

Temple Hillel B'nai Torah

**Annual Report 5769
2009**

**The world rests on three things ~
on Torah, on service and on deeds of love.**

~ Pirke Avot (Teachings of our Sages)



Rabbi's Letter

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*Hashiveinu Adonai venashuva,
chadesh yameinu kekedem*
Return us, Holy One, and we will find
our way back; may our days be new
as they once were.



This is the season for new beginnings. But like our prayer says, what feels new draws on what is past. As we look forward to a new start in 5770, we have much to learn and celebrate from 5769. Please take the time to review

these pages. You will be proud of our community as you see how much we do for one another, for our children, for the Jewish community and in the world. We are truly bringing the light of holiness to many dark corners and the individual lights of each member illuminate our world.

I believe that our success is due to two factors: our **vision** and our **leadership** that have become HBT's guiding principles

Our **vision** is to actively engage our members in the creative process of bringing new perspectives to tradition and making tradition meaningful to contemporary lives. This is ongoing work that is fulfilled through working together, praying together, learning together and being together.

As a Reconstructionist

congregation, we draw on the wells of our tradition and are open to new interpretations. Our roots in Jewish tradition brace us for the storms of our individual lives and the winds of change in the world. Creativity and openness provide the branches and leaves that attract the light and transform it into spiritual sustenance. For us, Judaism is a gift to be shared and celebrated at every opportunity and in multiple ways.

By **leadership**, I begin with those who have taken on the mantle of decision-making and of sustaining our many programs. We have a cohesive and talented group of lay and professional leaders who are devoted to making HBT sing. However leadership is not limited to our officers, board and staff. Every temple member is a leader in some facet of Jewish life, whether

Tikkun Olam (social justice), Avodah (worship), Torah (study), or Havurah (community). At HBT, these are not just words or logos. They are the musical score from which we join together to produce a symphony of Jewish community life.

We are also identified by the Reconstructionist process of values based decision-making, in which our leaders draw on our shared ideals to create a path for our congregation's every step.

I pray that we may join together in song in the coming year: may our days be renewed as in times past. Best wishes for a joyous, healthy and peaceful New Year 5770.

Barbara Penzner

Rabbi Barbara Penzner

President's Message

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Looking back at the year 5769, we have much to be proud of at our little shul that could. This is an exciting time to be at Temple HBT.

The members of the Board and our active, working committees, have tackled every issue brought before them and have worked together as a cohesive and thoughtful group. I continue to be impressed by the way our kehillah, our community, at Temple HBT comes together to celebrate simchas and support each other in times of sadness.

We've managed to make modest improvements in the building at



120 Corey Street, our spiritual home, and we are just completing major renovations to the house we own at 130 Corey Street. Slowly, but surely,

we make progress to fixing the bricks and mortar that we use on a daily basis as the foundation for our spiritual home.

It was very exciting to welcome back old teachers and meet the new teachers at the Chaverim School. They are a diverse and exciting group of people and we are fortunate to have them to help us educate our children.

This Annual Report is intended to provide you with an understanding of who we are and what we have busied ourselves with over the past year. We are indebted to the many individuals who helped prepare the information

for inclusion in it.

I would also like to extend my sincere thanks to the many individuals who so generously give both time and energy to making Temple Hillel B'nai Torah the unique Jewish institution that it is.

B' kavod

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'David Brenner', with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

David Brenner



Who We Are

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Temple Hillel B'nai Torah is a Reconstructionist congregation that is welcoming, egalitarian, multicultural, and inclusive. *We are devoted to worship, study, social justice and community.*

Hillel B'nai Torah is a haimish community that is rooted in Jewish tradition and responsive to the world we live in. We actively engage our members in the creative process of bringing new perspectives to tradition and making tradition meaningful to contemporary lives.



