

Since we are all in the midst of reviewing this past year as we prepare for the new year of 5769, I wanted to share with you the excitement that was generated at this year's Board retreat. About a year ago, Rabbi Raskin and I decided that we needed to try something new at the next Board retreat. We are fortunate to have among our constellation of talented members, Karen Hoffman and Jeff Markowitz who are skilled in developing and delivering creative workshops. They "volunteered" to work with Rabbi and me on developing the agenda for this Board's retreat this past August.

So on August 24, we did something entirely new and different, we went off-site to the Palomar Hotel at Mockingbird Station and spent 5 hours getting to know each other better with an overall objective of updating our shul's mission statement. We were at the Palomar thanks to the generosity of one of our new members – Richard Frank who works for the management group that owns and operates the Palomar. He and his capable staff helped create an environment that got our creative juices flowing.

We started the day with a fun icebreaker. We had to answer the following four questions by finding the signup sheet in each corner of the room:

1. When I'm Stressed, Help Me by...
2. Help me meet a Deadline by ...
3. If you need help, I can ...
4. If you want to thank me, I prefer ..

By answering these questions and providing the feedback to all board members, we have eliminated one barrier to progress by understanding how our peers react in various circumstances as well as gaining insight into skills possessed by our peers. All this

will enable your board to be more productive in the coming year.

We then moved on to the major task of the day, understanding what brought each of us to our shul and what we wanted to get out of our membership. Building this base would enable us to craft an appropriate updated mission statement.

At this point you may be asking why we need an updated mission statement. Good question and our answer reflects comments made recently by the Rabbi in one of his Shabbat morning D'var Torahs in which he said that one of the great legacies of the early rabbis vis a vis education was their recognizing when an approach was no longer effective and their ability to try something new. Well, as you have noticed, our congregation is in a growth mode and we felt it was appropriate to revisit our mission to make sure we do not lose the attributes that attracted and continue to attract our members. Therefore, we decided it was time to revisit our mission statement.

To accomplish this we broke into small work groups throughout the day and developed answers to a variety of questions. We then shared the results of each small group with the entire group. These activities culminated in two groups working on a mission statement that the entire group worked on.

I wish I could tell you that we have an updated mission statement as a result of all this hard work. I cannot say that as yet, but I assure you we are very close. We will introduce the new updated mission statement in the coming months.

This mission statement will form the foundation for the staircase to the future that we will build using input from the congregational survey the Strategic Planning Committee sent out and to which approximately 40% of you responded to. That is an incredible response rate and we all want to thank you for taking the time to respond.

Once the responses have been correlated the Strategic Planning Committee will present a report to the board. The board can then use our mission statement as the sounding board against which our plan for the future can be built. After all, we want to make sure that the direction we take the congregation in is in concert with our mission statement.

While we are working on this I want to draw your attention to a book the Rabbi provided to the board called "The Spirituality of Welcoming" by Dr. Ron Wolfson. This book presents concrete methods for helping a congregation create a warm and welcoming atmosphere. I encourage you all to buy a copy and read it. After all it takes more than just a few of us to ensure that Congregation Beth Torah retains that marvelous warm and welcoming feel that it had when it was much smaller.

Linda and I want to wish you and yours a Happy and Healthy New Year.

B'yedidut,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Chuck". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.