



Tzedek Kallah

Re-envisioning social justice at Temple Beth Am

Blessing for Pursuing Justice

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם אֲשֶׁר
קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתַיִךְ וְצִוֵּנוּ לְרַדּוֹף צְדָקָה:

*Baruch atah Adonai Eloheinu melech
haolam asher kidshanu b'mitzvotav
v'tzivanu lirdof tzedek.*

We praise you, Holy One of Blessing,
who sanctifies us through mitzvot and has
commanded us to pursue justice.



צדק צדק תרדף. - Justice, justice shall you pursue.

Text Study

צדק צדק תרדף

- ★ “Justice, justice shall you pursue.”
- ★ “Justice – and *only* justice – shall you pursue.”
- ★ “Pursue justice justly.”



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Overview

- ▶ Provide context
- ▶ Share the proposal
- ▶ Get feedback
- ▶ Inspire people about *tzedek* at Temple Beth Am



צדק צדק תרדף. - Justice, justice shall you pursue.

- Context: why we need to re-envision the work of *tzedek* at Temple Beth Am
- High-level walk-through of the model, followed by Q&A
- We're asking for feedback on the *concept*
 - 45-60 minutes for discussion
 - today we DON'T want to do word-editing
 - in the next day or so we'll post more detail on the web site and you can respond to that as well
- We want you to be inspired by our vision

Ground Rules

- ▶ Stay curious and listen for understanding
- ▶ Assume good intent
- ▶ Step up and step back



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- We've been tweaking this model practically right up until today, so please set aside whatever you may have heard before you walked in, and listen with an open mind. This model is different from anything we've tried before. It's informed by what we learned from past efforts and by best principles from other Reform Congregations and other faith communities committed to social justice.
- We're all here because we are passionate about social justice and about Temple Beth Am, so please listen with that in mind.
- We want to hear from everyone who's here, so please participate during the feedback phase. We want to hear from everyone who's here today, so please make sure there's room for everyone at your table group to speak up.

Why?

“Healing the world
through powerful Jewish
experiences.”

- Temple Beth Am Vision Statement



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- Our vision statement speaks to the importance of creating explicitly Jewish experiences. In other words, it's not enough just to pursue justice, we need to do it in a Jewish context. So how do we do this?
- We can use the study of *tzedek* to teach us about Jewish values (*hint*: it's not all *b'tzelem elohim*).
- Pirkei Avot tells us that studying Torah is important, but our actions are even more important. How do we know? In this week's Torah portion, *Pekudei*, the Israelites finish building the tabernacle, and Moses blesses them. The Midrash supplies this blessing: "May it be God's will that the Divine Presence rest upon the work of your hands."

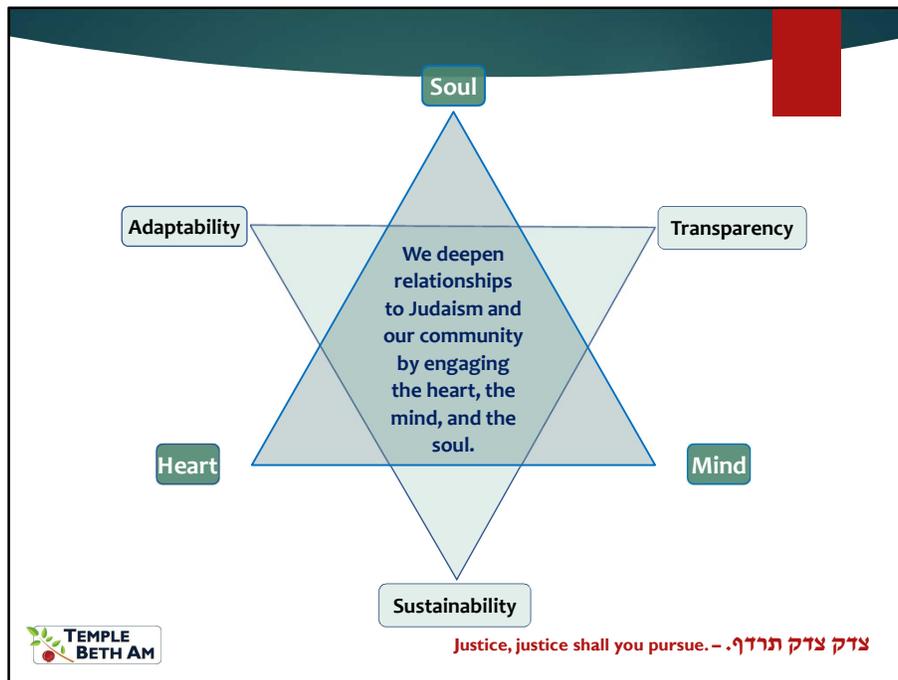
Why?

