We are here to celebrate our TBI Community

Find us on Facebook: facebook.com/TBIClearwater • Check Out our Website: tbiclearwater.org

We are holding weekly Adult Education classes, Religious School Education classes, Shabbat Services, family programming and more. Our Clergy, Board and Staff are working from home and are available for pastoral care, to check in and all temple business.

Let us know how we can support you!
RABBINIC RUMINATIONS by Rabbi Joshua Lobel

The wisest of kings, Solomon, decided to challenge one of his ministers. The king instructed him to search for a ring that could turn a happy person sad, and a sad person happy. King Solomon doubted the minister would be able to find such a thing. Still, the intrepid minister set out. The minister traveled the kingdom, but to no avail. Returning to Jerusalem, he found himself in a shabby neighborhood where there was a market. He noticed a man selling some odd pieces of jewelry spread out on a threadbare rug. Desperate, the minister explained to the merchant what he was seeking—a ring that could “make a happy person sad, and a sad person happy.” The merchant smiled and handed him a ring with the inscription: “Gam zeh ya’avor.”—“This too shall pass.” The minister returned to King Solomon and presented him with the ring. Smiling at the thought of winning the challenge, King Solomon took one look at the ring and was immediately humbled.

Gam zeh ya’avor. I’ve been thinking of this expression a lot in the past couple of weeks. It reflects the transitory, ephemeral nature of life. We don’t know what tomorrow will bring. Things could be going very well for us one moment, but the next day can bring trouble. In the same way, we may be suffering, victims of some misfortune, but, in a flash, our circumstances improve. The only constant in life is change.

Who could have predicted, just a couple months ago, our current reality? Who would have thought we would be living in a world of social distancing due to a dangerous, contagious virus? Our world has changed dramatically, causing many of us to feel isolated, anxious, fearful, and depressed. We are concerned about our own physical health and also the health of our family and friends. We also may have economic pressures, worries about our employment or our retirement savings. It is not easy.

In times like this, we truly appreciate the value of community. For when we are deprived of the ability to come together in person, we realize how much we miss it. How much it means to us. We long for the ability to embrace our friends in a warm and comforting hug, to hang out with our pals and kibbitz over a cup of coffee and a sweet treat. To learn, pray, and socialize with our temple friends. To go to the beach. To eat out at a restaurant. To finally return to a sense of normal human interaction without the necessity of screens.

Please be assured that, eventually, this time will come. A time when we no longer need social distancing to keep us safe from a terrible virus. When we aren’t panicking about masks, non-perishable food, and toilet paper. When we are free to congregate with as many people as we want and maybe take in a Rays game. When we can enjoy a grouper sandwich by the beach. This might happen more slowly than we would like, but, my friends, we will get there. My friends, we will get there. Gam zeh ya’avor. This too shall pass.

A LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT by Polly Kraus

April 6, 2020
Dear Temple Family,

Temple B’nai Israel has been a thriving community for over 70 years. I can say I have been part of this beautiful “extended family” since 1996. Twenty-four years is a long time. Through this time, we have weathered some big things, most tragically, the loss of our beloved Rabbi Treiser, may his memory be a blessing. But our congregation has persevered and, carrying his memory with us, we continue to build toward the future.

While no situation can compare to Rabbi Treiser’s passing, our congregation now faces another difficult challenge - the effect of the coronavirus on our community. We are scared and worried about our families, our friends, our livelihoods, and our future. On behalf of the Board of Directors, please know we are doing our best to, in these unprecedented circumstances, to serve the needs of our congregation.

We are so grateful for our wonderful, hardworking staff, who, whether in person or virtually, give of their time and efforts to work for the good of our congregation. Thank you to Rabbi Joshua Lobel, Laura Berkson, Dani Gamson, Bridget Seigel-Fultz, Carl Abbott, Peter Tanner, Angela Wachtler, Al Rodriguez, Rick McMullen, Sonja Garcia, and our just recently retired Barbara Bloom for all that they do. As much as the Board does to guide our staff, the real work is on the shoulders of these beautiful souls who support our mission, do the hard work and give so much of themselves to
make each of us feel cared for and included.

I am so honored to have gotten to serve this congregation as your president. I had so few skills, I had to reach deep and sometimes I came up short and had to depend on the Board or Past Presidents to help me navigate many situations. I hope you just saw that I really cared with all my heart and always strived to work for the benefit of the synagogue. And, looking back, I realize that even though we have faced tremendous obstacles, we also have accomplished so much. We have created meaningful and engaging programs, spiritually fulfilling worship experiences, informative educational opportunities, and, perhaps most importantly, retained our warm and welcoming spirit as we seek to strengthen bonds of friendship, both within our congregation and with the greater Pinellas County community. We all should be proud of how we not only have survived through our tribulations but have been able to, united as a community, begin to move forward.