History

Our beginnings date back to 1949, with the Parkway Jewish Women's

Club. A year later, the Parkway Jewish Men's Association came into being. By 1955, the group formed Temple Beth Torah, a conservative synagogue with its own Hebrew School. With 300 Jewish families in West Roxbury, the congregation moved into the original building on Corey Street, engaged Rabbi Oscar Bookspan and Cantor Simon Erdman as spiritual leaders, added a new sanctuary, and flourished into the 1960s. In 1970, Temple Beth Hillel left its historic building in Mattapan and merged with Beth Torah to become Temple Hillel B'nai Torah. Many of the historic plaques, the Torah scrolls, and Torah reading table in the sanctuary are mementos of the Mattapan congregation.

While the temple reached its peak in the late 1970s, demographic trends and movements out of the City of Boston led to a decline in membership in the 1980s. Rabbi Bookspan retired in 1986 and was followed by Rabbi Eliot

Somers who served the congregation for several years. During that time, a small group of young families created the West Roxbury Chavurah, which

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was invited to meet at the Temple building. In 1995, members of the Chavurah, joined together with the senior members of the temple to search for a rabbi to bring together this interestingly diverse and growing congregation. Rabbi Barbara Penzner took on the mantle of leadership, and that same year the Chaverim School opened its doors as the first

Hebrew School at Hillel B'nai Torah in ten years. Today we are proud to be home to a community of about 150 households made up of individuals, couples and families, children and seniors, multi-racial families, gay and lesbian families, interfaith families, and members from all different Jewish backgrounds. We are one of the few synagogues in the City of Boston and our members come from the many city neighborhoods, as well as the communities of Belmont, Dedham, Newton, Needham, and Cambridge.

As a community, Hillel B'nai Torah is devoted to our mission of Avodah (Worship), Tikun Olam (Social Justice), Torah (Study) and Havura (Community). These different cornerstones of our Jewish life our tended to by the various Temple committees.

Avodah (Worship)

Avodah – Worship – is a key pillar of our congregation. As a Reconstructionist congregation, we seek to infuse our Shabbat and holiday services with joy and meaning, understanding that each individual seeks God and community in different ways. A Bar or Bat Mitzvah service at HBT is an especially joyous occasion open to all and our holiday services are filled with warmth and reverence, encouraging personal reflection as well as community bonding. We also support two evening minyans a week, on Monday and Thursday for those who come to say kaddish and support one another, as well as to spend a few minutes at the end of the day in prayer and reflection.

This year we renewed our commitment to Avodah as we introduced Hadesh Yameinu – Renew our Days, our new mahzor for the High Holidays; added a Family Service and expanded our teen contributions and

membership participation for the High Holy Days; and organized the Temple's first Shabbaton bringing more than 60 people together to experience a full day of song, meditation and worship. Several Shabbat morning services were enhanced with moving speakers and guests, including Human Rights Shabbat and "Combatants for Peace". Throughout the year, monthly Friday night services welcomed Shabbat with a community dinner, song, stories and prayers for all ages. Pre-schoolers and their parents enjoyed Shakin Shabbat with the Rabbi and Tot Shabbat with Miriam Greenbaum once a month. We contributed to the Selichot event with Rabbi Danya Ruttenberg with Shir Hadash and Dorshei Tzedek; attended the Jewish Reconstructionist Federation Convention and celebrated Shavuot at Dorshei Tzedek. The Avodah committee explored ways to engage and encourage more individual participation in our worship services

by initiating changes in Torah reading to include more translating, reaching out to volunteers to lead summer services and worked to bring Torah discussion more deeply into the many facets of temple life. In the coming year, the Avodah Committee will

work in conjunction with COSMOS, the Committee on Shabbat morning services, to explore varied approaches to Shabbat prayer and worship.



Tikkun Olam (Social Justice)

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Tikkun Olam is our response to injustice, drawing on the Jewish imperatives of tzedakah, compassion, empathy, and justice. This year at HBT, we emphasized learning, reflection, and challenging ourselves, recognizing that “Repair of the World” starts with us and then spreads to our neighbors, our community, and the world beyond. Our activities reflected our desire to spread peace and understanding in a conflict-ridden world. Some highlights:

Building Bridges: HBT and the Muslim-American Civic and Cultural Association created the Muslim-Jewish Dialogue Group to learn about one another’s religion and culture, to socialize, and to build toward joint social action. HBT celebrated our 3rd joint Liberation Seder together with Union United Methodist Church, a predominantly African-American South End church. This partnership has grown strong roots in both

congregations. The commitment to inter-group dialogue is especially critical at a time with limited opportunities for open dialogue and learning between communities.

