

Rabbi London's annual meeting remarks May 9, 2018

A Man In His Life by Yehuda Amichai

A man doesn't have time in his life
to have time for everything.
He doesn't have seasons enough to have
a season for every purpose. Ecclesiastes
Was wrong about that.

A man needs to love and to hate at the same moment,
to laugh and cry with the same eyes,
with the same hands to throw stones and to gather them,
to make love in war and war in love.
And to hate and forgive and remember and forget,
to arrange and confuse, to eat and to digest
what history
takes years and years to do.

A man doesn't have time.
When he loses he seeks, when he finds
he forgets, when he forgets he loves, when he loves
he begins to forget.

And his soul is seasoned, his soul
is very professional.
Only his body remains forever
an amateur. It tries and it misses,
gets muddled, doesn't learn a thing,
drunk and blind in its pleasures
and its pains.

He will die as figs die in autumn,
Shriveled and full of himself and sweet,
the leaves growing dry on the ground,
the bare branches pointing to the place
where there's time for everything.

I share this poem tonight because I think it expresses where we are as a community. We have impending change that's hard and sad with Cantor Friedman and our youth director, Abby Backer leaving. But we also have exciting and wonderful things happening at Beth Emet. The strength of our community is found in how we manage the confluence of the hard and the joyful, the sad and the exciting. It's important we acknowledge the mix of emotions we are experiencing, say good-bye with appreciation and care, and celebrate new beginnings. We're in

the midst of all of this right now. We had an opportunity to express our appreciation to Cantor Friedman last Friday night in a joyous service that highlighted the work that she's done in the musical program at Beth Emet and to hear the Adult, Children, and A capella teen choirs that she's nurtured during her tenure. And this Friday during the annual BESSY service, we'll celebrate Abby's accomplishments. Then next Shabbat on May 18, we will celebrate the ground breaking of our building renovations. It's quite a whirlwind! I'm grateful to this thoughtful and caring community that creates space to express the full range of our feelings while simultaneously celebrating our community and those who serve it.

It's hard to believe that on May 21, the work on the sanctuary side of the building will begin. It's been six years since Sharon Ephraim initiated the master plan when she was president. Many conversations, board decisions, and hard work under the leadership of subsequent presidents, David Graham and Ross Bricker, and the capital campaign and building committees have transpired to get us to this place. We still have more fundraising to do in order to complete this first phase of the project and prepare to renovate the west entrance next year, but we've made tremendous progress. And the good news is we'll have a renovated sanctuary, social hall and foyer by this year's High Holidays. New chairs are really coming!

Ross gave everyone facts and figures about what we do at Beth Emet, and I'd like to dwell on some of the qualitative aspects of what makes Beth Emet special. Everyone is familiar with the weekly soup kitchen that we host at Beth Emet, but not everyone in the congregation is aware that for the last two years, in conjunction with Interfaith Action of Evanston, the Herman Crown Room has also served as a homeless shelter on cold nights. I'm proud that the Herman Crown Room not only serves the needs of our community for simchas and congregational activities and events, but that it is also a place where members of our community who are in need of a hot meal and shelter can come.

A core function of synagogues is to nurture our growth as human beings. During this past year, I'm pleased to report that we have continued our *tikkun middot* project, adding a second cohort of people who are meeting regularly to cultivate their moral traits, called *middot*. The path of *tikkun middot* is a series of practices and exercises to help us overcome the inner obstacles that hinder us from living the values we espouse so that the pure light of our soul can shine. Marci Dickman, Kathy Kaberon, and Barbara Stock are facilitating these groups. We had hoped that Rabbi Marc Margolius from the Institute of Jewish Spirituality would be our scholar-in-residence to introduce the practice of *tikkun middot* more broadly to the congregation, but, unfortunately, he had to cancel because of his father's death. We have rescheduled his scholar-in-residence weekend for next fall. Those who are part of the *tikkun middot* groups have found the practice to be quite powerful in their lives. We look forward to engaging more of the congregation in this deep and transformative work.

At Beth Emet we have always been proud of our social action work, but this year our social action committee has been reinvigorated. One of the new co-chairs, Lisa Levine, created a service day for parents and kids, and a sanctuary sub-committee has been created to explore how Beth Emet can serve as a sanctuary congregation. Under the leadership of Abby Backer, Beth Emet wrote and approved a sanctuary resolution and Abby has worked with congregations around Evanston to help them pass sanctuary resolutions as well. To date, eight Evanston

congregations have passed sanctuary resolution and eight more are in progress. At Beth Emet we are beginning to partner with the Immigrant Community for Detained Immigrants (ICDI) to train people at Beth Emet to work with people after they've been released from detention. Phil Bashook and Lizzie Graham are spearheading this effort. St. Nicks Church has been doing this work for a few years, and we are pleased to join them. There will be a training on May 17 and May 21 if you are interested in learning more about this work.

In addition to this social action work related to sanctuary, Beth Emet has been exploring the theme of sanctuary in all its facets. I hope you've been enjoying the weekly essays that congregants have been sharing about what sanctuary means to them. I have found them to be beautiful, heartfelt, and insightful. I'm grateful to Ellen Blum Barish and David Barish for curating this project.

