



STORIES FROM THE HEART

Temple Beth Shalom's LIFE WISDOM PROJECT

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Foreword by Rabbi Jay Perlman

Temple Beth Shalom, Needham, Massachusetts

Stories from the Heart

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Foreword

*"Consider and understand the previous generation. Ask your father and he will tell you.
Inquire of your parents and grandparents and they will explain to you."*

- Deuteronomy 32:7

Judaism is about tradition – the passing along of a rich heritage *"m'dor l'dor,"* from "one generation to the next." When lived most fully, the generations of our families and of our communities do not merely sit side by side like stepping stones through time. Rather, we are more like a chain – with each link tied to the next, strengthening each other's place in the broader continuum of history. The purpose of Jewish life is to ennoble, engage, nurture, comfort, heal, repair, and create. It does so through learning and prayer, music and *"simchas,"* the foods that we eat, reminders of our responsibility to make our world better, and, of course, the stories that we tell.

Temple Beth Shalom's "Life Wisdom Project" was inspired by Judaism's call to learn from the previous generations. Between 2011 and 2013, those with the greatest 'life wisdom' in our congregation – our TBS 'community sages' – were asked a series of questions about some of the most central issues in life: love, meaning, happiness, professional satisfaction, regrets, and the importance of Jewish connection. The responses of our sages included everything from single sentences to personal stories. This special project was coordinated by a dedicated group of lay leaders, including: Beverlee Bookman, Ina Glasberg, Margie Glou, Gertrude Silverstein, and Lois Sockol. Amy Willis, an outstanding writer and master organizer, completed this project by crafting the text itself. I am most grateful to all of them....and to all of our elders who shared their insights....for giving of their hands and hearts.

The purpose of this sharing is to begin a series of intergenerational conversations throughout our community. It is our hope that the younger members of our community will gain added insight from our community elders....and that, perhaps, this work might lead to a series of in-person conversations and discussions where new friendships might be made.

As I write, our community is preparing for the holiday of Purim. Not long after Purim, we will 'turn the corner' in the calendar and arrive at Passover. Passover is Judaism's time for "telling," and "sharing" from one generation to the next. We pass along a story of liberation and promise in the hopes that our commitment to those ideals will be nurtured in the lives of our children. I can't help but think of how appropriate it is that this work will reach the members of our TBS community at this season.

May the lessons of our sages inspire our hearts and our actions – enabling us to enrich the ways that we live, moving us to improve the ways that others live, and deepening our connection to one another as a community that, with love, shares its stories and wisdom.

~ Rabbi Jay Perlman

Acknowledgements

Our Committee

Many thanks to the Life Wisdom Committee members - Beverlee Bookman, Ina Glasberg, Margie Glou, Gertrude Silverstein, and Lois Sockol - for their encouragement and guidance throughout the shaping of the Life Wisdom Project.

Our Life Wisdom Participants

Our deepest appreciation goes to all of our Life Wisdom sages, who shared of themselves with grace and honesty:

Arline Aransky
Irving Baker
Joan Berman
Sigmund Black
Beverlee Bookman
Richard Bookman
Ken Brier
Marcia Brier
Susan Brisk
Susan Carp
Mildred Cohen
Geoff Eiten
David Feldman
Carolyn Cotsonas Finn
Len Finn, M.D.
Andy Gassman
Peggy Gassman
Ina Glasberg
Anita Glickman
Alan Glou
Margie Glou
Bob Goodman

Sally Goodman
Judy Gordon
Irma Grebber
Louis Grossman
Deborah Halpert
Jay Kaplan
Sue Kaplan
Debbie Kublin
Jeff Kublin
Chuck Levin
Harriet Lieb
Bob Lurie
Bev Luskin
Cindy Matloff
Ron Matloff
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Sandra Mills
Carole Mittelman
Henry Mittelman
Brenda Nagel
Ira Nagel
Trina Novak

Rita Perlman
Maryanne G. Pilat
Mark Rosen
Paula Rosen
Seymour Rosen
Lucille Sands
Jane Scheibel
Ed Schreider
Linda Schreider
Jeremy Serwer
Gertrude Silverstein
Jerry Silverstein
Lois Sockol
Ron Sockol
Ruth Stavisky
Howard Taylor
Ruth Taylor
Judy U. Shapiro
Florence Weener
Arlene Wolk
Les Yampolsky
Linda Yampolsky
Anonymous

Introduction

The goal of Temple Beth Shalom's Life Wisdom Project is to provide an opportunity for the senior members of the Temple Beth Shalom ("TBS") community to think about their lives in a special way - to contemplate what have been their most valuable life lessons - and to share that wisdom with all of the generations of our temple community.

Inspired in the fall of 2012 by the message of Karl Pillemer, Ph.D. in his book, *30 Lessons for Living*, Rabbi Jay Perlman invited Dr. Pillemer to speak to the *Three Score and More* group at TBS. Dr. Pillemer, a renowned gerontologist, shared his findings after interviewing over one thousand Americans over the age of 65. As we age, Dr. Pillemer explained, we learn and grow and arrive at important conclusions about love, children, careers and more. The wisdom and lessons of our seniors are extraordinary, and they should be shared with younger people in the throes of family and work life.

When Rabbi Jay announced that he would like to survey our own TBS sages and share their life wisdom with the congregation, I knew it was a project to which I could add value. With my writing skills and my interest in Jewish journeys, I offered to help Rabbi Jay collect and communicate this important information. I am honored to have worked closely with Rabbi Jay and the Life Wisdom Committee to bring this project to fruition.

In the spring of 2013, we asked our temple community sages to complete an online survey in which they shared their life lessons on a variety of topics. The topics ranged from the keys to happiness, to career advice, to the value of being part of the TBS community. We are blessed that 38 people responded to the online survey questions, and over 40 sages offered their thoughts in writing at a Life Wisdom kickoff breakfast. All told, 71 individual members of Temple Beth Shalom participated in the Life Wisdom Project.

The following pages contain many wise and valuable teachings about love, family and work, Judaism, and life in Needham. By seeking out and communicating the wisdom of our own sages, we as a temple community will not only benefit from their experiences and insights, but we will also grow closer as we get to know one another on a deeper level than ever before.

While some participants chose to identify themselves by name, others requested that their thoughts be shared anonymously. As a result, some direct quotes on the following pages are attributed to their authors, and some are not. We are deeply grateful to everyone who participated in the project, and we hope this summary will inspire further thoughts and discussions on these important topics. It is also our sincere hope that the younger members of our temple community - teenagers, adults raising families, and those who are approaching their senior years - will appreciate and learn from the wisdom and advice offered here.

