

## Shared Vision Task Force: Report

The most meaningful part of the “Shared Vision” work has been interactions with congregants...hearing from our membership what has been and continues to be core to their association with the congregation. We were able to explore at a relatively deep level what congregants believed represented B’nai Jehudah at its best. Over and over again, several consistent themes surfaced.

Congregants experienced a life cycle event where they were able to connect to their family at a deeper level than normal. They learned something that resonated with them and that they were able to connect to the issues in their lives. They were able to help the congregation or larger community by connecting particular talents to communal needs. They were comforted by their congregational family in time of distress. This feeling of being connected to an extended family created a sense of safety and acceptance, allowing them to be who they really were. There was also an undercurrent of fear – fear that we were losing our children, that we weren’t making a sufficiently compelling case as to why Judaism matters, or at least why the congregation matters, or why either needs more support.

Meaning, Connection, Continuity – these are the important Jewish themes mentioned in our reaching out to congregants.

So, based on the above, these are the recommendations of the Shared Vision Task Force:

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### **Core Purpose (Who we are)**

**Nurturing Jewish meaning, connection, and continuity.**

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### **Core Values (How we behave)**

#### *Open Hearts*

Our congregation values each one who walks through our doors. We embrace one another in our needs, hopes, and desires. We will accept others for who and what they are, recognizing ourselves in them. Each is created in God’s image and has gifts to share with other members of our congregation. We are present for one another as we encounter the full range of human experiences.

#### *Kedushah (holiness/sacredness)*

Sacredness can be found everywhere, if only we seek it. We infuse holiness into the world when we create moments that heal brokenness and when we catch glimpses of the underlying wholeness that connects everything and everyone.

We recognize our earth beginnings, as our hands and hearts reach for wholeness. Every situation and every person holds the potential to bring about holiness.

***Derech Eretz (common decency)***

We act by a set of values called “*derech eretz*.” Our behavior is guided by these principles of respect, honor, honesty, integrity, dignity, and humility. These patterns of behavior are literally “the way of the land.” They are the foundations of our relationship as a community and with one another. And even when holiness hides from us, we still act with *derech eretz* because such actions fan the holy sparks within us.

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**BHAG: Big Holy Awesome Goal (What we do)**

**Every congregant pursues an individualized Jewish path. In so doing, the individual, the community, and the world become better.**

Each congregational family unit will complete an IJP (Individualized Jewish Path) for a three-year period, typically as part of the self-evaluation already going in the weeks preceding the High Holidays. A cadre of trained volunteers – prepared by clergy and lay leadership – will call on all members of the congregational family for one-on-one visits. The purpose of these meetings is to listen to the congregants’ hopes, needs, and fears, suggest actions or programs that address those needs, as well as connecting them to others with complementary interests and needs. Ultimately, the congregant should feel both they are being helped and they are helping others. As a result, the congregation feels and acts more like a family.

Essentially, the IJP allows families to recognize and connect to what is holy in their lives. For some it is their children’s development. For some it is their own. Some may find meaning by reaching inward. Others may achieve the same meaning by reaching beyond, to community, or even the larger world. Whatever the holy purposes congregants identify, B’nai Jehudah helps them find a path that deepens their connection to it.

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**Vivid Description/Envisioned Future (What we will look like)**

Imagine a congregation where every individual feels equal ownership of the congregation; a place where all are welcome to explore the breadth of Jewish life with encouragement for innovation, experimentation, and acceptance toward diversity.

Imagine a congregation so firmly rooted in commitment to Judaism and Jewish values that such commitment permeates every conversation of governance and

program affecting our family; a congregation where one group's decision-making is affirmed through the trust of others.

Imagine a congregation of learners, where there is no distinction between school-time and congregation-time, where children and adults learn from and with one another every day of the week, a congregation that recognizes that it takes an entire congregational community to raise a single Jewish child.

Imagine a congregation where individuals and families decide for themselves, with clergy, educational staff, and volunteers as guides, what they will accomplish with, gain from, and give to B'nai Jehudah in the coming year. It is our IJP, an individualized Jewish path. It is a tool to make membership meaningful, to give every Jewish family a reason to be Jewish.

That imagining has become our future.

