

President's Report
Congregation Kol Shofar Annual Meeting
June 3, 2015

From time to time a congregant comes up to me and asks an innocent question: what's the Board been working on this year?

Scouring all the Board agendas etched in my brain, it all comes back to me in a rush: we approved the minutes of our meeting of July 24th, we approved the minutes of our meeting of August 28th, we approved the minutes of our meeting of September 30th....

But seriously, our Board has been busy. Baruch haShem, this has been a very stable year for our leadership. We had no calamities to address, nor schisms to play out. We have enjoyed tackling our ongoing challenges, both internal, and external.

I would like to highlight a few things that the Board accomplished this year. First, inspired by the work of Rabbi Chai, we approved the creation of the Center for Jewish Spirituality. In doing so, we committed to continue building on what we have learned from the several years of experimentation that began with our first "alternative" High Holy Day services. We are thrilled with how well our congregants are responding to the Center's offerings, and we are very excited about the rich opportunities for growth that we see the Center bringing us.

We acknowledged the huge potential of legacy giving to our institution by creating a policy that will enable members to remember Kol Shofar in their wills with confidence and clarity of intention. Legacy giving is a wonderful equalizer, enabling people at all levels of means to be major supporters of our community by proudly committing resources that they cannot afford to give up while they are living.

With the help of a coaching grant from the Jewish Community Federation, we are working on a project to give us better tools to regularly answer one simple question: how're we doing? We're going to be asking this question of you regularly, in the form of survey questions that you'll be seeing from time to time. We're also going to be asking this question of ourselves and our staff, in the form of so-called "dashboard measures" that will track our quantifiable operating outcomes.

Perhaps the most exciting effort we've taken on is an update of our MASA strategic plan. MASA means "journey", and that was the metaphor that came to mind five years ago when we engaged in a very broad-based effort to chart a strategic course for our community. In the ensuing years, some parts of the plan have come to life, while others turned out to need more thought or redirection.

Over the past year, our Vice President of Strategic Planning, Cynthia Ulman, has been leading us through the update process, working with a task team comprised of Board members and other congregants, and using the full Board for idea-gathering and feedback.

While the work is not finished, we have some pieces that I wanted to share with you this evening. You might want to follow along on your MASA Strategic Plan Update handout.

The update process started with our affirming our Mission, which was written several years ago and which you can see at the top of the handout.

From there, we said, “Where do we want to go with this mission? How do we want to make it come alive over the next 3 to 5 years?” Lots of brainstorming and group dreaming led us to craft the following Vision Statement:

In 2020, Kol Shofar is so compelling, transformative, and nurturing that it has become a magnet for Jewish life in Marin and a valued asset for the broader community.

Nice, isn't it?

We recognized that we would achieve our vision by embracing and building on our core values. We determined that as a synagogue community:

What matters most to us is:

- **Fostering personal and spiritual growth**
- **Caring for one another and our community**
- **Cultivating meaningful connections**
 - **Balancing tradition and innovation**
- **We believe that JUDAISM MATTERS!**

My favorite one is the last—We believe in our kishkes that Judaism matters! Some people express this as, “we are all committed to the Jewish Project.” You might recognize this concept in the form of the classic question that used to be asked regarding anything happening in the outside world—is it good for the Jews, or bad for the Jews? We want Judaism to thrive in Marin and the Bay Area, and whether it does so under our roof or someone else’s, we’ll be happy to see it happen and we’ll support it—because that will be good for the Jews.

Finally, we identified four strategic initiatives to move us closer to our vision:

1) Ritual Inclusiveness – to widen choices and provide meaning

2) Financial Sustainability – to support and continue the Kol Shofar mission

3) Aggressive Partnering & Fearless Collaboration – to extend the reach of Kol Shofar’s mission

4) Marketing and Communications – to broaden and enhance connections

Let me elaborate just a little. Ritual inclusiveness is about nurturing Jewish observance that has room for many different ways of being Jewish. Rabbi Leider will have more to say about that in just a moment.