- ▶ Integrate *tzedek* more fully into structure of Temple Beth Am
- ▶ Expand engagement with members
- ▶ Create greater impact
- ▶ Align with strategic plan



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- We believe the pursuit of *tzedek* is sacred work, and so we want to integrate this work more fully into the structure of Temple Beth Am
- Engage more of our members in doing this work
 - intergenerational
 - more and different ways to get involved (direct service, direct action, advocacy, education)
- If we have more people involved, and we broaden our toolkit, we can have a bigger impact
- Alignment with strategic plan (which is also related to the first three)



This should look familiar: the structure of our strategic plan. These are *all* things we’re working on together as a community. Some of them we do well – and can do better. Some of them we’re not as good at – and can do better. Continuous improvement is part of the process.

Just as we engage the **Soul**, **Heart**, and **Mind**, we need to explore different ways to reach people and engage them in pursuing *tzedek*. Some people prefer hands-on work, like Teen Feed; some get excited about doing advocacy; some want to learn more about an issue before they decide how to get involved. We want to offer meaningful opportunities of all types.

It’s important that as we pursue *tzedek* we also embody the other three priorities: **Adaptability**, **Transparency**, and **Sustainability**.

Adaptability implies experimentation: we’re going to try things; some of them are going to work, and others are not, and we’ll adjust accordingly. The only failure is if we fail to learn.

We embody **Transparency** on several levels. One is to walk through the process of developing this model to get your feedback before we put it into action. On another level, we need to do a better job of letting people know what opportunities there are for them to get involved in pursuing justice here at Temple Beth Am.

And that feeds into **Sustainability**: we need to make it easier for new people to get involved in ongoing projects so that there will always be leadership in the pipeline.



Imagine if:

- Temple Beth Am created a social justice structure that cultivated inclusive, bold, adventurous and unprecedented congregation-driven action.
- We aligned our social justice work with our mission to deepen relationships to Judaism and our community by engaging the soul, heart and mind.
- We all worked together on a congregation-wide initiative effort chosen by you, our members

Imagine what we could do together! Imagine the positive changes we could help bring about in service of *tzedek* (justice).

This is what this proposal is about. Please listen with open hearts and minds and imagine what we can all do together in the name of justice.

Is this the only structure that will work? Absolutely not! It is what the DTF came up with after studying what other congregations are doing, reading literature published by the URJ and taking into account the unique culture of Temple Beth Am.

Disappearing Task Force



For the disappearing task force we intentionally chose a diverse group of people, some who've been involved in social justice work at Temple Beth Am and some who had wanted to get involved but couldn't find a way in. We range in age from our 20s to our 70s; some of us are new members of Temple Beth Am and some have been around for decades.

