



Temple Beth David

Celebrating Fifty Years at Temple Beth David

Erev Rosh Hashanah 2011
Rabbi Nancy Rita Myers
Updated Sept. 20, 2011

When you hear the number fifty, what comes to mind? Is it more visits to the doctor? Is it the age of clothing you know you need to discard? Oh, I'm sure none of us have decades old clothing in our closets. Does fifty remind you of the years of your marriage? Fifty years married to one person, is quite an achievement. How about just turning fifty? I really can't comment on this, I still have about eight more years to go. Is turning fifty a big deal? Maybe? Do you think fifty is old?

Well, I imagine the answer to that question depends on who we are asking. For those who have reached five decades, some of you have told me that even though your bodies remind you that you are no longer thirty, you do not feel old. You are still working, taking up new hobbies, making new friends, and you have a lot to look forward to. There are always new adventures, kids are growing up, and novel challenges lay ahead. However, if we were to ask a thirteen year old, is fifty old, we would likely get a different answer. Teenagers out there: Is fifty old? I don't want to hear your answer. For children and teenagers, old begins, well, rather young. For a teen eagerly awaiting driving and moving out on their own, turning twenty five might indeed seem old not to mention forty or gulp, fifty. It's rather clear that it is all rather subjective when looking at people's ages and stages of life.

In Pirkei Avot, 5:21 chapters of our fathers, Rabbi ben Tema said the following about our age and what it means. ●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●● he used to say:

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Temple Beth David

..... five years is the age to study Bible, at ten on is ready to study mishnah, thirteen-for one is old enough to follow the commandments, at fifteen one can study talmud, at eighteen one is old enough for marriage, twenty one should be pursuing a job, at thirty one attains full strength, forty one gains understanding, and fifty one is able to give counsel or advice, sixty one reaches maturity, seventy- a hoary head, and finally eighty one has a kind of strength.

At fifty, I would agree that one has experienced enough to give counsel. My daughter a number of months ago with the best of intentions was trying to give relationship advice to my brother. I absolutely appreciated that she wanted to help however what a ten year old knows about love is quite different from a 37 year old. At least I tried to explain that to her. In a few years, she will be going to him for advice. Most of us realize that we have to have knowledge and life experience in order to be able to give counsel. And if we are wise and compassionate, then truly we can be a person for family and friends to turn to. Those who have reached fifty, you certainly have lived through a lot. You have experienced school, work, marriage, divorce, children, friends, travel, and etc. You've earned a few grey hairs and laugh lines. And you have much good counsel to share.

If 50 years is noteworthy for an individual how about for an institution? Is fifty years old for a synagogue? I only ask this because Temple Beth David is now celebrating its fifty years of services, life cycles, friendships, holidays, and more. Now for congregations on the East Coast, some of them can count their years by the centuries. Here in the West it is different especially in Orange County. The Jewish community in Orange County is still rather young and for us five decades of Shabbat, Bar/Bat Mitzvahs, and holidays gatherings is truly an accomplishment. In 1961, some remarkable people came together with the hopes of starting a synagogue in the middle of nowhere. Yes, there was little or no development in this part of Orange County in the

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1960's. Some of our members remember the ad in the Penny Saver looking for Jews that wanted to form a synagogue. They gathered together in each other's living rooms until they rented space in a church in Los Alamitos.

Founding president Al Caplan in a letter dated Dec. 26, 1961 urges the initial members to pay dues according to their conscience and ability. He wrote, "Although, many of us have taken the view that our participation in our Temple is mainly for our children, let us not overlook that equally important are the spiritual needs for ourselves. Our continuing relationship will bring about a stronger Jewish bond a greater awareness of Judaism." He concludes, "for a prosperous New Year with kindest personal regards, Al- president."

At the very beginning, there were some amazing families who believed so much in the start of our synagogue that they even signed their mortgage as collateral for the Temple's bank loan like Dr. Lois and Herb Abrams did. Without their faith and willingness to go out on a financial limb, we wouldn't be here today.

Gene Broscow's father Jack Broscow played an instrumental role in convincing our founding families to financially support our synagogue. His dad was also the president of what later came to be known as "the Jack Broscow Brotherhood" and his mother was president of Sisterhood. He remembers attending our Temple services when they were held at the church in Los Alamitos, the Bnei mitzvah of his sons, the anniversary party of Cantor Newman, and how his parents celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary at the Temple. He adds, "We also mourned the loss of Maureen here. I love my Judaism. I appreciate the Temple being here for us. We have made so many friends here." Gene currently serves as treasurer on Foundation board and brotherhood.

But one doesn't have to go back to the 1960's to get a sense of our history.

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Saul & Barbara Zenk joined in the 1970's. They liked Rabbi Front and Cantor Newman and found the Temple to be very warm and inviting. They joined a chavurah and still enjoy a number of friendships that grew out of this group. Sue and Jeff Leboff joined our Temple a couple of weeks before their son David was born in 1972. Sue remembers how "We went to a service at the church and as I recall it was a creative service with Seth Front playing guitar. The people were friendly and everyone talked to each other. Dick Fratello started a couples club and we made wonderful friends. We've always liked being a part of our Temple.