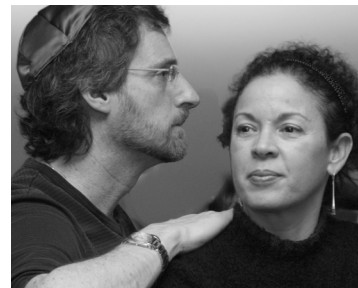
Responding to Poverty with Just Action: Continuing with our ongoing commitments, HBT sanctified the Yom Kippur fast by collecting full grocery bags for Boston Medical Center’s Failure to Thrive Clinic Food Bank. Through Project Ezra, members volunteered at homeless shelters on Christmas Day. We collected Socks for Boston’s Homeless and food for Family Table, Boston’s Jewish food pantry. B’nai mitzvah students served dinners to homeless women and children at Rosie’s Place.

Reaching beyond Boston, HBT teens and adults spent a week rebuilding in New Orleans together with Congregation Dorshei Tzedek and another week repairing homes in Limestone, Maine, in our fourth

annual work trip. HBT continued to sell Triple Mitzvah Coffee, our own roast of kosher, organic, shade-grown, Fair Trade coffee. Through Hands Across the Water, we collaborated with Theodore Parker Unitarian Universalist Church to send used books to villagers in developing countries.

Justice and Peace: At December’s Human Rights Shabbat, member Susannah Sirkin, Deputy Director of Physicians for Human Rights, described the fight for international human rights on the 50th anniversary of the U.N.’s Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Attorney Michael Mone, Jr., reported on human rights at Guantanamo Bay and the status of Uzbek prisoner Oybek Jabbarov. Member follow-up over the year led to relaxation of some restrictions on Mr. Jabbarov. HBT’s LGBT Awareness Shabbat in April helped us respond to the verses in Leviticus often cited as the basis for anti-gay laws and

attitudes in the Judeo-Christian world. At May’s Shabbat Shalom/Salaam Service, “Combatants for Peace” representatives Bassim Aramin, a former Palestinian fighter, and Yaniv Reshef, an Israeli soldier, shared the HBT bimah, describing how these former adversaries work together for peace in Gaza and Israel. Together with the Adult Education Committee, we also hosted several other speakers over the year about Mideast peace. Members continued work to Save Darfur and to sustain local activism through Greater Boston Interfaith Organization.



Torah (Study)

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The pursuit of knowledge and the act of learning is at the foundation of our community. Formal and informal activities, programs and classes are abundant throughout the year and reflect the diversity of our community.

ADULT EDUCATION

The adult education committee plans and holds programs of educational interest for Temple members and the broader Jewish community. Classes, speakers, and events are offered in a variety of venues. Highlights of this year included:

Events: Monthly Shabbat *Lunch and Learn* with new discussion topics every month; an on-going Book Discussion Club and this year Temple HBT served as a co-host of the Jewish Reconstructionist Federation 42nd Convention.

Speakers: Allen J. Worters Memorial Lecture by Dr. Leonard Fein renowned author and educator;

“Human Rights and Israeli Check-Points” with Hanna Barag of Machsom Watch, a group of Israeli women who monitor West Point checkpoints to prevent human rights abuses; Rabbi Ben Weiner, Spiritual Leader of Mishkan Ha’am: Exploring Judaism, an Introduction to Jewish Text, Tradition & Practice.

Films: Expulsion and Memory: Descendants of the Hidden Jews, a special film screening and discussion for Tisha B’Av.

Special Events: Time for Peace in the Middle East with Professor David Matz from the Brit Tzedek v’Shalom Board and Combatants for Peace, a Conversation featuring 2 veteran soldiers from the Israel Defense Forces and Palestine.

CHAVERIM SCHOOL

The Temple Hillel B’nai Torah Religious School, also known as the Chaverim School is an integral part of the HBT community and is focused on

providing a friendly community for children and parents that will foster learning the history, ethics, spirituality and language of Judaism. We seek to instill a love of Jewish learning through family participation in a continuum of education and practice from home to school.

