



4 Questions for Monica Gurell

Q: How did you come to join TBK?

A: I was raised Catholic but converted to Judaism in 2004 with Rabbi Kotok, a year before marrying my husband Dan. I remember walking into TBK and feeling immediately and clearly that I belonged there. It was the overall feeling - the people, the awesome building, the rabbis, Heather (the rabbi's secretary), and the fact that Reform Judaism and my own beliefs were similar. I appreciated that the vibe was less formal than my earlier church experience, and how human and approachable the rabbis were.

Q: How did you start becoming more active and what do you recommend to younger members as a way to become more involved?

A: Right away the rabbis asked me to teach Sunday school, and Dan and I became youth group advisors. I joined the board in 2010, and then started with Sunday Kollel. One thing led to another.

I think it's important to offer opportunities for service and connection which are easy to do, and incremental. Young people are so overwhelmed - how to fit everything in? Start small, find something - like the P.A.D. project. There should be a system to encourage graduated involvement, as people feel more invested. Social action should be ingrained in everything: maybe volunteer hours for kids, ways that families could work together.

Q: You've done a lot of volunteer work both in and out of TBK. What have been your most personally meaningful activities and why?

A: My work with the Mary Gooley Center and the Hemophilia Foundation of Upstate NY has meant a lot to me since it's an area where my family has first hand experience. Treatment for hemophilia can be incredibly expensive for those who don't have good health insurance coverage and helping those families is very important to me. At TBK, the Kollel has probably been the most rewarding activity: I stepped out of my comfort zone, learned new things, met wonderful speakers and learned a lot from the programs.

Q: What would you like to see in TBK's future?

A: TBK needs to continue as a welcoming, inclusive, non-judgmental, forward thinking congregation. We need to think outside the box and offer things people can feel connected to - service opportunities, chavurah, to meet people where they are at. To develop authentic relationships with members and each other, and create lots of different entry points.