

An Optimistic Story: From Sh'varim to Strength

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This new year will be one of the most important in the history of Temple Beth-El.

For two years, we've been walking this journey together. We've asked hard questions. We've listened carefully to one another. And we've weighed our responsibilities to the past, the present, and the future.

Now we stand at a turning point. God willing, and with your approval, our building will be sold later this year.

That's not just a practical decision. It's an *emotional* one, too.

Because this building has been so much more than bricks and mortar. It's been the container of our sacred memories: baby namings, b'nai mitzvah, confirmations, weddings, kiddush luncheons, and religious school.

We remember sitting in this sanctuary with our parents and grandparents. We remember getting lost in the maze of hallways and sneaking out to the lobby during the rabbi's sermon. We remember the hugs we got when we came here to grieve.

Think of all the ways this space has blessed us: the sound of children singing; the smell of bagels and coffee after services; the sight of a child or grandchild standing proudly on the bimah.

These walls have absorbed our joy and our heartbreak. For that, we owe this building our gratitude.

It's natural to feel sadness, even anger, at the thought of letting go. And those feelings are welcome here.

This has always been a place where we can bring our full selves, and that doesn't stop now.

But alongside the sadness, I want us to hold on to hope. Because as the songwriter Elana Arian reminds us: "It's an optimistic story"—the kind our people have told for

thousands of years: a story of adapting, enduring, and finding holiness in new ways of being.

It may not feel that way at first. Change rarely does. But the truth is, the optimism comes from being honest about where we are.

Our building has become a burden that is too heavy to bear. Every year, we stretch ourselves thinner just to keep the lights on, the roof patched, and the heat and air running.

Here's something that might surprise you: 100 percent of our membership dues go straight into operating the building. And that barely covers *half* of it.

One hundred percent, and then some—before we even *begin* to do what we're all here to do.

Many of us feel the frustration of knowing that so much of our time, money, and energy is tied up in bricks and pipes instead of in *people* and *purpose*. And deep down, we know: You didn't join a building—you joined a *congregation*.

But here's something I want you to know: Even after the sale, Temple Beth-El will still be right here. We'll remain in this building, in a smaller footprint that truly fits our needs.

And it'll be more than enough. The beautiful, historic Rudin Chapel will remain the heart of our space—our center of worship and community life.

We're not saying goodbye to this place. We're reshaping it so it can serve us better, now and in the years ahead.

I also want to be clear about something we've all heard around Great Neck. People are saying Temple Beth-El is going out of business.

Nothing could be further from the truth.

Selling the building isn't an ending. It's what we need to do to secure our future, to strengthen our congregation, and to make sure we can serve this community for as long as people in Great Neck, western Nassau, and eastern Queens need us.

We remain deeply committed to the Reform Jewish community here, and this decision makes us stronger, not weaker.

Temple Beth-El exists to provide Jewish life that's modern, inclusive, egalitarian, authentic, and joyful. We're here for transformational Torah; for inspiring prayer; for acts of kindness and justice; for the deep friendships that sustain us.

That's what your membership should support, and that's what selling the building will allow us to strengthen.

This isn't the first time the Jewish people have had to adapt. When the Romans destroyed the Temple in Jerusalem, many thought it was the end. They couldn't imagine Judaism without their sacred structure.

But the rabbis taught us that Judaism lives not in stones; it lives in *people*. And for nearly 2,000 years, our people have thrived: sometimes in great synagogues; sometimes in tiny *shtiebels*; sometimes even on Zoom.

The form changes, but the essence endures.

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That's exactly the story the shofar tells us today.

First comes *t'kiah*—one whole note, steady and familiar.

T'kiah is the world as it is—the status quo, the rhythm we know.

Many of us are still in that place—holding tightly to what feels safe, longing for things to stay the way they've always been.

But tradition doesn't let us stop there. After *t'kiah* comes *sh'varim-t'ruah*—broken, uncertain, unsettling.

That's where others of us are—feeling the cracks, the disruption, the loss.

Sh'varim-t'ruah isn't easy to sit with. But it's real, and it's holy.

And finally comes *t'kiah g'dolah*—one long, powerful note that propels us forward into something new.

Some of us already glimpse that promise, already sense the possibility of renewal.

But wherever you are—in *t'kiah*, *sh'varim-t'ruah*, or *t'kiah g'dolah*—the shofar makes space for you. *All* those notes, *all* those feelings, belong in our story.

The truth is, transitions are never simple. The change-management scholar William Bridges taught that all transitions have three parts: an ending, a beginning, and a “neutral zone” in between.

That in-between time is often messy and confusing. But it’s also where growth happens.

We’re entering the in-between time right now. We’re saying goodbye to a way of being that has defined us, while still discovering what the next chapter will look like.

There will be bumps and frustrations but also surprises and blessings. We need to give ourselves permission to grieve, to question, and to adapt.

And we won’t go through it alone. Our clergy and lay leaders are working to create rituals to help us say goodbye with gratitude—to prepare ourselves spiritually and emotionally for what lies ahead.

Meanwhile, our future is already taking shape.

Look at the *Horizons* catalog you received this morning. It’s filled with adult learning, cultural programs, social events, travel to Israel, service opportunities, and more.

There is Jewish life here every day of the week.

Temple Beth-El is about helping people find meaning, purpose, and connection—and that’s what will flourish when we’re no longer weighed down by this building.

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Every time our people have been forced to let go of one place, we’ve found ways to bring holiness into the next. Every time. That resilience is in our DNA.

And we’re not just *surviving*—we’re shaping the Jewish future.

Temple Beth-El has always been a leader in Great Neck and beyond. We’ve always pushed the boundaries of what Jewish community can be.

And that’s what we’re doing now: taking bold action—because our mission matters *too* much to neglect.

So, yes, this year will stretch us. We’ll laugh, we’ll cry, we’ll tell stories, and we’ll hold each other up.

And through it all, we will remember: Temple Beth-El has never only been a building. It's always been *us*: the *people*, the *community*, the *love* that binds us together.

That's not only an *optimistic* story; it's *our* story.

And like the sound of the shofar, it will carry us forward to a bright future.