Rabbi Ruth Zlotnick (ex officio)

Barbara Green, Executive Director:

- involved in social justice work since age 13
- served as Interim ED of many social justice organizations
- currently on the board of Legal Voice

Diane Baer:

- Member for 43 years
- Been involved in social justice at TBA for past 20 years, including founding the Interfaith and Intercultural Initiative, the group that sponsored last year's Mimouna celebration
- Past president. Currently a member of the URJ national board and previously on the Commission on Social Action
- Retired epidemiology researcher

Danny Beisel:

- Member for 7 years
- Has wanted to be involved in Social justice work at TBA but hasn't known how to connect
- Attends Hebrew class, Torah study and serves as Shamus
- Retired firefighter

Shelly Cohen:

- Member for 25 years
- Involved in social justice work for decades. Mostly LGBTQ issues
- Immediate past president; current member of Commission on Social Action; recently finished as co-chair of RAC's Transgender Students campaign

Emma Kahle:

- Grew up at TBA
- Current board member; serves on Small Group DTF
- Has been involved in advocacy and education on climate change
- Graduate student in climate change at UW

Josh Kriesberg:

- Member for 4 years
- Participates in H2R and leads tiny houses project
- Teaches marketing to graduate students at UW
- Authored an award winning children's novel

Susan Schulkin:

- Member for 35 years; converted to Judaism shortly thereafter
- Actively involved with TBA: taught RS, edited Bulletin, started grade level Shabbat BBQs, has provided food for members when they are in need
- Co-founder and co-leader of Immigrant Justice Action Team, which has over 100 members

Process



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- Re-envisioning our social justice structure was identified as a priority under the Strategic Plan
- We met biweekly and then weekly to review and synthesize a massive amount of information. We looked at what we know about our own congregation, including information gathered during the strategic planning process, and we reached out to other URJ congregations to see what they are doing. We also looked at best principles described in *Recharging Judaism: How Civic Engagement is Good for Synagogues, Jews, and America*, ed. by Rabbi Judith Schindler and Judy Seldin-Cohen, available from CCAR Press (ccarpress.org).
- We discussed, listened, discussed, disagreed, listened, and agreed.

If Not Now, When?

- ▶ Where are we now?
- ▶ What's missing?
- ▶ How do we fill the gap?



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NOW the importance of social justice activism calls out to more members of the congregation to engage to do more and better to bring justice, compassion, equality to our world. We come together because we care about Temple Beth Am and about *Tzedek*/Social Justice as a core value associated with our practice of Judaism.

We ask who the members of the congregation are with respect to *tzedek*. Some have been engaged in social justice for years, perhaps as members of the social action committee or other committees that have and in some cases still do lead great Beth Am social justice work in areas such as homelessness, health care, immigrant justice, and more. It is no wonder that in the greater Seattle area Temple Beth Am is often referred to as 'the' social action congregation.

And some of us at Beth Am are members who have had little or no experience with social justice work but who are interested in becoming engaged; or members who are new to the congregation with social justice experience but who haven't found the on-ramp to engagement.



The legacy of those who have come before, on whose shoulders we stand, as well as the tools and opportunities for congregational social justice from the Reform Jewish Movement’s Religious Action Center (RAC) make it possible for us NOW to stand stronger and more prepared than ever to do more together. Today’s vision is built on NOW, who we are and what resources we have.

So, we must ask—why is the onramp to social justice engagement at Temple Beth Am difficult for some of our members to find? What is missing NOW so that we are not already at the next step?