And finally, we hope that this first effort to share life lessons will encourage new dialogue and friendships between TBS members of all ages. There is tremendous opportunity for our community to grow closer and stronger through our mutual understanding and appreciation for one another and our life stories.

~ Amy Willis

1. Life Journeys

We began our survey by asking a series of questions on one's life journey. We were curious to know about the important lessons and values our sages have embraced over the course of their lives. The first section of the survey included the following questions:

- *What are some of the most important lessons you feel that you have learned during the course of your life?*
- *What do you know now about being happy and successful that you wish you had known when you were younger?*
- *Looking back, are there any significant decisions that you have made or beliefs that you have held over the course of your life that you now regret? If given an opportunity to do some things differently, what decisions would you make?*
- *Over the years, have you experienced any significant life challenges? If so, how did you face them?*
- *What would you say is the most important value you would like to pass on to your family?*

Our sages had a great deal to say about the lessons they have learned over time. Project participants thought long and hard about what is most important in life. Many common themes emerged around the importance of love and family, respect, and the value of time itself.

According to our sages, family is clearly the most important aspect of life, and showing love for one's family is essential. Friendship is also of utmost importance. Respect for other people was a major theme of life lessons. Many people emphasized the importance of time, valuing each day, and continuing to learn throughout life.

The importance of maintaining a balanced and positive attitude, and an appreciation for the goodness in life, cannot be understated. It seems that one of the keys to happiness, according to many of our sages, is the age-old adage, "*Don't sweat the small stuff.*" Indeed, so many Life Wisdom participants cited this quote that surely it must be wise to adhere. To be happy, our sages have learned over the years to be flexible, to worry less about things that cannot be controlled, and to appreciate what one has in life.

When asked specifically about their most important values, Life Wisdom participants emphasized "*being a good person.*" As well, many people described the importance of loving one's family, being honest, showing respect, and embracing life to the fullest.

If given the opportunity to do things differently in their lives, a number of people expressed that they wish they had pursued their education further. Similarly, some people wished they had tried out various careers, rather than continuing on a constant career path for their working years. But for the most part, our sages expressed contentment with their life decisions; they had few major regrets. This

is good news for the younger people in our community when facing difficult life choices. When decisions are made thoughtfully and with care, it seems, there is a high likelihood that things will turn out well. Many of us, it seems, will ultimately feel content with our path in life.

When asked about the challenges they have faced, our Life Wisdom participants told us clearly that life is not easy. Nearly everyone who participated in the project had experienced significant obstacles. The most common challenges faced by Life Wisdom participants included illness; loss of parents, spouses and children; overcoming childhood difficulties; supporting their children through difficult times; and financial and career setbacks.

Many people confided that these challenges can be very painful, life-changing events that require one to summon their strength and faith. Losses faced during childhood and early adulthood, in particular, can impact our outlook for the rest of our lives. But just as people remember and carry life's difficulties within their hearts, many also reported having gained strength and awareness through these experiences. By relying heavily on the support of family, and often on one's community as well, many people feel cared for and better able to be strengthened along life's path, despite all its bumps and bends.

Our Life Wisdom participants shared the following lessons and advice regarding love, family, happiness, and their most important values:

Expressing Love

It is all about the people in your life, whether it be family or friends, and the way you treat them. I cannot stress that enough. It is your relationships that make you happy, rich, secure and well rounded. You cannot feel good about yourself unless you have the opportunity to truly love and give to others. Be honest and true, and hug another like you really mean it. They will be able to tell. ~ Jane Scheibel

I have tried to share my love and trust of family and friends with each and every one of them. We need to convey our love to those dear to us. It feels wonderful to hear that we are valued, and it feels great to tell others how we feel about them. ~ Lucile Sands

Be honest and true to your word and be loyal to your family. ~ Jerry Silverstein

Embrace your family with all the love that you possess. Stay involved with people and activities and enjoy the world around you. ~ Anonymous

Live in the present. Enjoy each day. Find work that you enjoy and do your best at work. Tell everyone that you love how you feel about them. ~ Linda Germaine Miller

Love the people around you. Live each day to the fullest. Love, love, love! ~ Brenda Nagel

I think the most important value to pass on to my family is for them to stay connected with one another...by making the time to physically break bread together. ~ Judy U. Shapiro

Be honest in your relationships. Love your wife at all times. ~ Ron Sockol

I think it is most important to have caring friends. It is important to keep close relationships with your family and extended family and to share your feelings with your children. ~ Joan Berman

Respect

Always be a gentleman. Respect people of all ages and backgrounds. Never go to bed angry. Try to do a Mitzvah a day. If you have nothing nice to say, don't say it. Be honest and be faithful. ~ Ed Schreider

Do unto others as you would do to yourself...recognize that everyone has faults. ~ Irving Baker

*Listen before you speak. Forgive others and move on. Admit your errors and look at things positively.
~ Ira Nagel*

It doesn't hurt to be kind and polite to people and treat people of all ages with dignity. Also, listening is a great skill. ~ Anonymous

Always remember family comes first. Try to discuss things first, before jumping to immediate conclusions. Respect each other even if you don't agree with their philosophy or decision. ~ Anonymous

Bring up a close knit family...where the children and parents have respect for each other, love each other and are open with and honest with each other. Be a "mensch" with other people. ~ Marcia Brier

Time

Engage actively every day in everything you do. Time is a gift that should not be squandered. Work to the best of your abilities, understanding and accepting that you are imperfect. Focus on and accentuate the positive. Eliminate envy for material things. Discipline yourself to regularly save income in order to care for yourself and to care for others (tzedakah). Recognize the humanity in all the people with whom you interact in your business, your profession, or in everyday encounters, and treat them all with respect. ~ Ron and Cindy Matloff

Time flies by. If you want or need to do something, do it now. Don't put it off. ~ Henry Mittelman

The importance of goals, how to be a good parent, spouse, have time to give back to the community, and leave time for activities that interest me. In other words learning to live a balanced life. ~ David Feldman

Lifelong Learning

See the end of your career before it arrives, and use what you have learned and experienced as a guide for retirement. Decide where you will live, try different activities, and make new peer friends while you do. Love your children and grandchildren, but maintain a life of your own. Learn new things, volunteer your talents, and improve your ability in the talents you have. ~ Gertrude Silverstein

