

PRESIDENT'S ROSH HASHANAH REMARKS
SEPTEMBER 18, 2009

L'shana Tova!

It is my great pleasure to welcome each of you, as we come together as a congregation to worship for the High Holy Days. I would like to extend a special welcome to all our new members and guests, who may be joining us for the first time at Beth Israel. When the opportunity arises, please introduce yourself to those around you. I believe in short order you will sense the special warmth and character of your fellow congregants and our beloved Temple.

With your indulgence, I would like to offer a small dose of advice that you might find helpful some day. Before you agree to become President of one of the largest Reform congregations in the United States, be sure you ask these questions:

First, are there any possible indications of an economic recession on the immediate horizon?

And second, is there even the slightest possibility of a major hurricane impacting Houston anytime soon?

Thankfully, at least so far, the upper Texas Gulf Coast has been spared of any storms this season. But I can recall so vividly, the hardships that many of us experienced for the months following Hurricane Ike. Some of you may still be feeling the effects, and if so, please let us know how we can be of assistance.

Unlike the structural damage we suffered from Hurricane Ike, there is no insurance to protect us from the wraths of the lingering economic crisis. I continue though to be both proud and amazed at the resiliency of Beth Israel during these difficult times. Over our 156-year history, think of how many economic depressions, recessions, wars, conflicts, plagues and storms that we, as a congregation, have endured. Therefore, it is not surprising that we not only possess the strength to survive, but that we have historically faced adversity and accepted the challenge to become an even more vibrant congregation. It was imperative that our doors and hearts be open to all who have needed us since we came together last year. The fact is, that an unprecedented number of you have participated in the expanded and diversified services and programs that we offer almost every day of the year – for every interest and every age. Our clergy team is deeply committed to our diversified Temple community and is always available whenever you need them! We thank you, Rabbis and Cantor, for everything you provide that enriches our lives. We ask for God's blessings upon each of you and your families, for the coming year.

I want to express my sincere appreciation to all the families who responded and generously participated in our “Promise for Tomorrow – Today” campaign. Despite the economic crisis, our 41 year-old physical facility had severe mechanical infrastructure issues that required total replacement. I hope you will take the time to tour our renovations that were completed over the summer. We can all take pride that our spiritual home now looks absolutely beautiful and that all our spaces will serve us well!

If you have not had the opportunity to do so recently, I would like to encourage you to tour Beth Israel’s two very unique cemeteries. Our West Dallas mausoleum and original 3-½ acre cemetery, established in 1844, is literally a walking tour of Houston’s early developmental history. Famed-architect and Beth Israel member, Joseph Finger, designed the mausoleum with its art-deco style architecture. This past spring, we were proud to have our West Dallas facility distinguished as a Texas Historical Cemetery.

Also, the Beth Israel Memorial Garden on Antoine is equally acclaimed in its own right and a true architectural masterpiece. The Proler Family Chapel and adjacent meditation gardens and grounds serve our congregation with proud honor and distinction.

Eighty-four years ago, my maternal grandparents moved to Houston to raise their family in search of the American dream. Recognizing his developing love for Judaism, my grandfather became a Jew by choice, studying with Rabbi Barnston. Even though I was very young when he passed away, I have heard wonderful stories regarding his absolute insistence that embracing Judaism at Beth Israel would always be a priority for the Bailes family. I think he would be very proud that both his daughter and grandson would one day lead his beloved congregation as its President.

I am sure my grandparents possessed the same mindset as your descendants. They would be insistent that every effort be made to perpetuate our beautiful religion. To honor our past builders and leave a legacy for the future, Beth Israel is committed to building a strong endowment foundation. We have an ambitious vision to provide the excellence that our members desire and expect from Beth Israel.

I am extremely proud that the Temple’s Board of Trustees, and our new Endowment Board, has created the structure to assure that the treasures of our religion will be passed on to future generations. Therefore, I am pleased to announce that the L’Dor VaDor Endowment Fund has been established. The initial charge is to request the consideration of a planned gift, through a bequest, naming the Temple as a beneficiary through your will. Numerous options will provide estate-planning advantages that enable us to earmark resources to benefit Beth Israel’s future needs and plans.

Karen and I look forward to becoming first-time grandparents later this year as we anticipate the arrival of our identical “twin” grandsons. The reality of this milestone, certainly emphasizes for us, the need to insure that future generations will always have a vibrant Beth Israel, so that they will possess the same fond memories and spiritual support we have found. With your assistance, these goals can become a reality as we

create our legacy for our children and grandchildren, and continue to go from strength to strength.

Karen and I, along with our children – Stephanie and Bradley and Jill and Robert, wish you a new year built with promise – filled with hope – and blessed with peace.

L'shana Tova!