

Future Vision

Friends,

My job as president is to help steer Bet Am Shalom toward an ever-more-vibrant tomorrow. But I cannot write about the future without acknowledging the events in Pittsburgh this fall, when Jews at prayer were gunned down in shul on a quiet Shabbat morning. The rise of open anti-Semitism in our society is shocking and unacceptable and it requires a response from us. And I deeply believe the best response is to acknowledge and “do” our Jewishness with more passion, more conviction, and more joy than ever.

We are doing just that. This article is about the numerous ways in which we are demonstrating our vibrance and our determination to “do Jewish” openly in this world for generations to come.

Over 100 people attended our recent Shabbat Kulanu intergenerational dinner, including 40 children. In a deep way, this is what Bet Am Shalom is about. Kudos to Tara Stein and Meredith Strongin, chairs of that event.

Our Jewish focus isn’t only internal. Part of what we do when we contribute to Bet Am with our time and treasure is accomplish things together that none of us could consider alone. In the past few weeks, we welcomed an Afghan refugee family to Westchester and are helping them settle here. This has taken the concerted effort of scores of Bet Am’ers under the leadership of Bob Reitter, Laura Solomon and Susan Van Doren, along with congregants from our partner congregation in this effort, Woodlands Community Temple.

In October, we received word that CLAL (the respected nonprofit for Jewish innovation) was offering the coveted **SPARK Fellowship** again. We submitted our application for the SPARK Fellowship, and I’m happy to report that we got it!

Our SPARK Fellowship team is being led by Barbara Aloni and includes a small cadre of congregants, along with Rabbi Bronstein, who has enthusiastically signed on (participation of clergy is an essential element of the SPARK system). Our SPARK team will acquire skills and knowledge for implementing thoughtful, meaningful change we are ready to further innovate as we find appropriate.

CLAL/SPARK has already provided us with a treasure trove of thought-provoking materials to study. If you are **interested in viewing these materials**, please let me know and we will happily share them with you.

Our new **Future Vision Task Force**, led by Marisa Jackson and Ann Schaffer, will include members from every cohort of synagogue life and will overlap the SPARK team. This group will help us consider who we want to be in the future, and will help create a roadmap to an engaged, vibrant, financially sustainable future. They will be talking with most of our members, selected nonmembers, past presidents, rabbis, and others. They will ask hard questions and help us come up with a plan for moving forward with strength, purpose, joy and meaning.

We are getting ready to celebrate the 30-year-long relationship of Rabbi Les and Cantor Benjie with our community next spring with a **gala on March 9** and a scholarly event as well. Thanks to our Chairs, Susan Ackerman, Beth Davidson, Bettina Klein, David Aftergood and Robert Weintraub.

Our Financial Affairs Committee is studying whether **providing Jewish daycare or similar offerings could provide a decent return for us** and help enhance our financial stability. We expect them to report back to Exec and then the Board in a few months.

More than two dozen Bet Am'ers recently attended the **Reconstructing Judaism (RJ) Convention** in Philadelphia. The weekend exceeded expectations in every way. There was truly something for everyone - learning, conversation, art, yoga, speakers, music, storytelling, social action, the ability to experiment (or not) with different forms of prayer, community, joy, and intensity. We came away nurtured and invigorated. Thanks to Seth Rosen for his leadership of our movement, and to Seth and Joan for hosting the entire Bet Am group on Saturday evening.

And as we move forward in a powerful and celebratory way toward our future, we also are **becoming "security smart"** – because of Pittsburgh and so much else. We have reconstituted and expanded our Security Committee under the leadership of Howard Beltzer, Elizabeth Haas and David Hoch. We have already implemented numerous new security measures and look forward to looking at the committee's further recommendations.

Yes, we have a lot of balls in the air! It is a sign of vibrance, hopefulness and determination. Because having a dream for our future is not enough to ensure a vibrant tomorrow — we have to take active steps to get there. I hope that you will be an active participant in this process and help us take the steps that we need to implement our shared vision.

Please reach out to me individually with your thoughts, and if you can, roll up your sleeves as well. Together, all of us will build that bright future.

Ilene