Many times I've heard it said that life is a gift. Over 80 years I have known immense joys and deep sorrows, lush meadows and steep rocky hills. What I have learned is that life is more extraordinary than a gift. It is a privilege. Life makes possible the opportunity to better the world, to nurture consciousness, to touch others with kindness, to soften hurts, to foster love, and ultimately to leave, if only as a thread, your uniqueness woven into the great experiment of human existence... To live you must grow, you must learn, which means you will change and continually become more than you are. Growing and change are life-long processes, which aging need not stop. One life time will never exhaust all there is to know, so keep searching...Who I was is but a part of who I am. ~ Lois Sockol

Family, working and doing what you love are most important. Go to Torah study and always be open to learning. Giving is better than receiving. Forgive. ~ Susan Brisk

People learn through example. The things my parents did in their lives have carried over, and now I see these lessons continuing in my children's lives. ~ Debbie Kublin

A Positive Attitude

Things are seldom as bad (and sometimes not as good) as they seem in the heat of the moment. Life has a way of leveling out. It's hard to appreciate that when you're younger. We have to learn to accept - indeed embrace - the imperfections in ourselves and in others. People we interact with are often profoundly disappointing, but people can also astound with unexpected caring and generosity. ~ Ken Brier

This too shall pass, things look brighter and better after a good night's sleep in the light of day. Perfection is not a healthy goal, learn to accept "good enough." Count your blessings when facing challenges. Even during the most difficult times, centering on your blessings helps to take your mind off and ease any suffering. Love and appreciate your parents and the lessons and love they gave to you. Work through any resentment, disappointments, or anger. When you are disappointed in someone you care about, think about where they come from and what scars they bare from their story. Attempt patience and understanding and minimize being judgmental. Always finish what you start. Make decisions about your choices carefully, deliberately, reflecting on potential consequences. Try to live in the moment and appreciate and feel appreciation and gratitude. ~ Peggy Gassman

Have pride in everything you do. Always try your hardest and be proud. Be warm and welcoming with a smile, generous of spirit. Be aware and thankful for the gifts of life. ~ Ruth Taylor

One should live their life as they would like and not how they think others would like them to live. While you should never forget the past, one should not dwell on the past but rather focus on the future. Life is too short so put everything in perspective and don't sweat the small stuff. ~ Louis Grossman

Don't skip important family events. Be flexible in thought and action. Enjoy each moment with your children - they grow up way too fast. Keep a journal of life events so you never forget. Always look for the good in people - it may take some digging, but it is there. Don't speak poorly about others. ~ Anonymous

Live each day with a sense of gratitude. Treat people with respect and as you would want to be treated. Enjoy the journey of life... the years pass very quickly. ~ Jeff Kublin

Life is a challenge. Put things in proper perspective. ~ Seymour Rosen

Try not to worry about the things you don't have control over. ~ Judy Gordon

I've long believed you play the hand you're dealt. There isn't always a reason why things happen; they just do. Much more important is how you play the hand, and get from today to tomorrow. And sometimes not much beyond that, but somehow one day at a time (however trite that sounds). It really works -- as long as you don't dwell on "why me?" and stay too long on the fence about making key decisions. Forward movement is paramount. ~ Jeremy Serwer

Be flexible. Don't get too set in your ideas. Don't hold grudges. Be your own person. ~ Florence Weener

*It is not how you start out in life, it is where you finish. Stay positive. Life is like the weather - after a storm, the sun shines and things get better. Don't stay angry or upset - figure out a way to work things out.
~ Carole Mittelman*

Relax a bit more. Do not take everything so seriously. ~ Ruth Stavisky

Happiness

Be generous in thought and deed, with family and those less fortunate. Count your blessings and be grateful for even the smallest things. Take pleasure in the miracles of nature. ~ Anonymous

An education is invaluable. It will benefit your life and the lives of those you love. Reading is a personal joy that once discovered brings unending joy to the reader. Have a positive attitude as it affects others. Be mindful that most things in life have a beginning, middle and end. Smiling to yourself can cheer you up even if you are in a blue mood. Kids are fantastic to watch and work with... your own included. Having a lot of money is not necessary for happiness, but having little or no money can make one very sad. Working at being a good parent pays off, but luck sure does help. ~ Maryanne G. Pilat

We make our own happiness. It is important to take the time to learn what makes us happy. Take time to rest the body and mind. ~ Anonymous

Success

Success is in the eye of the beholder. If you feel you are successful, then do not let others' thoughts or judgments about what you do and how you do it affect your attitude. Try to do something you love, whether professionally, or as a hobby, for fun. Remember your blessings. We have a tendency to look at what we don't have as opposed to what we do have. You do not have to be the best at everything. When you find something that you do that touches your mind and soul, do that thing well. Happiness can be viewed as a desired state. Aiming for contentment often can automatically increase your happiness quotient. ~ Trina Novak

Persistence, not necessarily intelligence, will make you successful. Worrying about things you can't control is a total waste of time. Take all the negative karma in your life and convert it into positive energy. ~ Geoff Eiten

Our Life Wisdom participants expressed the following about life's challenges, their regrets, and the importance of moving forward:

Regrets

I wish I had asked my grandparents and parents more questions about their childhoods...their history...their stories, and recorded it. ~ Margie Glou

I would have had more college education. I have compensated for this by taking many college courses as a "guest," by taking studio art courses, and by being a member of learning in retirement for the past 12 years at Brandeis University and Regis College. Moving through life's stages is also an education in itself. ~ Gertrude Silverstein

Looking back to see the mistakes we made when we were younger... we cannot change what we did or did not do when we were young. We just have to move on with our lives and be supportive of our children and grandchildren. ~ Linda Yampolsky

I remember some of the silly and stupid things I did as a student. I hope children today are smarter than I was growing up and they learn to make better choices. I guess it is called experience. I was a teacher for 30 years and wish I had the courage to try different careers. ~ Anonymous

I think it an incredible sadness to look back and feel you haven't lived your life. Don't let your days fade as the morning mist. Engage life! Be surprised! Do not fear failure, fear the paralysis of never trying. We all fail, how else could we manage to achieve. Failure is but one step on the road to knowledge. ~ Lois Sockol

I have done some things, that in retrospect, were not wise. At the time, though, the decisions I made seemed sensible. The nice thing about life is that you can change your course and turn things around to do things differently (T'shuva). I have no regrets over actions I have taken, and, if I find I have wronged someone in the doing, I have no problems apologizing for my actions. ~ Trina Novak

Wait to get married - there is no rush. Enjoy doing things you can only do when single and childless. Have more children - they bring incredible joy and fulfillment to life. Travel more. ~ Anonymous

Illness

We participated in caring for my elderly mother for several years. It is hard to plan and prepare for a serious illness of someone you love. In addition, over the years we have experienced the loss of a job and income. This was a challenge when our children were young. ~ Linda Germaine Miller

