

Shabbat shalom and gut yontiff,

For those of you who do not know me, I am Marla Norton, President of Temple Beth El. To our new members, welcome! And to our returning members, you are always welcome.

Last week, Rabbi Micah spoke to us about transition. And as I listened to his words, I found myself looking at the Sisterhood needlepoint project, which hangs to the right of the bima and recites the opening lines of a well-known passage from Ecclesiastes:

To everything there is a season; a time for every purpose under heaven:

A time to be born, and a time to die;

A time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted;

A time to kill, and a time to heal;

A time to break down, and a time to build up;

A time to weep, and a time to laugh;

A time to mourn, and a time to dance;

A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together

A time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;

A time to get, and a time to lose;

A time to keep, and a time to cast away;

A time to rend, and a time to sew;

A time to keep silence, and a time to speak;

A time to love, and a time to hate;

A time of war, and a time of peace.

When I was growing up, I naively thought these words were nothing more than a 1960's folk song, penned by Pete Seeger and popularized by the Byrds in 1965, among others. I was somewhat surprised, years later, to realize that these words were written thousands of years ago and were part of the Bible. Any copyright had long expired by the time Mr. Seeger put the words to music in 1959. (Incidentally, in preparing this address I learned that Pete Seeger donated 45% of the royalties to the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions, Apparently, he retained 50% because the music was original and another 5%, allegedly because, he said, "I did write six words.")

In any event, the 1960's was a period of upheaval and of change and the song became an anthem for peace during that time. But to me, the words are about transition, evolution, and the cycles of life. As we begin this new year, we are, as Rabbi Micah reminds us, in transition. A year ago at this time, Staci Bagel spoke to you about searching our hearts and our souls and using what we gathered to help us search for a new spiritual leader. *A time to search and a time to find.* Rabbi Kaplan's retirement marks the end of one cycle and Rabbi Micah's joining us marks the beginning of a new cycle.

So, as we begin 5771, returning to our verse from Ecclesiastes, what "time" is this? Having given it some thought, I would say *A time to open our minds to new things -- A time to evolve* or perhaps *A time to trust.* As we grapple with trying to find our footing in

this time of transition, we find ourselves a bit outside our comfort zones. It is to be expected that things will be different, for Micah Becker-Klein is a different person than David Baruch Kaplan. Change and transition are not to be feared or avoided at all cost – they are a natural part of life’s progression. The earth turns, seasons change and so life goes on.

In one of our first meetings, Rabbi Micah gave me a homework assignment. He asked me to read a book, called “The Rabbi-Congregation Relationship: A Vision for the 21st Century, which was published over 10 years ago as the culmination of a study between the various components of the Jewish Reconstructionist Federation seeking to establish a healthy balance between the needs of Rabbis and the needs of their congregations. It speaks about the Reconstructionist democracy and the way in which the rabbi and the congregation share authority. A healthy congregation needs to allow the rabbi certain freedoms and authority to lead the congregation, while encouraging the congregation to participate in decisions of important policy issues. Thus the report notes “A rabbi can be a strong and effective leader in a democratic organization when the rabbi embraces the opportunity and the congregation supports and welcomes the rabbi’s leadership.”

Rabbi Micah brings us a new perspective; a creative approach to problem solving. He will have new ideas, and he may wish to lead us in new directions. We must not let fear of change, of the unknown, of losing control allow us to resist any and all change. Remember that an evolving religious civilization is at the core of Reconstructionist values. We must give proper heed to Rabbi Micah’s leadership and allow him to lead us in new directions, lest we become stagnant. As a congregation, we are in good shape. It appears that we ended our most recent fiscal year firmly in the black. (More on that at the Congregation meeting next month.) Membership over the past several years has been relatively stable but with a bit of attrition – while we do not yet have figures for this year (today being the official tally date), we are hopeful that this trend will begin to reverse itself. (Again, if you want to know the official tally, come to the congregation meeting on October 3rd). While the Temko building has not yet begun to take shape, Rabbi Micah sees huge potential for that space as a place to create a different kind of energy. His contacts within the Reconstructionist movement present opportunities for potential collaborations with other congregations and his outreach efforts to the greater Wilmington Jewish community can only strengthen our bonds there. All of this potential change is positive

During the last several years of his tenure, Rabbi Kaplan sensed that we as a Congregation had grown restless, complacent and craved something different and inspiring. He set about trying new things in an effort to inspire us, to rekindle our passion, our spirituality. Our joint services with TBE Philly were a radical departure from the average service at Temple Beth El Newark. Rabbi Micah comes to us brimming with new ideas, new ways to bring meaning to our prayer. We need to let down our defenses, let go of our preconceptions and open ourselves up to the experience.

While the introduction of unfamiliar melodies or prayers in the weekly Shabbat service may catch occasional servicegoers by surprise, but for those who attend services on a

regular basis, the changes from week to week over the past 5 weeks have been subtle. While some of you may have concerns about the impact of these changes and future changes on our b'nai mitzvah children, rest assured that Rabbi Micah is working closely with the transition committee, the ritual committee and the Daled and Hai teachers are closely involved. He is coordinating with the upcoming bar and bat mitzvah children and their families to ensure that their shared expectations match. We must trust that Rabbi Micah cares as deeply about ensuring a meaningful bar or bat mitzvah for our children as we do. Children are much more adaptable and open to change than we are – as a Hai class parent, I can tell you that after just a few of Rabbi Micah's services my son was walking around the house humming several of these new melodies.

Finally, in this time of transition, I ask that you need to trust in the Board and its committees, to know that we are cognizant of the fact that change is uncomfortable. Many people are working hard behind the scenes to minimize the foreseeable bumps in the road and to insulate the congregation from their impact. Mind you, that does not mean that the road will be flawlessly smooth, for surely there will be bumps and ruts we did not anticipate. But we need to put ourselves in a frame of mind where we reach out to one another, join hands, and cross that bridge together when we come to it. If you lack faith in your leadership, get involved. Volunteer to serve on a committee. If the committee you wish to serve on is already at an optimal size, make your views known to the members of that committee. Your feedback will be most helpful if you know the facts from personal experience, rather than merely relating what you have heard through congregational chatter (remember the game of telephone we played as kids?) and if you can offer constructive solutions.

As my remarks draw to a close, I am again thinking about Ecclesiastes, about which we will hear more in upcoming services. As we focus our thoughts inward today, and reflect upon the year past and the year ahead of us, think about the “time” that is the present, and how you can best use that time. And may the remainder of your fast be both easy and meaningful. Shana Tovah.