

Congregation B'nai Shalom

Rabbi Search Committee

May 2011

A Look in the Mirror

Introduction

In early 2011 the Board of Directors of Congregation B'nai Shalom commissioned a Rabbi Search Committee to solicit and review applications for the position of Senior Rabbi, and to make a hiring recommendation to the Board. The tasks assigned to the committee included gathering information from congregants on who we are, and what our strengths, challenges, and opportunities are as a congregation, and focusing on what skills, qualities and characteristics we should seek in our new rabbi. That process has led to a wonderful "*Look in the Mirror*." This booklet is a summary of the words, quotes, ideas and wishes collected, as well as a diagram of the important relationships at the center of our community.

To gather this information, the Committee has held congregational meetings and house gatherings, called members on the phone, hosted an informational table during religious school hours, met with most of the congregation's committees, talked with staff, collected feedback via a special web-page and spent many hours meeting weekly since the search process was started.

This booklet will be shared with the Board of Directors and with the congregation's professional staff, lay leaders and committee members. It is also available to any member of the congregation. In fact, many who have provided their thoughts, ideas and hopes to the committee asked about having access to the collected information, which we are pleased to make available to all.

Before even one resume has been received, we are pleased to offer this *Look in the Mirror*.

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Questions

Members of the Rabbi Search Committee served as facilitators and scribes at numerous “Congregation Conversations,” and asked attendees a series of questions aimed at encouraging a full and dynamic discussion. Participants were encouraged to share their personal spiritual experiences and offer constructive ideas and thoughts about our next rabbi. Here are examples of the questions asked:

- "Can you describe a spiritual leader who has influenced your life?"
- "When were you most proud to be a member of CBS?"
- "What does the ideal CBS look like?"

Notes

Where words appear in quotes, these are the words of congregants, as recorded by Search Committee note takers. We have tried our best to write down what we have heard. However, our notes at these congregation conversations were taken quickly. We apologize if we have misquoted. We believe that we have accurately captured the meaning behind the words placed in quotes.

Also, the following is a kind of “collage” of quotes, ideas, thoughts and feelings. With so much input collected it has not been possible to provide the fuller context of each comment, statement or expression.

Finally, the word *rabbi* appears throughout the following pages, sometimes referring to our current rabbi, but often referring to past spiritual leaders in our lives, or, in the hypothetical, to our future rabbi. It is not possible to separate the references, and the Committee asks readers to attribute all rabbi references generally to the position of rabbi.

A Community of Individuals

We have been reminded during the collection of the input we are attempting to share in this booklet, that Congregation B'nai Shalom is made up of individuals with vastly different experiences, expectations and abilities to participate in, or contribute to, the congregation. Many active congregation members want a strong (or stronger) sense of community, and connectedness with our rabbi and fellow congregants. Others want a place they can occasionally feel a part of, but are not looking for a frequent or involved connection. Regardless of where the congregants we spoke with fall along this continuum, there was universal sentiment expressed to us that our congregation should always be inviting, welcoming, warm, receptive, and kind to every member, relative and guest, no matter the frequency or context of one's participation. While we might understandably hope that the occasion of choosing a new rabbi will inspire us to improve our relationships with one another, or that a new rabbi may show us how to do this better, we also know that this is our responsibility, each of us.

Healing

One final thought before we begin. As we have put together this collection of words, quotes, ideas and wishes, we have realized that as a community we are in need of healing (Refuah Shlemah). Just as the Rabbi Search Committee members have felt this healing as we have begun to execute our task, it is expected that the entire congregation may well find healing as we navigate the full process of selecting our new rabbi. The process can: “heal us now.”

The Committee has also come to appreciate that this process involves and belongs to everyone at Congregation B’nai Shalom, and that any effort or time expended in connection with this joint undertaking is a gift to one another, a mitzvah.

So....we pause for the blessing that the Rabbi Search Committee recites as each committee meeting opens:

Praised are You, Adonai our God,
Ruler of the universe, who sanctifies us through *mitzvot*
and has commanded us to engage in the needs of the community.