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### **It began with an IJP.**

What does our IJP process look like today? Consider the following three (imagined) IJP meetings:

In one instance, it is an elderly, 87 year old woman meeting with the volunteer. She moved two months ago from her home to Village Shalom because of health issues. She also lost her mobility...her children "took away" her car. She is lonely and she is feeling abandoned. The volunteer knows that his job is part social worker; part educator; and part cheerleader. He listens, sympathizes, and suggests that a good thing to focus on for the coming year might be community - helping her feel connected to the synagogue, to contemporaries, and to share her wealth of knowledge and experience with our young people. We also will help her figure out how to get around - whether to the hair dresser or to services - perhaps by matching young people who want to drive with older people who no longer safely can.

In another meeting, the volunteer gets together with a family, with three children - ages 3, 5, and 8. They are new members and have never engaged in this process before. As they talk together, the volunteer hears three clear messages - the parents feel inadequate to teach their children about Judaism. The father was born Jewish, but the extent of his Jewish education/experience was lighting Chanukah candles for the first night only...but getting 8 nights of gifts. Nothing else. No High Holidays. Not even Passover. The mother was born Protestant, went to church occasionally, but now considers herself "nothing." She agreed to raise her kids Jewish, but "doesn't really know what that means." The volunteer now knows where to lead the family. They talk about family classes, where children and parents can together learn about Jewish holidays. And the family

commits to the 10 session program currently being offered. The volunteer hears the parents asking for a Jewish environment for their kids...so she helps the family find and plan for individual Jewish summer experiences – Camp BJ for the youngest, Barney Goodman for the middle, and the two-week session at GUCI for the oldest. They also agree that going to Tot Shabbat services once a month is an important addition. Finally, the volunteer gives them materials and candlesticks and a kiddush cup so they can start doing kiddush and motzi every Friday night...another piece of their IJP.

Finally, in one of her easiest meetings, a volunteer meets with a long-time couple of the congregation. In their mid-fifties, they have been empty-nesters for two years. They haven't quite "found themselves" yet in congregational life, transitioning from youth group parent to having to find Judaism for themselves. Last year, their IJP was a short document. Because they have the luxury to travel, services at B'nai Jehudah weren't on their radar screen. But travel and learning were. So...last year, they decided to join those loves into a Jewish plan. The congregation helped them find congregations to visit and courses to take wherever their travels took them. And when they returned, they had given three lectures to our monthly seniors' group, sharing with them the Jewish connections they discovered. They simply wanted to repeat the same plan this year.

We discovered that our IJP process changed the individual – helping our children grow into proud and responsible Jewish adults; helping ourselves deepen our connections to God, Torah, and Israel; helping us discover relevancy in our Jewish actions and beliefs.

**A funny thing happens along the way, though.**

As personal Jewish meaning deepened and as stronger connections were made, and as we began to see ourselves as part of a larger destiny, we extended ourselves outward to encompass a broader range of people. As we reached both inward and beyond, we grew.

Congregants feel they are listened to and valued, and that they are valuable and have gifts to give. Their sense of obligation to use their gifts and talents for a greater good has also increased, as has their sense of gratitude and satisfaction at being an important part of a larger whole.

Thus, while the IJP started out stressing the individual path, it led to a deeper feeling of belonging to community, a deeper sense of obligation to it, and deeper desire to accomplish higher purposes.

**As a result, we have transformed into a "kehillat kedusha," a holy community.**

Today, congregants feel more alive, more in touch with what is true, what is important, and what is right. No one feels excluded, unvalued or unsupported; B'nai Jehudah is a warm and inviting place regardless of whether one is young or old, a new or life-long member, a single adult or part of a multi-generational family. Congregants are engaged in pursuing their own Jewish paths. In so doing, they feel part of a higher purpose and embrace their responsibilities to the congregation and beyond. We now believe and trust that when we expend energy in support of our own Jewish purposes, the world is forever changed for the better.

We are growing, not just in number but in capacity. There is a sense of motion, of moving forward, of being in a dynamic place and time. Everyone is on an individualized path, but these paths intersect to create a communal path as well. As our congregational capacity grows, we have become a "vital center of energy," and we are better able to act together to accomplish one of our primary Jewish tasks – Tikkun Olam, healing our world.