

President Jeanne Freeman's Erev Rosh Hashanah speech 5777

Shana Tova, and welcome to Temple Beth Tikvah, I am Jeanne Freeman, and honored to be the president. Standing here I look out upon my dearest old friends, my new friends, and friends that I have yet to meet – but will.

When I came to Central Oregon seven years ago, I knew that finding friendship and camaraderie was most important to help me feel that I truly belonged. Since I wasn't a young mom rooting for my kids on the soccer field or sharing lunch break at the office... it was harder meeting people. I searched for friendly faces at art groups and book groups and floral groups and neighborhood groups, but I was unsatisfied and unable to meet people with whom I felt a connection.

Then I attended a Friday night service at Temple Beth Tikvah and was completely surprised by the warm welcome I received. I had met a few of you briefly in passing -- when you delivered food to our family when my sister was in hospice -- but I was shocked that anyone remembered me. You welcomed me and talked to me and asked me how I was. Your warmth and openness truly amazed me.

So I became a member of TBT. I knew that just joining wasn't enough to find the friendships I wanted. I had to join with good intentions to get involved. So, I immediately became part of the first Adult Hebrew class. Encouraged by my classmates, I joined them in b'nei mitzvah training and was bat mitzvahed in June of 2010. Which is really remarkable to me because the last time I had belonged to a synagogue was in 1980! I am excited for the current members of our adult b'nei mitzvah class who have embarked on that journey and wish them luck and joy in the endeavor.

So what did it take for me to become a part of the TBT community?

The answer is simple. When invited to participate, I said "yes." I said yes to coffee, to services, to b'nei mitzvah, to baking, to a seat on the communications committee. And yes to attending events at the homes of perfect strangers, the same folks I now call my friends.

At Temple Beth Tikvah I discovered that "yes" has made me a better, happier, more well-rounded person. Saying "yes" has fueled my continued personal development and expansion. I feel spiritual fulfillment and peace at an Erev Shabbat service. I am enriched by adult education programs and teachings from Rabbi Hershenson. I have learned to play mahjong (How I hate that dreadful game!) – because I love the women that play. And I have joined a book club with women who challenge me and make me laugh.

And now, having said "yes" to serve as president of TBT, I am encouraging you to say, "yes" as well. So you can see how it feels to be part of the fiber of our beautiful congregation. Because I know there are lifelong friendships to be made here. There are opportunities to learn and to have fun. To support each other. To share. To make each

other better, smarter, kinder. And ultimately to become an integral part of something grander ... called community.

Look at the person in front of you. Behind you and to your side. Smile. (Really, look at them) Think about the possibilities in getting to know them; or getting to know them better. Invite them into your heart. Meet at TBT gatherings and on your own. Connect with them. Enjoy them. Grow by just knowing them. Because relationships flourish based on mutual goals, a common language and shared experiences. And that's what Temple Beth Tikvah provides.

On this Rosh Hashanah, we are blessed to fill this sanctuary with our presence, raising our voices in unison. Like most synagogues, attendance is highest at services during the High Holy Days. Look around. Amazing, don't you think? But it is important to remember that a "big" number is not the sole measure of the value and worth of an experience; numbers alone cannot define the value and worth of our TBT community or our programs.

In fact, it means just as much to have 40 members come together for an Erev Shabbat; or 25 for an adult-education study; or 15 to serve dinner at Family Kitchen. Because what truly matters most is that those who do show up and participate, take away from the experience something special that makes them feel satisfied, fulfilled, enriched. Whether it be socially, intellectually or spiritually. Or all of it rolled into one.

So beyond the High Holy Days as we enter a new year ripe with possibilities, I invite each of you to say "yes". Please come to a Shabbat @Home —a delicious dinner with intelligent conversation and an opportunity to meet new people. Attend a Havdallah with a Maven and learn all kinds of interesting things from articulate, experienced members with knowledge to share. Join us for a Friday night service to welcome Shabbat and be inspired by Rabbi Hershenson's words and the gorgeous music of Lauren, Julie, Jo and Eileen. Join us with your children and grandchildren for a Family Shabbat. Bring the entire family to our upcoming Sukkot festival at Marlis & Dean's home.

And if you do want to say "yes" again but haven't found a program that suits you and your family... please, come speak to me. Together, we can create the programming that resonates -- for you, your toddler or young children, your spouse or partner. Say "yes" to this TBT community.

Temple Beth Tikvah is a wonderful community to find and to connect with really nice, fun, interesting people who are worthy of your friendship and support. That's what I've found at TBT. Join us and see how you thrive as an individual through your connection to us all.