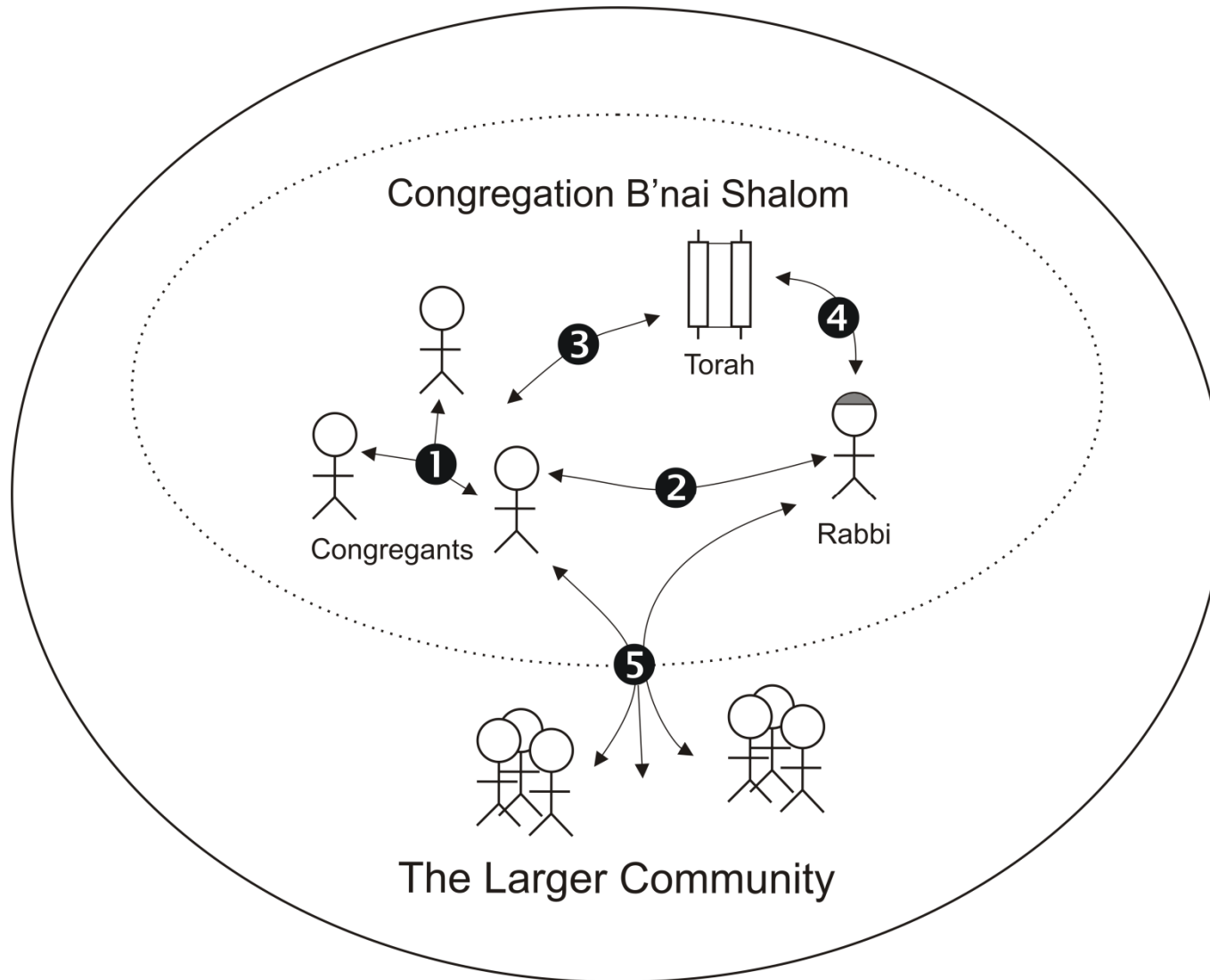
Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu Melech ha-olam
asher kid’shanu b’mitz’votav
v’tzivanu la-asok b’tzorchei tzibur.

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם
אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו
וְצִוָּנוּ לְעִסוֹק בְּצָרְכֵי צְבוּר:

The Key Relationships

1. **Congregants to Congregants**
2. **Rabbi to Congregation:** Rabbi to professional staff, lay leaders, committee members, teachers, students and individual congregants
3. **Congregation to Torah:** Referring to the essential features of our faith, including Torah, study, worship, life cycle events, spirituality, ritual, prayer, etc.
4. **Rabbi to Torah**
5. **Rabbi and Congregation to Larger Community**

Chart of Key Relationships



1 Congregants to Congregants

Words:

- Warmth
- Talk
- Belonging
- Inclusivity
- Engaged
- Fit in
- Comfortable community
- Welcoming building
- Atmosphere

Quotes:

- “nurturing place”
- “connectedness”
- “we have pockets of disconnectedness”
- “building bridges/active community”
- “the most important thing is who we are, and what we are”
- “Feeling like an insider”
- “It was amazing how we all got together”
- “Points of brilliance – like Mitzvah Day”
- “The chairs and sofas in the hallway are great”
- “The community came together to support me”
- “You were so nice when we joined the Temple”
- “People have to be happy there!”
- “I want my children to continue to be part of the community”

