

Erev Yom Kippur Message
by Congregation Beth Yam President Michael Weingarten
September 25, 2012

Good evening and good Yom Tov! It's wonderful to see our Temple completely filled with our members and visitors to worship together on our holiest day of the year. For those of you who were here on Erev Rosh Hoshanah, you heard me talk about all the wonderful things we're doing here at Congregation Beth Yam. Tonight, I want to speak about where we're going and how we hope to get there.

I'm sure most of you know the story of Alice in Wonderland. In the middle of the tale, Alice is lost in the woods. She looks up and sees a Cheshire cat in a tree and asks 'Cheshire cat, which way should I go?' The Cheshire cat asks her 'Where do you want to go?' She says 'I don't know' and he replies 'Well then, any road will get you there.' Obviously, the message here is that you need to know where you want to go to find the road that will get you there.

Five years ago at CBY, a strategic planning effort was embarked upon to establish where the Temple wanted to be in the future and plans were put in place to get there. The most significant objective was to build a new building with a religious school wing to prepare for the anticipation of the growth of the Jewish community here in the lowcountry. At that time, there was even a discussion about whether a religious school wing was necessary given the number of children in religious school then. Obviously, the right choice was made. A capital campaign was launched and through the generosity of the congregation, enough commitments of donations and pledges were made to build this beautiful edifice we now call our home. The donations and pledges were sufficient to enable us not to have to secure a mortgage, which is a blessing for us now, and something that doesn't frequently occur in synagogues. Many other plans were put in place and when we recently revisited that plan, many of them have been achieved.

So, where do we go from here? In order to continue to grow and prosper, we must have a vision of where we'd like to be in the future. The vision should be aggressive, but achievable, and consist of specific plans and timeframes detailing how that vision can become a reality. This year, we established a strategic planning effort under the leadership of Mike Werner. Mike and his team of facilitators worked with each CBY standing committee to help them establish a strategic plan for their function, including an implementation plan to execute their strategy. Every committee now has a plan and Mike and his team are now working to integrate all of those plans into an overall strategic plan for our congregation. Although it's not expected to be completed until the end of this calendar year, I want to share with you a couple of the major themes that have emerged. It was apparent from all the discussions that we must have a major focus on our youth, including the means to create a strong Jewish environment and attraction for our youngsters after their Bar or Bat Mitzvah. The URJ has also recognized that need and has put in place a national Youth Initiative and hired a full-time rabbi take the lead. We also have already started down that path with the hiring of our new youth advisor, Nancy Siegel. Another area in our new strategic plan is an in-depth look at our committee structure to

refine, simplify and insure frequent cross communication amongst committees with common interests, and create better economies of scale to reduce redundancies and decrease unnecessary expenses. Funding, of course is a critical area, and an examination of additional means to fund our needs will be explored. When the strategic plan is completed, it will be made available to everyone in our congregation.

Both to continue to offer all of the wonderful religious, cultural and social programs you heard me speak about on Rosh Hashanah, and to realize the vision we have for the future, we need to have sufficient resources to maintain what we now have and expect, and our ability to continue to grow. If you have an interest or talent to offer, don't wait to be asked, but volunteer your services. If we are being realistic, we must acknowledge that regardless of how we request financial support, a member contributes to congregation to the best of his or her ability. Understanding that, we work very hard every year, as we have done this year, to make sure we have a balanced budget to avoid deficit spending. Our dues structure covers roughly 60% of our committed requirements to maintain our operations. As I told you on Rosh Hashanah, we now have 54 children in our religious school, which has almost doubled from 2 years ago. We have, and should have a very strong commitment to offer a robust religious school program and make it affordable for every family to send their children to Hebrew and Sunday School. The tuition for our school only covers approximately 50% of the cost and the remainder is subsidized by the congregation, as it should be. Our youth is the future of Judaism and we need to support them to the fullest. At the same time, we have an aging population and we can't forget their needs, and we must continue to offer a variety of programs and services for them.

So where does the remaining funding come from? We have an extremely active Fund Raising Program which offers social and cultural events that are not only intellectual and fun, but help support our financial needs. We are continuing to examine ways to support our Temple from sources outside of our membership. At our very successful 92StY, over 30% of the attendees are not CBY members and come from the local community. We are anticipating that our upcoming Jazz Concert, which we hope will become an annual event, will have over 50% of the attendees coming from the local community. Our Ad Book, which is included in the back of our Family Directory, is another source of income from primarily outside sources. Please make sure to thank any vendor who supports us, and let them know that their advertisement is appreciated and we aggressively promote their goods and services to our congregation. We are continuing to examine ways to generate funds from outside of our membership in order to help keep our dues at a reasonable rate.

However, the most critical and largest component of our fundraising activities is our Friends Campaign, which will commence shortly after the holidays. I want to thank all of you who generously participated in the campaign last year and hope you will maintain your level of contribution for our coming year and even increase it if possible. Through your generosity, when our new building was constructed three years ago, many of you made 5-year pledges to the capital campaign and/or the Friends campaign so that we were able to build this magnificent Temple without being encumbered with a mortgage. Most of those pledges have now been completed, but I hope you will consider continuing that level of contribution. Last year the participation in our Friends campaign was far less than 100%

of our families and I hope we will get much closer to that in this coming year. Every member of our Board of Directors has made a commitment to support the campaign, including of course Janet and myself who have already made our donation to kick the campaign off. To those of you who have never contributed to Friends, I urge you to consider even a small donation to help CBY. This is your Temple and every little bit helps. If we want to continue to grow our programs, subsidize our religious school, help support our youth by providing assistance to send them to Jewish camps and NFTY conclaves, enhance our wonderful music program by having our choir sing on a regular basis, along with the many things other things we want to achieve now and in the future, we need everyone's support. Every member of our congregation has a stake in our Temple, a place where Judaism is fostered and maintained in the lowcountry.

Tomorrow night at the conclusion of Neilah, we will hear the last sound of the shofar, and that is the *tekiah gedolah*, the very long last blast. The *tekiah gedolah* is the sound of vision. It reminds us that wherever we are in our lives at the present moment, things can become better if we are willing to put the necessary effort, work and resources to make them so. I hope everyone one of you will hear that call and help sustain us now and enable us to reach our vision for the future by supporting to your fullest, the Temple we all love and call our home and continue the tradition of Tzedakah and our tradition of giving.

I am very proud to have the opportunity to the President of this wonderful congregation and look forward to working with all of you this year to move forward to our future. On behalf of Janet and myself, we wish you L'shana Tova Tikatevu v' Tikatemu. May you all have a sweet, healthy and prosperous year and may all your names be inscribed and sealed in the Book of Life.

Shalom