In sickness it's always nice to know that people care and support you. The support I had when I was ill made me stronger. ~ Beverlee Bookman

*I have had cancer 3 times in my life - breast cancer at 46 years old with teenage children; colon/rectal cancer at 52 years old; and just this year mesothelioma, which I am still recovering from. I think my caring husband, children and friends and the Chesed committee support gave me strength to keep fighting to recover.
~ Joan Berman*

I had to face my husband's illness as terminal. I made accommodations to care for him at home, to give him the quality care he deserved. ~ Mildred Cohen

My youngest son, Jim, suffered a brain hemorrhage which, for a time, left him totally paralyzed on the right side of his body. He could move but one knuckle on his hand. Those who know Jim know that not a kinder or better soul existed. How did I manage? I forgot about me. I prayed for good doctors for strength. ~ Lois Sockol

Loss

Losing my father at age 14 was a significant challenge as I was forced to essentially work for everything I had since then. Having the law firm that I really loved fold when I was just establishing my career was a challenge as I had to start all over again in a different city. ~ Mark Rosen

*I had a younger brother who was born without a bile duct and died at the age of 2 (I was 5 years old). My paternal grandfather died a year before my Bar Mitzvah and wasn't there to see this meaningful life cycle event. My mother was deathly sick during my senior year in college and almost didn't attend my wedding the week after I graduated. These challenges were made easier by the love of my parents, my wife, and my faith in G-d.
~ Louis Grossman*

My mother died when I was 19, most unexpectedly. It was through friends and a family that belonged to the local temple that I worked my way out of my depression. ~ Sue Kaplan

My Mom died when I was 4 years old. When I was a senior in high school, my Dad had a heart attack and died. I had to live with my aunt and uncle for a few years in high school and college. I faced these life challenges by surrounding myself with many friends who gave me moral support. Through this, I became stronger and gained independence. When I met Ed in grad school, he admired my strength of character and determination. Through the years, this has helped me get through medical operations and other obstacles. ~ Linda Schreider

I have faced challenges in my life such as having my daughter Nancy pass away, and having my husband pass away. When my child passed away at 4 1/2 years old I found that I had to go on for the other two children in my house. The people around me helped a great deal. When my husband Kivi passed away, my challenge was to continue my life in a meaningful way. ~ Irma Grebber

I have learned that you cannot take life for granted. I lost my sister Sheila, an active board member of Temple Beth Shalom, when she was 40 and I was 36. She was married and her two daughters became Bat Mitzvah at our Temple. Her funeral was here as well. ~ Judy U. Shapiro

I think the toughest life change I had to make was the loss of my mother. I feel she would have wanted me to carry on with all her beliefs and her traditions. I have tried with my family to honor her wishes. ~ Anonymous

I lost my father unexpectedly at a somewhat young age. I was 30, he was 66. He was a quiet anchor in the family. Though I missed him, I anchored myself to my own family - wife, baby son and then a baby daughter - trying to fulfill what had been his role as best I could. I did not get a big-firm law job after graduating law school (the usual track from Columbia), but I accepted a job instead in an accounting firm. Though disappointed, I learned tax law from a different perspective and ultimately was able to transition into legal work. ~ Ken Brier

My mother died when I was 17 and was about to go off to college. I had emergency surgery shortly thereafter and had a very bad recovery. I had to grow from the experience and start my life from there by making new friends and getting to know new relatives who lived near my college. It helped, but there was a void that I never got over. I tried to be there for my younger sister, Peggy, age 7, when I could see her. She was an important part of my life, as was an Aunt who stepped in to support me. Her recent death has been a big blow to me.

~ Sandra Mills

Moving Forward

I did experience lots of changes in my life. I lost my husband who was ill. You have to face life and go on. It is difficult. ~ Arlene Wolk

Having a major illness is life changing. I faced it head on and dealt with whatever I had to deal with. Now I am more aware of the specialness of each day. ~ Anonymous

I lost my first child when he was 6 weeks old. In those days there were no support groups, so you had to be your own support to survive. I knew I had to wake up each morning and go forward. I am really so proud of myself of all the life changes I made for myself and was able to move forward. Talking was the number one facet that was helpful. ~ Deborah Halpert

Our major challenge was our change in business, and readjusting our life until there was some of the stability we were used to. It took patience, understanding, and working together. ~ Ina Glasberg

My father was stricken with cancer at age 48 and died just before I graduated from high school. With my mother's guidance, I had no choice but to go on. With Sue's companionship, I have found happiness.

~ Jay Kaplan

Every stage of life has its challenges, but there are solutions. Work them through patiently. ~ Anonymous

Support

We have had health challenges and have sought advice and care. We take care to live a healthy lifestyle. We have also faced aging parents who needed care at facilities. This required patience and talking with friends. When you realize that you are not alone with a problem, it is helpful. ~ Ruth Stavisky

The death of my husband when he was 50. I always say I am alive today because of Temple Beth Shalom, my community and my wonderful friends. ~ Arline Aransky

*After Melvin's passing, Rita got involved with Beyahad. This kept her busy and involved with people who became great lifelong friends. Sigmund was alone after his divorce and sought out theatre for recreation; he was sent to Beyahad by a friend. Sigmund and Rita met through Beyahad and married one year later.
~ Rita Perlman and Sigmund Black*

Support of the Jewish community locally and world-wide is a fundamental responsibility of a Jew. At times of stress, that community can be depended upon. ~ Jerry Silverstein

I, like almost everybody, have certainly faced significant life challenges... I think it is important to acknowledge the challenge and to really allow yourself to experience and feel it. For me, these challenges generally feel like losses of some kind and there is a good deal of sadness surrounding them. I try to allow myself the space to mourn the losses, and I surround myself with my beloved friends, family members, and temple community who I trust and hold dear. To know that I have these folks standing beside me gives me strength and faith that I can move forward. ~ Jane Scheibel

I took care of elderly parents and made sure that the quality of their lives is and was excellent. How did I do that? I just made time every day somehow to help them, to give them the services they needed to have the quality of their lives be excellent. It would not have been possible if my wife and kids didn't support me and allow me to spend the time to do this. ~ Ed Schreider

Ten years ago my husband was very seriously injured in an automobile accident. There were health complications for many years, and he passed away 1 1/2 years ago. I was able to get through this challenge in a positive manner with the help of family, friends and our temple community. ~ Anita Glickman