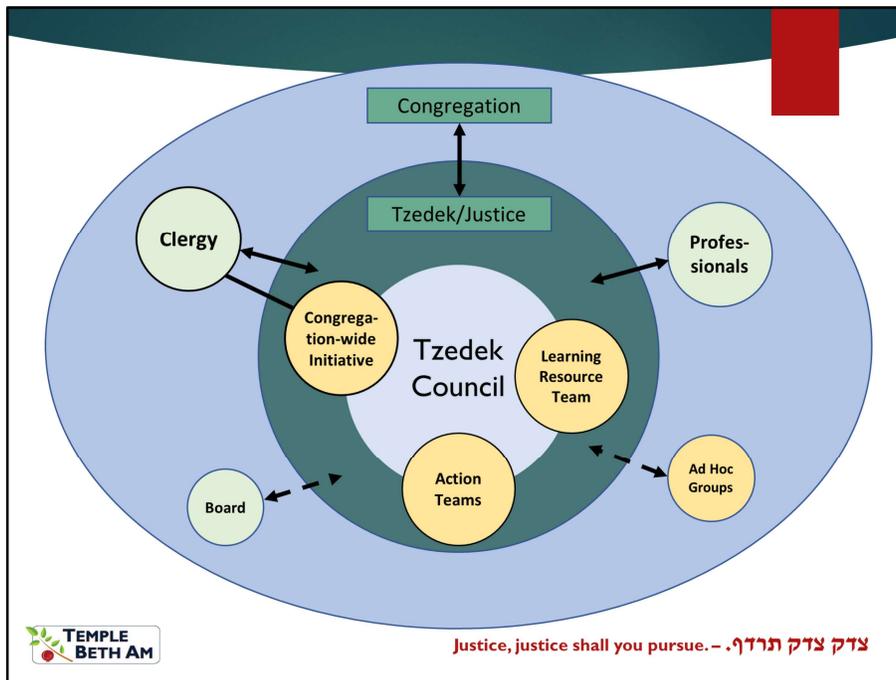
There is a gap in our congregational *tzedek* structure which we are proposing to fill that impacts engagement as well as congregation wide social justice effectiveness and impact. We propose to fill this gap with a congregation wide, congregation-led *tzedek* framework and structure to ensure that there is an on-ramp to engagement for all members while cultivating the collective power and energy and commitment of ALL of our members to continue and add to the bold and impactful social justice work that we know we are capable of doing... How do we know? Because we have a track record - TBA social justice activists today and in the past stand strong dealing with the critical issues of the day with bold, exceptional, “out of the box” organizing and advocacy. We can move forward NOW to the next step.

Proposed *Tzedek* Framework



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Our goal with the proposed *Tzedek* Framework is to build on what we currently do well, and to extend that to enable us to have a greater impact and to engage more of the congregation in *tzedek* work.



The first circle in the *Tzedek* Framework is the congregation as a whole - everyone, whether you're currently involved in *tzedek* work or not. Within that broader Congregation circle is the *Tzedek* or Social Justice circle, which contains the activities we do at TBA around *tzedek*. Within the larger congregational circle, there are three groups, in particular, which interact with the *tzedek* work that goes on at TBA: the clergy, the professionals, and the Board.

Within the *tzedek* circle, the new structure creates new groups as well as maintains existing teams and activities. At the center is the new *Tzedek* Council. The Council's role - by seeing across the congregation - is to better connect congregants to *tzedek* work; communicate the work that is being done to the broader congregation and to those outside the congregation; find areas of collaboration among those involved in *tzedek* work, and help cultivate new ideas.

The Action Teams Circle represents the teams that do *tzedek* work today, like H2R and Immigrant Justice, as well as any new groups that will form.

The Congregation-Wide Initiative Circle: This is a new concept in the proposed *tzedek* framework—a congregation-wide initiative, chosen by the congregation, that focuses on a particular cause that the congregation as a whole seeks to address.

The Learning Resource Team: This is a new team in the proposed *Tzedek* Framework, which is designed to provide resources to help foster and create educational forums and other events on social justice.

Ad-Hoc Groups: Finally, there are ad-hoc groups, which are informal groups at TBA that are involved in *tzedek* work to some degree, but not in a structured way.

Tzedek Council

- ▶ Connecting
- ▶ Communicating
- ▶ Collaborating
- ▶ Cultivating



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The *Tzedek* Council will have the following principle roles:

Connecting: The Council will connect Temple Beth Am members with *tzedek*/social justice work that interests them, and with each other. The goal is to foster greater engagement in *tzedek* work within the congregation.