Ideas:

- We should include, welcome, support:
 - Mixed marriages
 - Interfaith families
 - Same sex marriages
- Being invested in each others success.
- We’re there for each other
- We have to want to welcome people
- People have to reach out

Wishes:

- Getting this community more together

2 Rabbi to Congregation (*words, ideas*)

Words:

- A Facilitator
 - Kind and brilliant
 - Approachable [*many used this word*]
 - Warm
 - Get to know folks
 - Set the context
 - Vision
 - Partnership [*with Board of Directors*]
 - Reach out
 - Understand
 - A Neighbor
 - Fuzzy, inspire a close knit community
-
- Connect [*the most frequently used word*]
 - Build bridges [*Rabbi's role*]
 - Courage of convictions
 - Engender success
 - Trusted relationships
 - Exhibits [*some said exudes*] warmth
 - Fun
 - Comfortable [*a place to feel comfortable*]
 - Gentle
 - Collaboration
 - Compassion

Ideas:

- Strong organizational skills
 - Strong interpersonal skills (Board, staff, membership)
 - Ability to make all congregants feel important (kids too)
 - Good intellectual/good personality
 - Recognize the diversity within the community
 - Rabbi - look at congregants as members, but include elements of friendship
 - Can sit with the Rabbi
 - Don't just toe the line, let us stand as our congregation
 - A lot of this is intangible
 - There is a push and pull of good leadership
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- Strong but flexible
 - Two-way communication
 - It's not the Temple; it's the community, the tradition
 - Temple can be someone's home
 - Choir adds to the experience
 - The culture of the temple emanates from the Rabbi
 - Comfortable with the kids [*many mentioned this*]
 - A Rabbi who can state and define mission and expectations
 - Should be able to disagree with your Rabbi (comfortably)
 - A Rabbi who is accessible [*word often used*]
 - Open to new ideas from students; show genuine interest in students
 - Our Rabbi should be more involved with younger students
 - Approachable in a variety of settings

2 Rabbi to Congregation (*Quotes*)

- “Rabbi is part of the experience, but not the star”
 - “Need a Rabbi that is engaged in it, not set apart from it.”
 - “Rabbi makes a space for these things to occur”
 - “I want to feel a personal connection”
 - “He would tell these wonderful stories”
 - “Who can actually engage students”
 - “Talk to you and not down to you”
 - “I’d like to think, I could go to a rabbi, tell them about my problem”
 - “I’d like a Rabbi to say hello, to know my name – and have a conversation”
 - “Rabbi made a point to know everyone”
 - “What was important was my mother came to services; Rabbi knew her – the connection was important”
 - “I like to see the Rabbi as one of the people you go to; the community feel is more important to me”

 - “I’d like a Rabbi to actually walk with his congregation, and be one of the people”
 - “I think a Rabbi has to get to know who we are”
 - “A younger Rabbi who could take root, and stay for a while”
 - “I really appreciate the spiritual leadership of the Rabbi”
- “I’ve taken some classes, I like how things weave in and out”
 - “Not just indoctrinate us into his thought”
 - “What would the Rabbi want me to do?”
 - “A Rabbi that meets folks where they are and accepts their imperfections”
 - “The Rabbi sets the tone”
 - “Connectivity and warmth”
 - “Make a connection – children through seniors”
 - “Keeping members – recognizing them, greeting them”
 - “The Rabbi took the time”
 - “The Rabbi needs to challenge me to be a better person”
 - “We need someone who listens and is comfortable with people”
 - “The congregation has to be invested in the success of the Rabbi”
 - “The congregation has to step up and help the Rabbi get connected”
 - “How do we balance a Rabbi having an opinion and our ability to listen to it rather than criticize it”
 - “How do we become better at listening”
 - “Follow up and keep the connection [*after a life cycle event*]
 - “Our Rabbi soaked up what everyone said”
 - “Rabbinic outreach is huge”
 - “A leader and a participant – comfortable in both roles”
 - “Time to let kids figure it out”
 - “How do we connect it all”

2 Rabbi to Congregation, continued (*wishes*)

Wishes:

- Help us (inspire us) to make a better connection with our fellow congregants
- Build relationships, whether the visions align or not
- Interact well with kids
- A Rabbi with integrity, able to gain confidence and respect
- Overcome geography (some members drive a long way)
- Help us be a more welcoming community
- We want to operate in a way that eliminates a blaming culture
- Help us come together as a shared community
- A Rabbi with warmth, and a depth of soul.
- Knows what is important to congregants
- The Rabbi shouldn't have to be "on" all the time
- A Rabbi who connects with us

- A Rabbi there for everyone
- Rabbi that makes us feel like we want to be part of the Temple
- We want to feel part of a group, comfortable, we belong
- A Rabbi who teaches, and has the ability to work with children
- A Rabbi who finds a way to nurture
- Can delegate
- High ideals for all
- A Rabbi who is warm, compassionate, fair and consistent
- Show interest in us
- Engage empty nesters
- Accept others
- Nurturer by nature

3 Congregation to Torah

Words:

- Brilliance
- Questions
- Gorgeous sanctuary
- Beautiful space
- Music [*mentioned many many times*]
- A place to connect to Judaism
- The learning just happens

Quotes:

- “Create a spiritual home to express the Jewish Identity – whether you’re a twice-a-year Jew or a 52-times-a-year Jew”
- “It’s not just about the food, it’s about our families”
- “I’ve been very proud of the services on Fridays”
- “I love to bring guests
- “It’s like their second home, they’re so comfortable there” [*speaking of children*]
- “I’d like to continue with the music – I’ve never seen that in a conservative congregation”
- “Feels good when you can hear the congregation sing and some folks add harmony”

Ideas:

- Strong education, pre-K thru adult
- CBS founded as a very open and honest place
- Everyone worked hard to get it done [*new sanctuary*]
- Spiritual, not dogmatic; tradition, not laws
- Freedom of the Pulpit [*we should give to Rabbi*]

Wishes:

- To combine spirituality and tradition
- A Community with a lot of learning
- A different place

4 Rabbi to Torah

Words:

- Engaged/Engaging
- Questions
- Connections
- Inspirational
- Partnership [*with congregation*]
- Good presence [*on Bimah*]
- Worldly
- Consistent
- Clear concise sermons
- A Rabbi who inspires
- Sensitivity to life cycle events
- Intuitive

Quotes:

- “It wasn’t just about the singing...the engagement is an important piece...as kids, we don’t know how to reach out”
- [*At a life cycle event*] “The Rabbi took a quick assessment, and adjusted, he included everyone.”
- [*Haftorah reading*] “the way he explained it to me, with enthusiasm”
- “To accept the questions, and to battle with them, that’s the thing”
- “My daughter is living a Jewish lifestyle”
- “Sermons very profound, very impactful”
- “See a Rabbi’s open door”
- “Compassionate and deliver a beautiful eulogy”
- “Important for a Rabbi to love what they do and show a passion for Judaism”
- “Able to utilize music to draw congregants into the spirituality of the service”
- “It’s OK for Rabbi to have strong opinions but be comfortable and flexible in applying them”

Ideas:

- Ability to use music in the service
- I’d rather have a great Rabbi than a singing Rabbi – we have other options [e.g. our soloists]
- Participatory readings [*very important*]
- Strong beliefs and conviction
- Not afraid to speak about convictions
- Spiritual through leadership
- Musical
- Skilled orator
- Extensive knowledge of Jewish history
- Able to read and speak Hebrew fluently
- Ability to deliver strong sermons (beginning, middle and end)

Wishes:

- Strong Rabbinical skills
- A Rabbi that doesn’t squash ideas and opinions
- A Rabbi connected with Onegs
- Finds points of connection
- Real, honest
- A Rabbi that can identify leadership
- Educated on Jewish issues
- Pro-Israel
- Important to bond with children, to inspire them to stay involved
- That the Rabbi and the Ritual Committee collaborate and be respectful of differing opinions
- Rabbi should focus more on pulpit duties than on managing committees

5 Rabbi and Congregation to Larger Community

Words:

- Shared views [*on Israel*]
- Take Action
- Follow through
- Participation
- Exercising good judgment
- Take a leadership role
- Hard decisions

Quotes:

- “Looking for a Rabbi open to a greater sense of the whole Jewish Community”
- “It’s important that the Rabbi be a symbol of someone who cares”
- “We want to feel we’re doing something, something to return.”
- “Having the Rabbi be a part of “external” leadership”
- “love to see weekly updates on what’s going on in the external communities”
- “I like the Muslim & Jewish programs; there’s more we have in common”
- “Something incredibly powerful to come to your home in a time of need”
- “Guests from out of town and even non-Jewish friends loved the service”
- “A Rabbi needs to stay current”
- “My Rabbi was integrated with the generations over time”
- “A steady and diverse approach to issues”
- “Social conscience to our congregation – tikkun olam – should be a pillar”
- “My growing up Rabbi was part of the community”
- “Focus on Israel and Middle East current situation”
- “To me, social work and ethics are a part of religion”
- “Socially conscious and applying the tenants of Judaism in the real world”