Acceptance

Our oldest son fell in love with a woman who was raised Catholic. Having our grandsons baptized was a very difficult time for us. We swallowed hard and showed the entire family that they were loved. When we interact with the two boys, we know that alienation would have been a wrong decision. We have been rewarded by unconditional love from everyone concerned. ~ Anonymous

Take what life hands out and run with it. Be your own best advocate. Cherish family and friends. Try not to sweat the little things. ~ Bev Luskin

I am an artist and had a major problem with my eyes; I could not do what I had been doing. But when one door closed, I opened a new one. I found a new direction doing portraits for a charity in Uganda that helps children who have lost parents to AIDS and are being raised by their grandmothers. From something bad, something good came out of it for others. ~ Paula Rosen

I tend to focus on what will be in the future if I persevere through the current challenge...I try to keep my sense of humor no matter how difficult the time. Laughter is a great healer. ~ Peggy Gassman

Giving Back

Be a good person, work hard at something you enjoy, take time for yourself, and give back. ~ Trina Novak

Give of yourself to your family, friends and community. ~ Louis Grossman

Try to be a good person. Always do the right thing in your dealing with family members, your friends, your neighbors, people at work and your community. ~ Linda Germaine Miller

Personal responsibility - for learning, growing, being happy, being trustworthy and being loving. ~ Bob Lurie

If life treats you well, it is your responsibility to give back. ~ Lucille Sands

Just think what the world would be like if everyone concentrated hard on making a particular someone else's life better, easier to handle, every day. The world is improved one individual effort at a time; private initiative leading to community effort makes it happen. ~ Jeremy Serwer

II. Love and Family

Our survey continued with questions regarding marriage and children. What is the key to a happy marriage? Which elements of parenting are most worthy of passing from one generation to the next? Our survey questions included the following:

- *If you are or were married, what do you feel are the most important elements of a strong and happy marriage?*
- *If you are a parent, what do you think is the most important thing to remember when raising children?*

The keys to a happy marriage, according to our sages, include respect, love, friendship and humor. Many, many Life Wisdom participants cited these important values in discussing marriage. Many people also emphasized the ability to communicate, and to apologize when needed.

As in marriage, respect is also essential to healthy parenting. Nearly everyone emphasized the importance of showing children love, and many people also emphasized the importance of providing guidance and setting limits.

For our sages, letting go and allowing children to find their own way in life is also important. Finally, many people also emphasized the value of teaching by example.

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Our Life Wisdom participants shared the following lessons on marriage:

Partnership and Respect

Respect for each other, love, caring, listening, understanding, and mutual interests are all important in marriage. ~ Beverlee Bookman

Recognize that marriage is a partnership and each individual brings important skills and life understanding which enhances the life of the other. The best way I have ever heard it expressed was as follows: 'No one has it all together, but together we have it all.' ~ David Feldman

On June 14th, 2014 Ron and I will have been married for 60 years. Many things changed, we grew, our ideas developed, but there was always one constant. We love each other, and the mutual respect we have for each other seals our bond. When we disagree, it is about issues, not about who we are. ~ Lois Sockol

Marriage is about co-commitment ... being as committed to my partner's point of view and conditions of satisfaction as I am to my own. ~ Bob Lurie

Total respect for each other is important. Know without a doubt that you can trust one another. ~ Lucille Sands

Don't sweat the little things. Remember that your partner is there for you through good and bad times, and you for him. ~ Bev Luskin

Communication

Learn how to communicate during difficult times; also how to argue effectively...without belittling the other person. Try never to go to bed angry. Set aside a time to re-visit the issue after the heat of the moment has subsided. ~ Anonymous

Never let the sun set on your troubles. Communicate, communicate, communicate. Appreciate, nurture and encourage your spouse. Laugh at yourself and with each other, often and loudly. ~ Anonymous

Compromise, communicate, appreciate and acknowledge your spouse in words and actions. Tell your spouse you love them. Be open, honest, understanding and supportive. ~ Louis Grossman

Work as a team. Talk about every decision and get professional help when needed. Sometimes an impartial third party is helpful. ~ Anonymous

Listen to the other, ask questions to try to understand where your partner is coming from. Enjoy each other's company...Realize that love changes in intensity. Marriage goes through cycles. Recognize when to jump in and have your say and when to back away. It is ok to stand up for yourself, but do so without blaming the other. ~ Trina Novak

Friendship and Laughter

The most important elements of a strong and happy marriage are maintaining your mate as your best friend; accepting their opinions when they differ from yours; providing support when passing through the difficult experiences of life; and accepting and supporting your mate's family as your own. ~ Jerry Silverstein

Laughter. It is important to try to keep a happy outlook. There will be very trying times. Being together and enjoying each other's company is the most important thing. I can truly say that JoEllen is my best friend. ~ Chuck Levin

I believe the most important elements in a happy and strong marriage are to communicate daily, laugh a lot, and to go dancing. ~ Judy U. Shapiro

Our Life Wisdom participants shared the following lessons on raising children:

Unconditional Love and Respect

Since there is no book to give you the "how to" advice, think of safety, health and happiness, and always let them know that you love them! ~ Bev Luskin

Support them, whatever they try to do. ~ Judy Gordon

They're not perfect. Always let them know how special they are. They should always feel that they are the center of your lives. ~ Chuck Levin

Give unconditional love, but expect honesty and integrity. ~ Anonymous

Make your children feel valued - treat them with respect. ~ Lucille Sands

Independence

Be patient, and give them latitude to evolve. Do not impose your judgments on your children; let them be who they are. ~ Mark Rosen

Your children are not clones of you, and you should celebrate who THEY are. Admire and love them for their strengths and talents, and cheer them on when they are challenged. I think of children as a perennial garden not yet grown. Parents should watch for what their children are becoming and nurture all that is good and possible. ~ Jane Scheibel

Love and give guidance to no end, but respect your child's independence and choices. Avoid seeking to shape your child into some mold that you perceive as necessary. Impart values and experiences, emphasizing those positive ones and avoiding the negative ones that you experienced when you were growing up. Try to provide children with a variety of experiences that help them to grow, learn and understand who they are. Accept your child's limitations and imperfections. Accept their uniqueness. ~ Ron and Cindy Matloff

The function of parents is to guide children's maturation process with the goal of having them become independent and responsible adults, while recognizing that a child is not a possession that can be controlled. ~ Jerry Silverstein

The goal is to help kids learn to fly - give them wings so they can soar and do not hold them back. Let them know that anything is possible. ~ Anonymous

Guiding and Setting Limits

Give your children love, encouragement, and a sense of security. Set firm limits, which they may not appreciate in the short run, but will thank you for in the long run. ~ David Feldman

