

Shofar Column: September, 2057  
Kol Nidre 5783

— An upcoming column from Temple Beth Tikvah's Newsletter, The Shofar—

Dear Friends,

As we all know, our congregation reached a milestone anniversary this year. I was pleased to join many of you at our Gala this past spring, as, aided by archival materials, town records, and oral histories, we were able to both honor our founding legacy and imagine what our future might hold.

Looking back on the many years of Temple Beth Tikvah's history, it's incredible to consider how far we've come. From a modest group of families who founded the Shoreline Jewish Community Organization in 1970, to a thriving 20th Century congregation on our very own campus in Madison, to our beautiful new congregational home, our past reveals the pioneering spirit that made us who we are today..

Of course, it hasn't always been easy. Back in the 1970s, our diverse community wrestled with the merits of affiliating with a particular Jewish movement, hiring a rabbi, and breaking ground on a building. For a fledgling community beginning to establish its identity, these were hardly straightforward questions. After considerable debate, we dedicated our very first TBT Home in Madison at Shabbat Services on Friday May 13, 1977. Rabbi Malcolm Stern, a noted historian of American Jewry, spoke that evening about "Jewish Pioneers in Connecticut."

Well, we are still Jewish pioneers, and we are still in Connecticut, but so much else has changed since in the last 80 years. On the national stage, the Union of American Hebrew Congregations became the Union for Reform Judaism in 2003; and the URJ eventually merged with the Conservative and Reconstructionist Movements in the early 2040s to become BDJ — "Beyond Denominational Judaism." That was a big decade for us at TBT, because less than ten years later we made another very difficult decision as we sold our first congregational building on Durham Road. The grief of that loss was real. It was a beloved place for us in times of sadness and in times of joy. Truly, TBT meant "home;" and it really felt that way across the full life cycle for so many of our families. That space was beloved by all, especially after our first major renovation project wrapped up in early 2026.

As you know, these days our Religious School most often meets in family homes or at our nearby Jewish summer camp, where our students love their experiential lessons at the ropes course and in the lakeside chapel. Hebrew instruction takes place one-on-one via Google's cerebral implant services, which allows our in-person community time to focus on fun activities that promote identity-formation and build community. So, in short, we no longer needed a large classroom wing.

Ever since the Long Island Sound began regularly breaching the Connecticut coastline, our families started moving northward in greater numbers. We knew that in order for our congregation to thrive, we had to meet people where they were. And so we did.

Meeting people where they were also meant rethinking what it means to belong. People were thirsting for community and for the spiritual resources of their heritage, just as they always have. Yet, they were less likely to find their way into a congregation in the old-fashioned way. That led us to abolish membership dues way back in 2024. The cooperative financing model that we adopted in its place allows every household to determine its level of commitment, commensurate with its means, and with full knowledge the resources needed to allow our congregation to prosper. It may seem like an obvious idea these days since virtually every synagogue operates this way; but back then, it was not a foregone conclusion. What a pleasant surprise that we actually saw increased financial stability the wake of that change. Today, our community is more vibrant and secure than ever.

We can also see that vibrancy in the many ways we connect:

1. First, there's our Tikvah Teams. Small interest groups form micro-communities based on common interests or pursuits. For instance, there's a music lab; a great Jewish Foods of the world group, and even a TBT Tennis Tourney. These cohort groups meet regularly to build camaraderie, improve a skill or knowledge area, and access Judaism to understand something they love to do in a new way.
2. Then there's TBT's Jewish Journey Central in the metaverse, or JJC for short. This is our immersive world of augmented Jewish reality. Users can visit Jewish communities across history and geography without leaving their living room. They can attend a poetry reading in Medieval Spain or a Passover Party in ancient Jerusalem; have a cup of tea with Maimonides, or dance across the Red Sea with Moses and Miriam. And though there are no more Holocaust Survivors to meet in real life, they can speak with one in the metaverse as naturally as sitting across the kitchen table. Suffice it to say that kids and adults alike are inspired by the learning possibilities.
3. And finally, while we sadly don't hold Shabbat on the Beach very much anymore, we soon plan to introduce an exciting new option: Shabbat on the Moon.

All of these initiatives tell the story of resilience in the face of challenge and change; and we know that more challenges yet lie ahead. For instance, an interfaith marriage rate of over 90% is constantly pushing us to re-evaluate what it means to be a Jewish Community. The ubiquity of Zoom meetings by hologram has redefined time spent in the presence of another human being, with all this implies for our services, holidays, and special events. Now, we can sing at the same time with other people and detect no delay. But it's still not quite as good as sharing the space and fellowship with other people, in real life. Maybe it will be in another 80 years.

When Susan and I moved to the Shoreline way back in 2021, we were so taken by the caring, committed, unpretentious character of this community. That is equally true today. And though those early years brought many changes and new challenges alongside, we are so grateful that you loved and welcomed us as your own.

Those early years were formative ones in my rabbinate; I certainly would not have become the rabbi I am today without you. Thank you for letting me serve you; letting me dream and experiment — and sometimes fail — all on the way to becoming the best rabbi I can be. We need each other, even at the best of times, and let's face it, most times are not the best of times.

As new obstacles, we will turn to meet them. Judaism has always thrived by translating the best of tradition to a modern idiom. As Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook, modern Israel's first chief rabbi, said: "הישן יתחדש והחדש יתקדש" - let the old be made new and the new be made holy.

I wonder what the next 80 years hold in store at TBT!

Ever full of hope for the future,  
Rabbi Danny Moss  
September, 2057