Financial sustainability is critical—we have no organized community if we cannot be responsible for supporting our own needs and paying the cost of building our dreams. Rabbi Leider is going to have more to say about this one as well, and she will challenge us to find more ways to say, “yes” in our Jewish lives.

Aggressive Partnering & Fearless Collaboration—this one is my personal favorite. You may have heard about “pop-up Judaism”, “Do It Yourself Judaism”, and new Jewish projects such as “Urban Adamah”, “Wilderness Torah”, “Keva”, and the “Kitchen”. These are all responses to what I believe is a wonderful phenomenon—that many people, especially younger people, are wanting to connect with their Judaism despite the fact that they may feel totally alienated from their impression of synagogues. Though we are indeed a synagogue, this phenomenon need not be a threat to us. Since we believe that Judaism matters, we are happy that these young Jews are seeking Judaism in their lives, and we are motivated to find ways to support them by sharing the things that we have—our facilities, our teachers, our ritual objects, our connections, and our experience. Aggressive partnering and fearless collaboration—because if it’s good for the Jews, it’s good for Kol Shofar.

Finally, Marketing and Communications—not because we need to sell people something, but rather because people want to know what’s here for them. How many of you have shared my experience of reading through Kolnections wondering how I can ever find the time to go to all the interesting things that our shul is offering each week? Now picture that dilemma in a world where one person stays informed through email, another through our newsletter, others via Facebook, and even others through Twitter, Instagram, or that latest hot social network innovation—word of mouth. Smart, sophisticated, and appealing communications are critical to all organizations nowadays, and for us, providing these rises to a strategic imperative.

So that's a taste of what the Board has been working on this year—the nitty gritty of charting our organization's path through sometimes unknown waters. But notwithstanding all the environmental change in the Jewish world, some things remain the same. One of these is the value of great rabbis to Jewish communities.

When we hired Rabbi Leider three years ago, we were taken by her drive, by her clear desire to come to our congregation to accomplish great things, to truly be a leader for us at a time when great leadership is required if we are to thrive. Her reputation as a builder and connector preceded her, and it was clear that she brought skills that were ready to support a higher level of responsibility.

She joined us and immediately began building for us. She reached out to the unaffiliated Jews all around us, bringing Yiddishkeit to the families at the JCC pre-school that shares our building, and reaching out to the families at Brandeis Hebrew Day School who had Jewish education but no shul. She brought us teaching that is down to Earth, accessible, empowering, and built around making personal connections; many of our newer members quickly bonded with our community through the friendships that they made in her Judaism 101 series. She reaches out every day to be with both our new families and our longstanding ones, and if you have not yet been invited to share a Shabbat dinner with her and her family, it's just a matter of time. For so many of our members, especially our newest members, their connection with Kol Shofar is personal, and at the core of their personal connection is Rabbi Leider.

One important part of the Board's duties is to continually assess the performance of our key professionals, and this has been accomplished through a very intense and thorough review process that has been diligently conducted by our Personnel Committee so ably chaired by Keith Chertok. Based on what we learned from their work, and what we knew from what we heard ourselves and what we experienced, it was easy for our Board to conclude that we wanted Rabbi Leider to be a part of our future for a long time. I am therefore thrilled to announce that we have entered into a new contract which will see Rabbi Leider continue to lead us as our Senior Rabbi for at least the next five years.

I would like to close by thanking all of our members, way too numerous to even attempt to name individually, whose volunteer service and personal leadership enables our community to function. From our Board members to our committee chairs to our gala workers to the folks who serve our bagel nosh, we thrive only because of the commitment and dedication of every one of you. Kol HaKavod, and thank you!

And I thank all of you for hearing me out! It is now my honor to turn the Bimah over to my dear colleague, Senior Rabbi Susan Leider.