I think the most important thing about raising children is to be aware that they are children and are looking for guidance. Tell them and show them how much you love them. Always remember each child is an individual jewel...each unique in what they have to offer the world. Take them to take a deep breath. ~ Judy U. Shapiro

First and foremost, you are the child's parent, not his or her friend. Saying 'no' is a good thing, even if it is not popular. ~ Linda Germaine Miller

Remember that you are a parent and not a friend while children are young. Set limits and stick to them. I would not over program children - I used to tell my kids they could choose one sport and one additional activity per season. Play with your children whenever you can. Encourage outdoor activities and family fun. As children mature, encourage them to continue to spend family time together in spite of the demands of sports and social activities. I had from 6-12 teens around my Shabbat dinner table every week. With adult children, learn to listen, to back off and when to say something. Most important, love them, tell them you love them, and show them you love them. ~ Trina Novak

Patience is important, and sticking to whatever decisions you have made for your children. Admit and say you are sorry when you are wrong. ~ Arline Aransky

"No" is a love word. Teach them to appreciate what they have and not to be jealous of others. Teach them the importance of working hard; life is not easy or fair. ~ Louis Grossman

*I do not think I ever raised my voice with my children. From the time they were babies, my voiced changed when they went near the stove. They understood danger. They understood love. Quality time is the most important. In today's world there will mostly be two working parents. Not to worry, You won't damage your children.
~ Deborah Halpert*

Be firm but fair. Don't give children a lot of different options. Love them as much as you can; they grow up too fast. ~ Anonymous

Listening, and Teaching by Example

Be a good listener...enjoy the moment. Take time to share your values and thoughts. Find time to see the little moments of joy. Get your children involved in Tzedakah. ~ Margie Glou

I think it is important to listen to your children, to hear about what they want and what they fear. Offer them a guide, to let them know they are safe to be who they are. I also think it is important to set down expectations, limitations, and appropriate amounts of responsibility...We are their guides, and how we conduct our lives, the values we live, are thousands of times more important than the lectures we might give. They are watching us just as surely as we are watching them. ~ Lois Sockol

Listen to them, and encourage them to be good people and work hard. ~ Les Yampolsky

III. Career

The third section of our survey focused on career. Work is such an important part of our lives, and satisfaction with our daily activities is critical to our sense of fulfillment. What advice can our sages offer to younger members of our community who are just starting their careers? We asked the following questions:

- *Looking back over your career, what do you feel is the key to professional fulfillment?*
- *With respect to your work/professional life, knowing what you know now, is there anything you would have done differently to bring greater career fulfillment?*

According to our Life Wisdom participants, love seems to play an important role at work as well as at home. Choosing a career that one loves seems to be a key to professional fulfillment. Many people also emphasized having a strong work ethic, advising younger people to work hard and stay motivated. And for many people, making a difference in the world through one's work seems to greatly enhance one's life.

As with other major life decisions, it seems that people who were thoughtful and careful in their career decisions found contentment with the outcomes. Many Life Wisdom participants said they had few to no regrets about their careers. However, some participants expressed that they wish they had obtained more education in order to achieve greater success and financial reward. Balancing career and family life was also a challenge for some of our sages, particularly for women with children.

Our Life Wisdom participants shared the following insights on career:

Love Your Work

Pick a path which combines that which takes advantage of your skill set, gives you personal fulfillment, matches your personal value system, and allows you to support yourself and your family. ~ David Feldman

Work at a job that you love. Each day should be fulfilling and rewarding. ~ Anonymous

Believe in what you do and share your passion. ~ Bev Luskin

Find work that you really enjoy. ~ Linda Germaine Miller

The key is setting goals for yourself and achieving any or all of the goals, but also accepting your disappointments. ~ Jerry Silverstein

Love what you do for work. ~ Maryanne G. Pilat

Be happy in what you do. ~ Ruth Stavisky

Work with people who you respect and enjoy being with. ~ Mark Rosen

Work outside the home builds self-confidence and makes one feel they have contributed to society in a meaningful way. Volunteering makes one feel good contributing to the community. ~ Sally Goodman

Be happy with what you are doing and you will be successful. ~ Beverlee Bookman

Do something that you like and that speaks to your soul. ~ Trina Novak

A Strong Work Ethic

*Do what you say you are going to do. If you make a promise to someone, be sure to keep that promise.
~ Chuck Levin*

Do something you enjoy and do it the best way you can. ~ Brenda Nagel

*Learn to manage stress. Form strong professional relationships. Continue to learn and grow professionally.
Don't be afraid to take chances. ~ Anonymous*

Select a mentor. ~ Irving Baker

Enjoy what you are doing in your career. If you are unhappy about your choice, make a commitment to yourself to change careers, and work hard to stimulate the change. ~ Les Yampolsky

E ducation

Professionally, I spent my years as a teacher, skills I didn't need to abandon when I became a parent. Teaching is a wonderful profession where you are always learning on the job...I have taught hundreds of children, and each has taught me. I still teach in the life-long learning program at Brandeis, and I'm still learning! ~ Lois Sockol

Looking back, I would have perhaps completed my masters degree so I could have eventually held an administrative position. Once I had my children this was not a priority. ~ Margie Glou

Looking back, I would have expanded my education. ~ Jerry Silverstein

When I think back on my career, I probably should have gone back to school to become a CPA. However, I did enjoy my bookkeeping positions. ~ Linda Yampolsky

Looking back, I would have continued to become a speech pathologist. ~ Ina Glasberg

Making A Difference

Making a difference is most important. ~ Bob Lurie

Leave something behind to make your profession better. ~ Geoff Eiten

It's important to truly love what you do for work and feel your mission is an important one. The amount of money you earn is not an indication of the importance of your work. ~ Jane Scheibel

Each child I helped to become a believer in himself - it fulfilled me...No role gave me more satisfaction than helping a child learn something he thought he couldn't understand. ~ Lois Sockol

I felt like I made a difference in the lives of the children I taught...I loved what I was doing and looked forward to going to work every day. ~ Margie Glou

Work - Life Balance

I worked part-time, 20-30 hours per week, until my children were 14 and 17 years old. I turned down offers of full time employment at least twice. I tried to achieve a balance between home and work lives. ~ Anonymous

Being a woman, having a sick sibling, raising children, I was at home. My work could only be part-time. I was fortunate to have a husband who had a business and we lived modestly. I then went on to have many varied and sundry jobs. ~ Judy U. Shapiro

*I wasn't strong enough or didn't have the ability to explain to my husband over the years that he had to take more on at home. Maybe our children in this generation get it now...I would have learned to "Lean In."
~ Deborah Halpert*