I could not do this work alone. I am so thankful to have had the opportunity to work with so many of you who are all so passionate about Temple B’nai Israel. Thank you! I would like to thank this wonderful Board of Trustees, Paul Gross, Nina Warshofsky, Jorge Rodnizki, Heather Kaufman, Denise Kirschbaum, Sandi Sunter, Tiffanie Lopatin, Stephanie Van Zandt, Brian Rolfe, Robyn Lesser Melamud, Sue Wall, Katie Blaxberg, and Ceril Shagrin for all they have done to guide us through these two years. These Board members are my teammates and dear friends who showed support and were ready to step up to whatever challenge we had in front of us.

I am also so grateful to all the past presidents who have responded to my calls for help and guidance through my term. The work of a temple president never really ends, for even when our terms conclude, our love for TBI remains and grows. We know the amount of hard work it takes to engage, embrace, and educate our congregants and we all understand the dedication it takes to be a temple leader. I would like to thank all of the Past Presidents who helped me, especially that first year when our hearts were heavy with grief. A special thank you to Paul Gross, Denise Kirschbaum, Toni Rinde, Bruce Levine, Andy Salzman, Greg Fox, Evan Frayman, Bob Mintz, and Richard Snyder for all their support and encouragement. I am thankful for Nina Warshofsky taking on the presidency this coming year. She is amazing and we are lucky to have her. Please make her feel cared for and help her when you can. I know you will.

In closing, let me say there is so much work left to do. Developing leadership for the next generation, bringing our mortgage to a close through the Rabbi Treiser Sanctuary Campaign without disrupting the annual Torah Circle giving, educating our congregation about our Life & Legacy Program to grow an endowment for the future. Not to mention congregational outreach projects, developing new, innovative programming for all segments of our community, and expanding our justice work through FAST or RAC. Please know I’ll be around because there will always be more work to do. We, Jews, have thrived because God didn’t give us the option to cease from the work and we can find true joy in trying to make the world a more just and beautiful place for everyone. May we learn from the past, seek the best in each other, and work together to bring peace to our world.

With gratitude and shalom,

Polly Kraus

Mazel tov to TBI’s Sheila Miller and WTBI’s Andrea Feldman who will be representing our synagogue as our Women of Distinction for the Jewish Federation of Florida’s Gulf Coast Celebration. Other TBI members who will be honored are Barbara Bloom as T.O.P. Jewish Foundation’s honoree and Shirley Botkin as the Jewish Foundation of Florida’s Gulf Coast as their honoree.

This annual event allows us to honor those who work so hard to create our unique caring congregation for the greater community. This event will be held in the near future. Watch for the details!
A letter from Nina

Over the last two years I watched Polly and the board work through some of the toughest situations imaginable, but the drive and dedication of the board and congregation lead to my decision that I wanted to help continue our journey. When I decided to be president my expectation was a well-attended annual meeting where I along with slate of board of directors were elected for a two-year term. We would review a budget that finally balanced, highlight the events of the last 12 months and talk about the future. The future was bright. Thanks to the generosity of many congregants we were on the way to financial stability and a flourishing community. As president I would have talked about the goals that we wanted to accomplish over the next two years. To develop a plan to retiring the mortgage, increase member engagement and develop a community outreach program. My how things can change in a flash. Kind of like Moses and the Israelites getting the OK to leave Egypt, they had to adapt quickly, so has Temple Bnai Israel.

As you all know our physical building is closed, but our virtual community is developing. Religious School students are “Zooming” into class and Shabbat services are streaming on YouTube, while Bible study and choir continue. You never know who will pop up on our Facebook page with word of encouragement or a fun activity. If you aren’t connected virtually please let us know and we can try to walk you through it over the phone.

The harsh reality is that while we are adapting to a temporary situation, we are doing everything we can to be prepared to maintain the services we offer and to be ready when we get the all clear. We don’t want to miss a beat or stumble our way back. We are currently awaiting the approval and funds from the Paycheck Protection Plan which will be a tremendous help. As you know May 1st is the beginning our fiscal year and we have sent out our annual membership due invoices. As the letter said, if you can pay them now, we would appreciate it, but we understand if you must defer. Your financial contribution has never affected your membership status and it never will. Give what feels right based on your personal situation.

Like everything else in Temple B’nai Israel’s 70-year history, we will get through this and be stronger for it!

We would like to acknowledge Wendy Capelin, Marci Sperber, Sandi Sunter & Steffi Rosenbaum for their many hours of volunteering in the temple office performing multiple tasks! We couldn’t do it without you!
2019/2020

Torah Circle Donors

(DONATIONS MADE ABOVE AND BEYOND ANNUAL DUES)

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- Abraham Slep ................ Shirley Kirby
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........................................ Speedy recovery of
........................................ Judith Haimes Birthday .......................... Leslie Freedman
........................................ Happy Birthday to Martha Margolis,
........................................ Special honor of Martha & Jay Margolis,
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If you have already made provisions in a will or trust let us know.

We thank our charter members:

Ariella Safer
Polly & Barry Kraus
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Ron & Stephanie Rosenbaum
Denise Kirschbaum
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PLEASE JOIN THEM....
Call the Temple office for details