Our social justice work has also expanded to work more closely with the Religious Action Center, the Reform Movement's social justice arm. Just a few weeks ago, the Religious Action Center (the RAC) launched RAC-IL, a project for Reform congregations in Illinois to work on social justice issues statewide. RAC-IL will initially work on racial and immigrant justice issues. I'm proud to say that Beth Emet is one of the founding members of RAC-IL and that we had twenty-five Beth Emet participants, including teens, at the launch program that took place at Chicago Sinai Congregation. As RAC-IL develops, we will be in touch with the congregation to let everyone know how they can get involved.

Our interfaith partnerships have continued to be robust, helping us navigate the struggles we are facing in our country and galvanizing our collaboration on social justice issues. This past summer we came together as an interfaith community to an overflow crowd at Second Baptist in response to the white supremacist march in Charlottesville, Virginia. And on Yom Kippur, Pastors Ruen and Nabors from Grace Lutheran and Second Baptist preached with me about the importance of interfaith social justice work. This coming November, our three congregations are planning to travel to Israel and the West Bank together on a trip with a Jewish and a Palestinian guide. It was originally a trip just with Second Baptist, but we've decided to include Grace Lutheran as well. It will be a wonderful opportunity to deepen our relationships with each other and experience the power and complexity of the holy land together. There are still spaces available for this trip. It will be a unique and amazing trip. You don't want to miss it. (PUT IN LINK TO TRIP_

I could go on about all the amazing things that happen at Beth Emet week in and week out. I am proud to serve this community which is actively engaged in working to make ourselves and the world a better place, engages in worship joyfully and seriously, and loves to study our tradition. We are a place where we ask hard questions, challenge ourselves to grow, and care deeply about one another.

I'm honored to work with an outstanding group of professionals—our Klei Kodesh—who work tirelessly and creatively to serve our community. We are grateful to Cantor Friedman and Abby Backer for the gifts they brought to Beth Emet and wish them well as they begin the next chapter in their lives. May they be blessed with continued growth and well-being.

And I am grateful to all of our staff at Beth Emet who care deeply about this community and who see their work as a calling, not just a job.

I want to thank the lay leadership who give so freely of their volunteer time to keep Beth Emet thriving. I'm grateful to the outgoing leadership for their service. We are glad to give you a little time off, but, don't worry, we'll call on you again soon! I'd like to welcome our new board members. We are so grateful that you are willing to contribute your time and talents to the betterment of this congregation.

I'd also like to thank the capital campaign and building committees for all their hard work. These two groups meet regularly and work tirelessly to ensure we have the capital we need to support our community and to make sure the building renovations will be beautiful and on budget. I don't know what all of you will do with your free time once the capital campaign and the building are finished!

Finally, I'd like to thank Ross for his leadership as president. It's not an easy and often it's a thankless job to be president of a synagogue. I appreciate his steadfastness, his insight, and his love for and commitment to Beth Emet. We have accomplished much under his leadership over the past two years. I look forward to what we will build together in the coming year.

In our tradition, we are in a 50-day period between our liberation from Egyptian bondage which we celebrated on Passover and our journey to Mt. Sinai to receive the Torah which we will celebrate next weekend on the holiday of Shavuot. At this time of the year, we have a ritual in which we count each day between these two events. In ancient days, a sheaf of barley—an Omer—was brought as an offering daily when our Temple stood in Jerusalem. Today we don't bring offerings, but ritually we count each day to remind us that the purpose of our freedom is to receive and live by God's teachings. With freedom comes the holy responsibility to create a just and caring world.

Each and every week, there's a spiritual quality that we are supposed to work on as we make the journey from Egypt to Mt. Sinai. The quality we are focusing on this week is *Yesod* – Foundation. *Yesod* is a balance between *Netzach*—the drive to make the world a better place—and *Hod*— which means beauty and gratitude.

This week we focus on balancing our drive to improve our world with being thankful for the beauty and wonder of the blessing we have in our life. This is a perfect time for our annual meeting, because these are the twin goals we are striving to be at Beth Emet—a community that works for justice AND serves as a sanctuary for our souls, a community that acknowledges the sadness and pain of our lives while simultaneously celebrating the joy and beauty around us, a community that teaches us the values of our tradition and gives us opportunities to work together to create the world that God envisions for us—one overflowing with justice and compassion for all. As Yehuda Amichai reminds us, the nature of human life is that it's full and complex. I'm grateful that we have a community that embraces this truth and supports us on life's journey, nurturing us in good times and challenging ones, and helping us to grow in wisdom and compassion.

Please join me in this ritual. *Baruch atah Adonai eloheinu melech ha'olam asher kidshanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu al sefirat ha'omer*. Praised are You, Eeternal our God who has sanctified us with commandments and commanded us to count the omer. Today is 40 days of the omer. May we continue to build together a community that supports and encourages us to grow into our best selves, and to appreciate the beauty around us while we strive to create an ever more just and compassionate world.