Anne and Ed Farber joined Temple Beth David when congregation Hillel merged with our synagogue in 1972. Anne recalls, "We were coming from a Conservative to a Reform congregation and we were proud to offer money to help build the school. I was sisterhood president at Hillel and I became active in the TBD sisterhood immediately. People were very friendly. "

In 1980, Anne & Lewis Katz joined TBD when they moved from NY. Even though Beth Emet was closer to them, TBD started Hebrew in fourth grade. When their daughter Rachel was three years old, she would dance in the back as the choir sang during the HH services. They celebrated their children's bnei mitzvah, confirmation, daughter's wedding, and Anne was supported by our community with the death of her father. Anne says, "When I'm in Temple I'm home. No matter what is happening. This is my Temple."

Sue and Fred Wolff joined in 1982. Initially, both of them liked Rabbi Front, the music, and our sense of family. In the 1990's, they both organized our library because education was always very important to them. One of the most meaningful life cycle events was Fred's Bar Mitzvah. As a youth, he was forced to have an abbreviated service where he wasn't even able to read the Torah. However here at TBD, he joined the adult BM class, reaffirmed his faith, and both he and Sue were so proud of his accomplishment.

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Stephen and Yu Fen Harris joined TBD in 1993 on the advice of Jackie and Chuck Brotcher . The Harris have had their children named here, their son's bar mitzvah and confirmation and they look forward to their daughter Debbie's Bat Mitzvah in January. Most High Holy Days, Yu Fen chants the Torah or Haftarah blessings. Stephen is so proud of her because it showcases the diversity of our community. He especially enjoys having a rabbi who can see things from differing points of view, an open minded staff, the variety of activities, and finds our synagogue 'a great place to belong.'

One year ago, Robin Harrison joined along with his family in 2010. Robin describes his Temple membership as "meaningful because it seems like an extension of family. Everyone is warm and welcoming. " He says, "I'm able with my family to establish a religious foundation. We can express our joy and relationship with God in a very positive fashion. Ever since becoming a member, the Temple has helped bring our family closer together and establish a meaningful relationship with so many people and reinforce a genuine purpose to life."

Looking back 50 years is rather amazing. In Pirkei Avot, we are taught *Al tifros min hatizbor*, don't separate yourself from community. It is because of you who have joined our synagogue over the decades, volunteered, donated, and participated that we have a synagogue with an Early Learning Childhood Center, i.e. a preschool, an outstanding Religious School, a highly meaningful Bnei Mitzvah program, adult education, active Brotherhood and Sisterhood, amazing music program, talented choir, creative holiday celebrations, and so much more. Those who have joined our community have become part of our family. We have long friendships, support each other during times of loss, and celebrate the best moments of our lives as individuals and as a people. By being part of a Jewish community, we are part of something bigger than ourselves. We are part of history, sharing in the covenant between God and the Jewish people, and we are forging the continuation of Judaism for future generations.

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In celebrating our fiftieth, I would like to first of all invite any of you who are unaffiliated to become members of Temple Beth David. The price of your HH tickets can be applied to membership and the synagogue doesn't refuse anyone based on financial need. Secondly, we have a number of activities throughout the year. We just launched our 50th on Sept. 18. There will be Friday evening "Reunion" Shabbats where we honor and recognize those who have celebrated a bar/bat mitzvah (adult or youth), confirmation or wedding throughout the decades. We are establishing our Endowment Fund as part of our Lasting Legacy initiative. This will help the temple flourish for another 50 years. If you want to learn more, I would love to discuss this with you.

Fifty is a significant number for us as individuals and as a synagogue. It is even more so in the Torah. In Leviticus chapter 25, we read how the horn was sounded after forty nine years proclaiming the Jubilee on our Day of Atonement. We are told to *kidashtem*, to sanctify the fiftieth year. During the Jubilee the land was left untilled and returned to its original tribal holdings and Israelite slaves were freed. The fiftieth year was celebrated by our people throughout the land of Israel as it reminded them that people and land ultimately belong to God.

So the number fifty in our Torah is a reminder of holiness, sanctity, freedom, rest, and God. For us as individuals, five decades is old enough to appreciate the sanctity of life, i.e., we don't take it for granted any longer, we can dream of the freedom of future retirement, and we can focus on the relationships in our lives that are most important. For a synagogue such as Temple Beth David, fifty years gives us perspective. We have lived and survived much over half a century but we have created decades of friendships, a place of prayer and study, and a community that can support one another and celebrate the great joys of our lives. Fifty years for us is an opportunity of connecting with history and creating more moments of holiness.

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Not a coincidence but Rosh Hashanah is called Yom Teruah, day of the teruah, the sounding of the horn. The blowing of our shofar reminds us of the new year and every 50 years of the jubilee. Let's sound the horn proclaiming our 50th anniversary as we look forward to the next fifty!

I blow the shofar

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