Ideas:

- Rabbis should know which committees are doing what
- Our Rabbi should know who needs help, so we can take action
- We want leadership that empowers others to be more engaged
- Discover – what does it mean to be Jewish
- Center of influence
- We are a community that wants to build community
- Can the Rabbi conduct periodic service at the Willows?
- We want to be actively involved in inter-faith activities
- We want to be involved in Social Action

Wishes:

- Rabbi with strong connection with Israel
- Rabbi as a “social conscience”
- A Rabbi who can help us be unique
- Focus on cultural identity
- To rise up, to make a difference
- A Rabbi who draws people together
- Active community outreach
- Understanding our connection to other Jewish organizations
- A Rabbi with connections to Jewish camps
- A Sense of Justice

All this, and a mensch too?

Five Key Relationships/Five Key Words

Congregants to Congregants	Welcome	Be welcoming to one another, more often than we are
Rabbi to Congregation	Connect	Members wish to form connections with our rabbi
Congregation to Torah	Tradition	Our traditions lead to our spirituality
Rabbi to Torah	Passion	Knowledge and skill too, but passion first
Rabbi and Congregation to Larger Community	Engage	We want to be involved, outward looking

Major Gleanings

Congregants to Congregants

We sometimes fall short in our relationships with one another as congregants, as members of one community. Welcoming visitors is easy; being **welcoming** to one another through kindness, openness, inclusiveness and friendship is our challenge.

Also, we are very much an interfaith congregation. Sometimes non-Jewish family members are unsure about which activities they may participate in. We can perhaps make this clearer as we strive to welcome all.

Rabbi to Congregation

We are looking for the near impossible; for a rabbi to have some **connection** with each of us. While we seek a rabbi who can give to us so much, we also see that we have to support our rabbi.

Congregation to Torah

We are very attached to and invested in our spirituality and faith. We count on our **traditions**, our community and our rabbi.

Rabbi to Torah

Our new Rabbi will certainly have the skills to lead us in the sanctuary, but more important than skill is our rabbi's own connection to Torah, and the ability to inspire us, to teach us, to challenge us and to stand with us. The qualities we seek are wrapped in a **passion** for our faith.

Rabbi and Congregation to Larger Community

The rabbi's leadership in looking outward as we seek to actively participate in the pressing issues of our time is important. We need guidance as we reach out. And, to close the circle, we see that **engaging** with other organizations and people outside our congregation helps to keep our own community vibrant, and even serves to improve Congregant to Congregant relationships (*the beginning*).

Next Steps

The Rabbi Search Committee was careful to date this booklet (May 2011). This is because its members recognize that such a collection of words, ideas, quotes and wishes is applicable only at a given moment. At times in the future, congregants might answer the questions we have asked differently, or have priorities and concerns other than those expressed on the preceding pages.

The information in this booklet will now be used by the Rabbi Search Committee in formulating interview questions that will be asked of our rabbi candidates. In this way, all who provided information to this *Look in the Mirror* can take some comfort from the fact that their thoughts, ideas, words and wishes are very much a part of the process that will result in a recommendation to the Board of Directors of who shall become our next Senior Rabbi.

Thank you all for participating.

The Rabbi Search Committee

We Stand on your Shoulders

Congregation B'nai Shalom has been blessed with two Senior Rabbis since its founding: Debra Hachen until 7 years ago and, after a year with an interim rabbi, Ilene Bogosian, Rabbi Laurence Elis Milder for the past 6 years. Looking back at the preceding pages, and contemplating why it is that we are Who We Are, we realize how much our thinking, feeling and acting has been and is shaped by our rabbi.

Rabbis Hachen and Milder have given to this congregation their strong work ethic, their intelligent teaching, their poise and challenges from the Bimah, their spirited music, and their passion for Israel, the Jewish faith, and life itself. They have helped make this community resilient, empathic, curious, active and inspired.

One message that has come through to the Rabbi Search Committee from congregants that took the time to speak with us at this transitional moment is that *as we look out at this complex world, over at one another and inside our hearts we see more because we stand on the shoulders of our rabbi.*

We thank Rabbi Hachen and Rabbi Milder.

The Rabbi Search Committee (May 2011)

Rabbi Search Committee

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