This year Orna Sonneschien joined us as the new director of education. With over 10 years of experience

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running a religious school, under her leadership our Chaverim school thrived. 5769 proved to be a busy

yet fun year filled with exploring, learning, celebrating and singing! Classes were available to children from preschool through 10th grade. The classes are all relatively small, with the largest class this year including 15 children. This allowed for individual attention and a strong sense of belonging. Classes meet once or twice a week. The curriculum integrates Judaic study, prayer, and learning Hebrew into each session of school. Older children at HBT are encouraged to continue their Jewish education. We were also fortunate to have an active group of post B’nai Mitzvah teens that worked as teacher assistants.

The Chaverim school included book groups, Rosh Hodesh, an ongoing girls group (grades 6-9), and learning and discussion groups for students in grades 7–10. Last year, Orna introduced a new class for our families with 3 and 4 year olds called Parparim. This class has been a great entre into



the religious school.

Other highlights included: monthly 'services' during Wednesday sessions, in which classes came together for prayers, weekly music for each class, Tikkun Olam activities including collecting for Family Table – the Jewish Food Pantry, creating Shalach monet baskets at Purim which were distributed to seniors in our community, and school wide collection of tzedakah. Last year the Boston Jewish Coalition for Literacy (CJP) and a Shiluvim project that assists Ethiopian Jews in Israel were selected to receive the donations.

Teachers worked hard to engage our students in sacred in unique and creative ways while building a community in the classrooms to foster a warm and welcoming environment. In addition to classes, wonderful programs were held throughout the year. They included: the annual building of the sukkot, a Purim story

time and carnival and a Tu B'Shevat event with parents learning alongside their children about the holiday by writing poems, making recycling bins, planting seeds and learning that being 'green' is not such a new idea

Study occurs both in and outside of the classroom. This year HBT continued to participate in CJP's Myra and Robert Kraft Passport to Israel program, a matching savings plan to help parents send their teens to Israel after 10th grade for a new learning experience.



Havurah (Community)

The heart of Hillel B'nai Torah is our community. Through Tikun Olum we identify and find ourselves as part of the greater, global community, but we also recognize the importance of



building, strengthening and tending to our temple community. Temple members reach out to each other at times of joy and sorrow, sharing in celebrations and offering help and condolences to those who are ill, in crisis or mourning the loss of a loved one. It is part of our mission to keep the community strong and this past

year we worked hard to strengthen both our membership and the building we call home.

In 5769, the Membership Committee provided the temple office staff with procedures and training for how to welcome potential and new members to the Synagogue. As part of this process, committee members followed up with each prospective member by phone. In addition, the Membership Committee took responsibility over the past year for advertising temple events in coordination with other Committee Chairs; and we implemented monthly outreach calls targeting families with young children (newborn – 6 years old). We coordinated the new member *Welcome Shabbat* and called and emailed potential and new members with invitations for many temple activities. We planned and implemented the Friday Night Community Dinner Series

and developed a transition plan for providing the temple community with the opportunity to continue the series in the New Year.

In 5770, the primary focus of the Membership Committee will be welcoming new members and prospective members to the temple community. Committee members will work with the education director on recruitment opportunities. In addition, committee members are available to provide background support and technical expertise to temple members taking on community dinner responsibilities.

To ensure that our community has a solid place to learn, worship and gather this past year efforts were also focused on building a strong staff and stronger temple building. We have a new educational director Orna Sonneschein, office manager, Benita Block, and maintenance supervisor, Moreno Guzman. Our

new team worked hard to keep our temple running, coordinating the work of the board, committees and volunteers, responding to the needs of members and making sure programs and the building ran smoothly. Under the guidance of the Operations Committee, we also undertook the renovation and repair of 120 Corey Street to bring it back to a condition where we can begin to use the space for our expanding needs. The temple byilding itself also benefited from multiple improvements with repairs you can't see (plumbing, wiring and fire escapes) and those you can – new plantings, railings, rugs and lights - all done to create the best environment possible to nourish the Hillel B'nai Torah community.

