

## **President Judy Bluestone's Rosh Hashonah Speech September 29, 2019 (5780)**

Thirteen years ago on Erev Rosh Hashonah 5367, I stood as cantorial soloist, on our high holy day bimah at All Saints across from my husband Stan, then president of CBY, waiting for news of the birth of our second granddaughter Gabriella. When Rabbi Covitz announced her arrival from the bimah, the whole congregation broke into a simultaneous mazel tov. We both felt enveloped in the warmth of Congregation Beth Yam and that hasn't changed these last 13 years.

So it is that I deeply value this congregation and admire our far sighted founders who recognized the need for an official Jewish presence on Hilton Head Island almost forty years ago. And, too, I applaud the leaders who in 2008 understood that we needed an expansion of our building to accommodate the growing Jewish community in the Lowcountry. Their two year effort along with a host of members to gather the financial resource, to design and furnish a beautiful structure, to engage a large committee in establishing management policies, updating by-laws and finally hiring the right spiritual leader Rabbi Brad Bloom have brought us to this day. Thank you all.

That is past history...now to modern history. This building is the place where **we Jews** celebrate holidays and life cycle events; where we memorialize our members who have passed on. It is where **we Jews** pray, where we study and learn but over time it has also become the place where all **Jewish residents of Hilton Head, members and non-members** and our **non-Jewish neighbors and friends** have come in communal sorrow last October in the worst of times. It's where we gathered last spring to hear a speaker from the ADL tell us of the rise of white supremacy and the increase in anti-Semitic acts across the country. It is where we will be welcoming US Senator Tim Scott, the first guest lecturer of the Judie Aronson Initiative for Social Justice, on October 10 at 6pm to share his thoughts about the decline in civility in this country. If there were not a Congregation Beth Yam, where would we gather for meaningful moments? How would we be a community? Our Rabbi Bloom is the Jewish face to the community, there when we (and yes non-members) need him, who writes about Jewish values in the local paper, who represents us in the Lowcountry, who is called upon to teach about anti-Semitism and the lessons of the Holocaust in public schools. If there were not a Rabbi Bloom, to whom would we turn?

We have a Hebrew word for such places as ours...it is kehillah. Kehillah means "community" and, like all communities, we have an organized structure...a board, elected by you, many committees which reflect the values of the kehillah, an excellent professional staff led by Rabbi Bloom who manages the spiritual and educational interests of our community including our talented professional staff...Music Director David Kimbell, soloist Adriana Urato, Student Cantor Olivia Brodsky and Director of Youth Education Valerie Seldes and our indispensable support staff, Michele Johnson and Ceil Tries who make sure that everything is accomplished in an organized fashion.

Our kehillah CBY is not a Jewish Federation but it serves the same purpose. In the Lowcountry: we don't have a Bureau of Jewish Education but we have an Adult Education Committee chaired by Barbara Slagowitz who with Rabbi Bloom brings exciting opportunities for Jewish learning to our members and the general community; we don't have a Jewish Community Center but we have a Sisterhood led by Randy Kurjan and a Men's Club led by Dave Solomon which plan social events and contribute dollars to our kehillah and serve to integrate new members quickly; we don't have Jewish Family Services but we do have a Care Committee led by Joanne Doyle and April Adelson whose members visit not only CBY members in the hospital and local senior communities but Jewish non-members as well; we don't have a Jewish Community Center to bring our community together for cultural and recreational events but we look to Adult Ed and the Men's Club; we don't have a Jewish Community Relations Council to focus on tikkun olam but we do have the Social Action Committee and the Tzedakah Fund and as founders of the Lowcountry Coalition Against Hate we stand together with other groups in our community to promote good community relations and respond to hate speech and activity and to tragic events in this country and the world. Our Religious School and Youth group bring young Jewish children together for learning, fun and friendships. Congregation Beth Yam is the Jewish Center of the Lowcountry. By the way, any one of these committees would love to have you join and I thank them and the other fine committees for their dedication.

Finally, recognizing that we have a growing group of members on the "mainland" in Bluffton and beyond, the membership committee led by Candy Solomon, and with the assistance of religious school parent Nancy Rosen, Valerie Seldes and Rabbi Bloom, has planned and sponsored the off island Lev Simcha or "happy heart" Shabbat experience. We hope to replicate Lev Simcha Shabbat here at the mother ship CBY this year.

As we look to the **future**, at this time of year and just as we do individually, the board must undertake a "chesbon ha'nefesh", an accounting of the soul. We have the responsibility to take stock of the congregation and ourselves and ask these questions: what have we done to create a holy community? Have we been responsive to the needs of our congregants? or Have we put ourselves before the community? Have we been as warm and welcoming as we think we are?

Have we been respectful of our friends, our leaders, our Rabbi? Have we created a culture of respect and civility or have we fallen victim to the tenor of the times? Have we neglected our members? Are we maintaining a holy place at CBY, an effective oasis of civility? Have we recognized demographic changes in the Lowcountry?

These and other questions will guide the work of our newly appointed Long Range Planning Committee led by Phil Davidson and Howard Rothchild. As the LRP moves along they may be seeking your input.

Some of you might know that something new has been added to our CBY profile... Chavuroth ... 88 members have expressed interest in being part of a chavurah... which is a small friendship group within our kehillah. Thank you Pennie Meiselman and committee

for managing this initiative. Thank you to the Board of Directors for their wisdom, insight and support.

Tonight, I welcome our many new members identified by the star on their name tags. Let's make them feel as welcome as Stan and I were made to feel some 17 years ago. And, if you are here as a guest, consider joining CBY.

We have challenges...we always do... but with your continued support, leadership and presence we will meet them in the name of our kehillah.

Wishing you...shanah tovah. May you have a good year in which you will live rightly cultivating virtue and character.