Communicating: The Council will keep the congregation informed of ongoing *tzedek*/social justice work at Temple Beth Am, as well as new opportunities that may arise within the wider community (locally or nationally).

Collaborating: The Council will annually convene a gathering of clergy, staff, and members from all the action, project, and learning teams to share information about ongoing *tzedek*/social justice work and about plans for the coming year. Throughout the year, the Council will identify opportunities for action teams, project groups, clergy, and staff to work collaboratively toward a stated goal or event.

Cultivating: The Council will work with congregants to help cultivate new ideas. Some of these ideas may form new Action Teams. The Council, in conjunction with the Learning Resource Team, will create opportunities for social justice leadership development and for training on best principles regarding advocacy and outreach.

Action Teams

- ▶ Independent
- ▶ Focused
- ▶ Action-Oriented



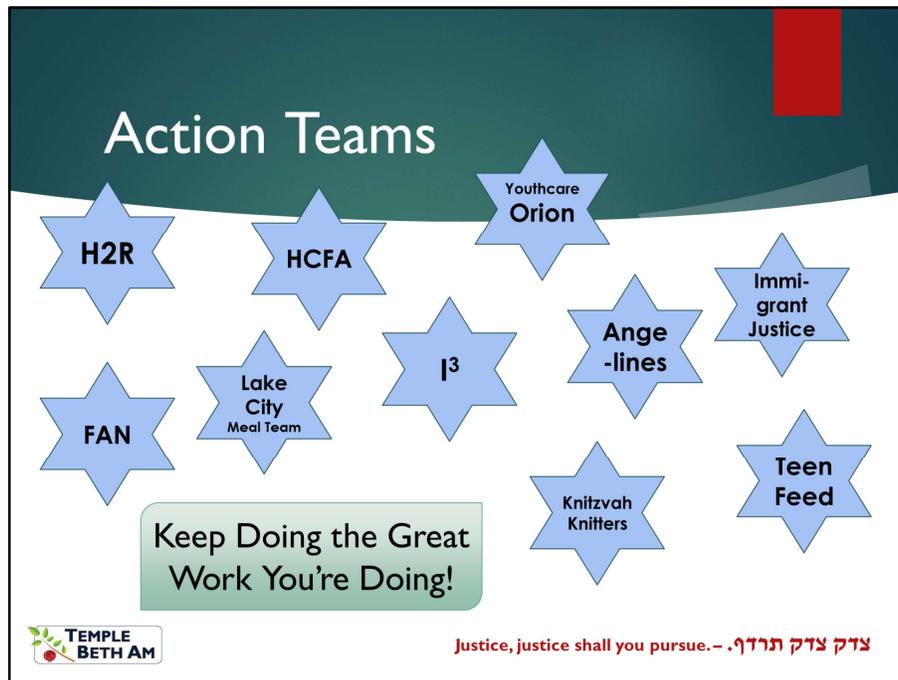
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All Action Teams share the following key characteristics:

Independent: Action Teams act independently to determine the best ways to address a *tzedek*/social justice issue. These decisions are made by members of the Action Team.

Focused: Action Teams are focused on a particular cause or issue they wish to address and have a long-term commitment to help address this cause.

Action-Oriented: Action Teams, by their name, are action-oriented, seeking to find ways to help repair the world through action.



There are numerous Action Teams that exist today, serving a wide-variety of issues and needs, such as homelessness, hunger, immigrant justice, and health care for all. The new structure maintains what we do well, and builds upon it. Action Teams should continue the great work they are doing!

If you are interested in joining an Action Team, these teams are always looking for new participants. **You can find information, including e-mail contacts, for all of these teams on the Temple Beth Am web site.**

If you are interested in starting a new Action Team, we've outlined a process for how to start a new Action Team that is available on the Temple Beth Am web site. Please see a member of the Task Force if you have questions.