I started working when my children were small. It was hard, but I managed to go to as many of their sports and other events as possible. ~ Judy Gordon

Be well rounded and willing to listen to others. ~ Arline Aransky

No business deal is worth losing a good night's sleep. ~ Howard Taylor

IV. Jewish Journeys

While this Life Wisdom Project was initially inspired by the stories and messages in Dr. Karl Pillemer's book, *30 Lessons for Living*, what differentiates our project from that of Dr. Pillemer is that all of our Life Wisdom participants have embraced Judaism and, specifically, are part of the Temple Beth Shalom community. As such, we wanted to take the opportunity to learn what Judaism has meant to our sages, and how being part of the Temple Beth Shalom community has enriched their lives. In this section we asked the following questions:

- *Has being Jewish, or has Judaism as a whole, helped to shape who you are as a person? If so, how?*
- *Has your Jewish affiliation, or your level of Jewish observance, changed since you were a child or a young adult? If so, how and why?*
- *Each year, our TBS members reaffirm their desire to remain part of the TBS community. Why is being part of the TBS community important for you?*
- *Has being part of the TBS community enriched your life? If so, in what ways?*
- *Looking back, has there been one ESPECIALLY meaningful moment or experience you have had as part of the TBS community? If so, what was it? What made it special?*

Nearly all of the Life Wisdom participants felt strongly about their Jewish identities and its positive effects on their lives. Many people shared personal stories about childhood holiday celebrations, their parents' involvement in temple life, and their desire to continue the chain of tradition with their own children.

Moreover, a great number of people described their Jewish value system as an important anchor in their lives - a moral compass for making decisions, for treating other people with respect, and for living with integrity. People also described a strong sense of connection and belonging to the TBS community and to the greater Jewish community.

With regard to their level of Jewish observance, although some of our participants maintain the same level and type of Jewish observance that they were taught by their parents, many reported that their affiliations and practices have changed since they became adults. Perhaps not surprisingly, no two Jewish life journeys are alike; there are as many variations in Jewish identification as there are Jews.

Interestingly, only 30% of Life Wisdom participants were raised as Reform Jews. While a small number were raised either Orthodox or as secular Jews, or outside of the Jewish faith, the majority of Life Wisdom participants (56%) were raised within the Conservative tradition.

Regardless of participants' backgrounds, most people expressed comfort and contentment being part of TBS and the Reform movement. A number of people said they connect with and enjoy the spiritual

aspects of Reform Judaism. Many people also expressed satisfaction in having chosen their level of affiliation and practice as a mature adult.

Life Wisdom participants described many important reasons for being part of the TBS community. Irving Baker clearly stated the most common reason - the strong "sense of belonging" one feels being part of this vibrant community. Many people described the temple as their second home. Through this sense of connection, through the nurturing of lifelong friendships, the spiritual guidance and support, the learning opportunities, and the volunteer and leadership opportunities, the TBS community has enriched the lives of many.

There have been many special moments for those in our community. Many people fondly recalled personally special moments including the B'nai Mitzvah and weddings of their children and grandchildren; celebrating special anniversaries at TBS; baby namings; and their own adult B'nai Mitzvah. As well, people described their enjoyment in taking part in High Holy Day services; traveling to Israel with the congregation; and the opportunity to serve in leadership roles within the temple.

Finally, many people fondly remembered the comfort and support they received from the TBS clergy and community during times of difficulty.

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Our Life Wisdom participants shared the following thoughts about Judaism and how it has shaped their lives:

Ethics - Be a Mensch

Judaism has shaped me by providing me with values, identity, family culture, and community and friends. Values of truth, peace, hard work, scholarship, charity and lovingkindness. Understanding of history, literature and law. Understanding and exploring the concept of G-d. I have always lived in the context of Jewish family, community and friends. ~ Len Finn, M.D.

I try to live my life giving back to others, to help make the world a better place. ~ Linda Germaine Miller

Judaism has helped shape my values - love of family, respect for others, giving back to society, being part of a community larger than yourself, stopping to enjoy and appreciate life cycle events, and offering love and support to others during their difficult times. ~ Jeff Kublin

Being Jewish and being part of the Jewish world provided me with the basis of the ethical standard by which I hope I have lived. That environment also provided a sense of 'membership' and pride in being part of a unique community that has contributed positively to the advancement of humans. ~ Jerry Silverstein

Judaism has helped reinforce the value of lifetime learning, the importance of community, and most importantly a set of faith traditions that connect with my values toward myself and others. ~ Bob Lurie

Living a life caring about family, and conducting oneself in hopefully an honest and sincere manner. Abiding by laws and traditions taught through the years. To be a mensch. ~ Richard Bookman

As I have learned over my adult years what it means to live the teachings of Torah and the Ten Commandments, I have tried every day to apply those teachings to everyday life. It is not easy to do, but I find myself to be more aware of the "right" thing to do, the right way to treat someone, the best way to respond in a given situation. I feel it is a gift to have these tools to aspire to. ~ Jane Scheibel

I don't know that I consciously invoke Talmud or Pirke Avoth to address decisions of how to act, but I respect that somewhere there is an undercurrent of Jewish thought and Jewish learning that informs such decisions. I try to think what is the right way to act, rather than just the convenient way. ~ Ken Brier

The lessons learned from Torah have helped me be the best that I can be. Life would be futile without love, charity, kindness, caring for others and hope. ~ Anita Glickman

Being Jewish is being part of a vibrant community and caring for your fellow man with love and compassion. It enables one to become a mensch. ~ Anonymous

Judaism has helped me establish my values and ethics for life. It has helped me establish my personal conduct and treatment of other people. ~ Bob Goodman

To be a mensch. ~ Alan Glou

Tradition and Joy

Being Jewish has made my existence fuller and rich beyond expectations. Having a Jewish outlook towards life brings a smile and warmth - being proud. ~ Andy Gassman

Judaism has been in my heart since I was a child - I give Jewish camps the credit. ~ Lucille Sands

I grew up in a strong Jewish household where Shabbat, and all the Jewish holidays, were always celebrated with extended family. The temple was an important part of our lives, both socially and spiritually. I excelled in Hebrew school, and still have the most wonderful memories of our temple as a child. ~ Beverlee Bookman

