

Good Evening and L Shana Tovah

I'm Barry Marks Temple Beth El Board president. I welcome you to our mutual home on this first day of Tishrei 5769. While I welcome all of you, I want to make special mention of three groups:

First- The 37 individuals and families who have become members since Jan. 2008...I encourage you to seek connections and encourage our veteran congregants to reach out to you as well.

Second-Visitors, visiting relatives...thank you for making the journey to be with us tonight.

Third-Temple Beth El's past presidents...We need to be always mindful that what we experience here at Temple Beth El is the result of your heart felt efforts, perseverance and vision. Thank you so much.

Our theme for this year's High Holiday season is building a community. You might ask, don't we already have one of those? Yes we do. So what's to build? Well, a community, like nearly everything else needs tending, enriching and love to really flourish.

Nobel Prize winner, Elie Wiesel, said:

"To be part of a community, to shape it, and to strengthen it is the most urgent, the most vital obligation facing the Jewish individual."

Two years ago Kathy Goldenkranz reminded us with sacred text to 1) Not to separate ourselves from the community and 2) keep our hearts open to each other.

However, sometimes, taking on this obligation loses that sense of urgency and other aspects of our lives capture our attention. We fall into a whirling pool of daily activities.

Tonight as we step out of the pool and enter the gateway of the 10 days of Awe I want to focus on the importance of community and share a brief personal account of my journey to Temple Beth El and this community of Jews.

For me it all started in Hollywood (really) on one warm July day in 1944. My parents, Jacob (Jack) and Dorothy Kaplan were breaking away from the orthodox Jewish traditions, family and community of Brighton Beach, Brooklyn, New York. World War II was still raging and life was difficult but exciting. For them Southern California was the new world, a golden land of sunny days and endless possibilities. But paradise came at a price. They had difficulty replacing the roots they had severed 3,000 miles across the country. Their relationship fractured and then ended when I was five. Without close

relatives or the support of close Jewish friends or community I felt isolated and disconnected. This feeling continued as my mother remarried and Ed Marks became my stepfather. Burdened by a lack of formal education and an Eastern European sense of Judaism heavy with suspicion and a vast array of superstitions (most of them quite frightening to a young child) he provided me with an insight into Yiddish culture, colorful language and the music of Mickey Katz. Our High Holidays were spent at the Orthodox Breed Street Temple in Boyle Heights where I watched the service with my mother from the nose bleed section of the balcony. The rituals looked and sounded like something from an ancient past that both fascinated and repelled me. I drifted into my teenage years and a conservative suburban Temple that seemed distant and stratified. I went to college, married, moved to Santa Cruz, divorced, and finally met someone who made Judaism seem appealing and accessible. Julie Lorraine was a revelation and it's taken me years to appreciate her impact on my life. In 1980, we approached Rabbi Rick about marrying us and he said certainly. "Join the Temple and no charge for the ceremony". We were married in the home of a good friend Katie Levy and slowly began to weave ourselves into the tapestry of Temple Beth El. Soon Laurel was born and when she was two entered Simcha Preschool. Rabbi Paula was one of her teachers. We carpoled with the Kaplans and the Levins. Our son Ellison was born in 1989 and very soon thereafter the congregation moved into this building. Over the 28 years, we joined a chavarah, participated in wondrous lifecycle events (some happy and others profoundly sad) and have come to regard Temple Beth El as our hamish community. Here I stand before you tonight as President. The disconnected outsider, now the unlikeliest connected insider you'll ever meet. But that is **my** story, what about you? Recent events have shaken our nation to it's foundation. Who do you trust? Where do you turn? Where's your community? Look around, it's right here, tonight. A living, evolving community of Jews that is doing well, yet still needs our love and energy to stay vibrant and relevant for us and the new families who will be sitting here with us next year or 5, 10, 20 years in the future. One way to demonstrate commitment is to respond to the High Holiday appeal. The information was placed on your chair. The concept is to have as many families participate at whatever level they can. Beyond this Appeal there are many opportunities to connect. Check out the information in the hallway, our website, or just ask us.

In conclusion, I want to extend our collective thanks to our clergy: Rabbi Rick, Rabbi Paula and Rabbi Educator Shifra for their efforts in illuminating the sacred aspects of these days for all age groups in our temple community; our dedicated Executive Director Drew Barkley, the entire Temple staff, the Temple Brotherhood and Sisterhood, the Temple Board and the many, many

volunteers who have worked behind the scenes to make certain that these sacred days will go smoothly for all of us.

I appreciate the opportunity to share these thoughts with you and look forward to learning about your journeys. May you have a sweet new year and be sealed in the book of life,

L'Shana Tovah