Congregation-Wide Initiative

- ▶ In addition to Action Teams
- ▶ Voted on by congregation
- ▶ Many ways to engage

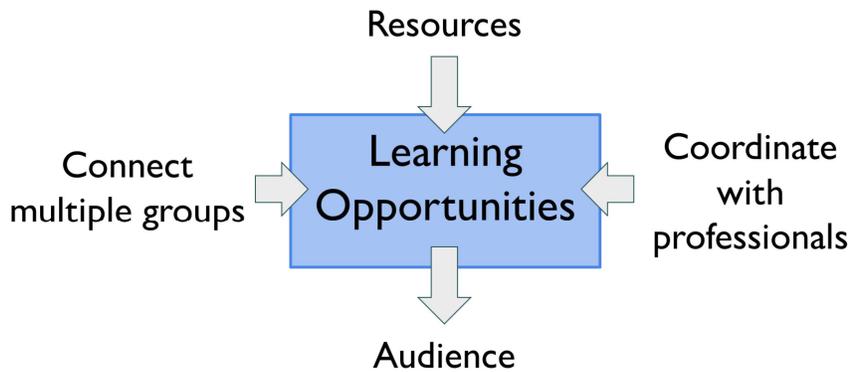


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This initiative will provide an opportunity for the entire congregation to join together, working toward the same goal in a variety of different ways, thereby multiplying our impact.

- One broad-based issue voted on by the congregation (racial justice, homelessness, environmental justice, etc.)
- Lasts two to three years and can be renewed
- Will include direct service, direct action, advocacy, and education
- The Religious School will be involved
- In addition to, not instead of, Action Teams such as H2R, I³, and the Immigrant Justice Task Force
- The *Tzedek* Council will develop a simple proposal and selection process

Learning Resource Team



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The Learning Resource Team will be responsible both for creating free-standing educational opportunities and for supporting Action Teams and the Congregation-Wide Initiative Team in putting on educational events. These are the people who will handle all the logistics of putting on the event.

- Provide educational opportunities and leadership development to go along with social justice work
- Learning opportunities: educate congregation on existing work (action teams and congregation-wide project), potential new work
- Resources: use collected info to develop annual calendar of events, secure speakers/materials/etc
- Connect multiple groups: communicate across *Tzedek* Council, actions teams, and congregation-wide initiative
- Coordinate with facilities and communications professionals
- Audience: develop creative ways to communicate, collect evaluations, incorporate feedback into future activities

Table Groups

- ▶ Does the proposed framework energize you to engage in *tzedek* work or to engage differently – why or why not?
- ▶ What are three action items you would like to see the Tzedek Council focus on first?
- ▶ How would you define success with this new structure?



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These are the questions that were discussed in small groups at the Kallah. If you participated in the Kallah and we've already gotten your responses, thank you. If you were not able to participate and would like to send us your answers to these questions, please e-mail them to tzedek@templebetham.org

Another way to get involved



partial scholarships available for two first-time attendees – contact davida@templebetham.org

info on the conference:
<http://rac.org/consultation>



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- Consultation on Conscience is the Reform Movement's social justice conference, every other year in Washington DC
- Schedule includes plenary sessions with great speakers; workshops where you get to brainstorm with other social justice activists from all over North America; and an opportunity to lobby our representatives on the *other* Capitol Hill
- Currently four Temple Beth Am members in our delegation; we'd love to have more of you join us!
- Register using the code **Delegation19** to get \$20 discount

Reflection

- ▶ what we heard
- ▶ next steps

send questions to
tzedek@templebetham.org



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Shehecheyanu

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וְקִיַּמְנוּ וְהַגִּיעָנוּ לְזִמְן הַזֶּה:

*Baruch atah Adonai Eloheinu melech
haolam shehecheyanu v'kiy'manu, v'higiyanu
lazman hazeh.*

We praise you, Holy One of Blessing,
who has kept us alive, sustained us ,and
brought us to this moment.



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If you have any questions about this presentation, please e-mail them to tzedek@templebetham.org.

