for the worship and the cultural needs of the wide variety of beliefs among our members. And, as I discussed last week, we are in reasonable financial condition.

So, we possess the spiritual, the physical and the fiscal infrastructure to move to the next level. The question is what is that next level? What path do we want for our community and our congregation and how do we get there? What is our vision of the future? These questions require thought, insight and involvement from each congregant. After the High Holidays, Mike Werner will lead a Congregation-wide exercise to develop CBY's Path to the Future. Tonight I'd like to share some of my dreams, my vision for CBY.

Our members are the mainstay of CBY, involved, dedicated, and comfortable in the CBY family. In the future, our members will demonstrate even more of the spirit and commitment that enabled us to receive a Fain award from URJ for Social Action, a Belin award from URJ award for Outreach, and a monetary grant from the BJH Foundation for Care for isolated seniors.

Worship and ritual will always be the central reason for CBY's existence and the bedrock of our future. We at CBY invest ourselves in worship. Our weekly Shabbat service and our festival services are vibrant with sacred meaning that comes not from mouthing words but from jumping in heart and soul first. But, I dream of expanding and diversifying worship and ritual to meet the needs of our wide range of member backgrounds. For example, we might further expand Saturday and Festival learning and worship opportunities and we might initiate alternate worship formats, such as a Jazz Shabbat, Shabbat at the beach, celebrations with other congregations and a Youth Shabbat, among others. I also see technology enhancing our worship services.

Music is an important part of CBY worship; witness the beauty of this year's HHD services. I dream of more music at our worship services – the choir at least once a month, perhaps a youth choir, guest cantors, instrumental music. I also see additional entertainment events revolving around music and musical themes.

CBY will continue as the center of Jewish life in the Low Country. That's not just a "catch phrase." It means that we provide a supportive environment in which all members, and potential members, feel comfortable. We "reach out" to educate the public about Judaism and to attract members to CBY and we "reach out" to provide expanded, meaningful programs to members of all backgrounds and cultures, Jewish and interfaith, young and old. In that way, CBY will be "home" to all congregants.

CBY will also continue as a congregation that cares about our members in their times of joy and times of need. We celebrate the simchas of our members and grieve at the sadnesses. We also care about the community in which we live. We continue to visit the sick and the shut-ins. We will also build on the dedication of our volunteers provide services and activities for isolated seniors, such as the HHD tea held just yesterday. For those who cannot come to us – we will go to them (think technology).

I am especially interested in bringing more young families to CBY and more children into our religious school. There are limits on the number of young families in our community, but I don't think we have reached the saturation point. I would like to see 3, 4, 5, 6 B'Nai Mitzvahs a year. I also envision a further strengthened Youth Group so young adults continue to get a solid grounding in their Jewish heritage and have some fun at the same time. Further, I see our children attending Jewish summer camp and visiting Israel, perhaps as part of the Birthright program. Perhaps we should also consider a pre-school program or a day-care program to provide a continuum of learning for CBY's youngest members.

Continual learning is central to what it means to be a Jew. I envision our education programs stimulating and rewarding for adults of all ages and backgrounds, potentially including an integrated program of Lifelong Jewish Learning. Our adult education programs must also "cross-fertilize" and partner with Social Action, Ritual, Care, Religious School, the Youth Group and all facets of the congregation. Crossing boundaries enables us to nourish our cravings for learning and knowledge.

CBY will continue to reach out to the community to "repair the world" or at least our part of the world. We will continue to provide for those who cannot provide for themselves, we will take community wide leadership roles, as per the Hunger and Homeless Coalition and will explore social justice issues.

CBY must also build a pipeline of future leaders. Establishing that pipeline is the objective of the Leadership Growth program I mentioned at Rosh Hashanah. If you are interested in participating, please see Karen Blickstein.

I suggest that technology can significantly improve programming and administration at CBY. We currently use computer and satellite technology and have a web site and Facebook page. But we can and should do more. For example, how about using technology to bring worship services to shut-ins and travelers, for the Religious School, for Adult Education, for Social Action, for fund raising (such as on-line auctions), for membership as well as for administration.

I have many more dreams and goals for CBY – for example, our continued commitment to Israel (the Israel trip to start in a couple of weeks), providing social activities for members, continued strength of the Sisterhood and Men’s Club, and ongoing membership growth. But, I think you get the idea.

These are some of my dreams for “the next level for CBY.” Are these where we want to go? Can we afford it? What are the timetables? What are the priorities? The real question is what are your dreams for CBY? So as we create CBY’s Path to the Future, each congregant will be contacted for his or her input. Please lend your voice and your dream as we craft the “next level.”

We also need you to fulfill today’s dream. You have heard me say often that we are a volunteer driven organization. We have many members actively involved; we need more. CBY is nothing without you. Neither I nor others in leadership know your talents, skills and interests or what “turns you on.” So, I am asking each of you to volunteer. Don’t wait to be asked. A quick story. After last year’s Yom Kippur remarks a long-time congregant approached me and said he would like to contribute time to CBY. He had nothing specific in mind, just a desire to get involved. Well, after he and I talked, I asked him to take on a project and he did. I won’t embarrass him by naming names, but he did a terrific job on the project for the benefit of CBY.

My message during our 30th anniversary year, on this Day of Atonement and this Shabbat is that we need each of you to shape CBY’s future. So get involved. Help to develop our Path to the Future and to lead and grow CBY. Your participation is another investment in our family, in our community, in our future.

Jeri and I and the Board of Directors again wish you and your families Shabbat Shalom and L’Shana Tova, a Happy and Sweet New Year. May God inscribe us and seal us in the Book of Life.