I love being Jewish. It started when I was a little girl and my father would lead us in Kiddush - in a beautiful voice, my mother bench licht, and there was always delicious Shabbos dinner. At 6 years old, I was sent off to Camp Pembroke and was surrounded by much Jewish tradition and love. I have always been dedicated to those traditions and each time I see the candles being lit on Friday night, I remember to stop, mark the sacred moment and appreciate my Jewishness. My husband and I have raised our daughter with these same traditions and she now lives a very committed Jewish life, with Friday evenings at temple surrounded by her new New York family of friends. I find joy, hope and love in my Jewish life surrounded by my immediate family, dear friends (as close as family), my dear TBS family, and as a Jewish American. ~ Peggy Gassman

Being Jewish has definitely shaped who I am. I came from a Jewish family where both of my parents were active in the Jewish community. Both parents volunteered for Jewish organizations. Many times I came home from school and would find a rabbi in our home talking to my Dad. I came from a very large family, all of which lived in Worcester. Each year my parents hosted the annual family Chanukah party where we often had more than 100 relatives in attendance. The uncles would line up all the kids and distribute Chanukah gelt. What a time! I have never forgotten those days. My uncle was the first Jewish mayor of Worcester and I remember how proud my family was. ~ Anonymous

I have always felt so proud to be Jewish. As a child I loved my temple and Jewish community. As a youth I loved belonging and feeling part of a Jewish community - feeling the support during difficult as well as happy times. As a full adult and now "senior" feeling part of an extended family - I enjoy watching my children join their own Jewish communities. ~ Ina Glasberg

I am proud to be Jewish. That Jews have survived throughout the centuries and have cared and helped others has been a constant theme in the history of the Jews. This has been an inspiration to me. ~ Harriet Lieb

*I think that I'm more in tune with traditions, culture and the idea of social justice. We love going to services, meeting new people, and taking the courses offered. I just love the High Holy Days services!
~ Maryanne G. Pilat*

A memory of a shaping moment comes from when I was a 10 or 11 year old boy attending Hebrew school. My teacher, a small and gentle older man with a kind smile, who cared for all of us very much, was talking to us about the Holocaust and about his personal story of internment in a Nazi concentration camp, which had happened only a little more than a decade earlier. When he finished, he rolled up one of his shirtsleeves and showed us the numbers in a row that were permanently seared into the skin of his forearm. That was a 'picture is worth a thousand words' moment. Maybe not immediately after, but over time, I became aware of my place in a chain of people and tradition that had struggled to survive for centuries...L'dor V'dor. ~ Ron Matloff

Judaism has always been a part of my life. My friends are Jewish and my way of life as well. I don't think one has to be religious to be Jewish. ~ Judy Gordon

I feel a part of a greater community. I feel connected. It gives me a feeling of belonging to history. It makes me proud. ~ Ruth Stavisky

I love being Jewish. ~ Anonymous

*As my children have grown and moved on, my expression was always, "there's chicken soup waiting when you come home." I think that says it all. The basis of our home and tradition was always Judaism.
~ Deborah Halpert*

Life Wisdom participants shared the following recollections about their Jewish affiliation and level of observance:

Observance and Affiliation

I had the good fortune to have parents who set a positive example of Jews being responsible for each other, expressed through participation in local and broader communities. It is a responsibility I have tried to maintain.
~ Jerry Silverstein

I am more observant of Jewish ritual and practice now, and more confident in being Jewish. ~ Mark Rosen

My level of Jewish observance changed in 2003. That is the year my mother died, Rabbi Jay came to Temple Beth Shalom, and I went to my first Sisterhood Spirituality Retreat. None of this was by accident, but a very fortunate coming together of important events. I was struggling mightily with my mother's terminal illness, and Rabbi Jay kindly communicated with my while he was still in St. Louis. A dear friend felt I would enjoy and feel embraced if I attended the Sisterhood Retreat. This all set the stage for me to feel that I was a true and valued member of Temple Beth Shalom, and that I had found a place where I felt so very comfortable praying, learning and observing. I don't think I had ever felt that before, even as a child who graduated from religious school. I think I needed to have that choice and experience as an adult. ~ Jane Scheibel

As a child I was Jewish because my parents were and therefore I was, without really understanding what that means. As an adult I am Jewish because I understand and connect with its underlying values and faith traditions. In other words, I was Jewish by birth, but really became Jewish by choice. ~ Bob Lurie

We didn't grow up with real Jewish affiliation and sought it out as a young married couple. Our friends are largely a result of this and our children were brought up in our community. These same things are what they look for in their own lives. ~ Bev Luskin

I grew up in a kosher home, loved the tradition of it, but when I married it was really not an option. I still observe all holidays, still gather with all my family, and still am very proud to be a Jew. ~ Anonymous

My involvement in Temple Beth Shalom made me feel like I had a second home, and it is here where I made my dearest friends and learned the true love of Judaism. This came with maturity and the appreciation I did not have as a young adult. ~ Lucille Sands

I grow up in a secular home, in which I hung Christmas stocking as a child. I had no formal or informal connection with a temple, and knew little about Jewish traditions or history. I knew I was Jewish, but it was just a label. I started delving into Jewish history when I was about 17, devouring everything I could find about the Holocaust. Then I began reading literature by Jewish writers. At 25 years old, when my first child was born, I wanted to affiliate with a temple. It's a decision I never regretted. ~ Lois Sockol

I believe I am more spiritual now. I truly enjoy attending services. My husband and I light candles every Friday night. Now that we are retired we have the time to celebrate Shabbat. We attend minyan and think it is a wonderful way to begin the day. ~ Anonymous

*I am a Jew By Choice. Judaism has afforded me the opportunity for less dissonance within my deeper self.
~ Carolyn Cotsonas Finn*

*Religion does not seem to have the answer for me. I believe there is something more powerful out there that created this place where we live, but none of the stories written by men of any religion cuts it for me.
~ Judy U. Shapiro*

I was raised Orthodox and raised with many rules that were passed down as truths. You have to find your own truths. I chose to be more liberal in my Jewish affiliation and in my life. I try to have an open mind and accept or reject things as I view them. ~ Brenda Nagel

I did not come from a religious family and being part of a temple has enabled me to appreciate the philosophy, beauty and wisdom of Judaism. ~ Anonymous

Reform Judaism

I was brought up with orthodox family connections, but our family did not observe in the same way. I went to orthodox Hebrew school and went to orthodox synagogue with my grandmother and aunts. My father worked on Saturday. We observed all holidays and Friday night rituals. We kept kosher. When my husband and I were first married we helped establish a conservative temple in our town. We kept kosher and were able to host the visiting rabbi. When we moved to Needham, the conservative temple was just getting started and we did not want to be pioneers again. We knew nothing of Reform Judaism. I contacted Rabbi Kaplan and asked him to tell me about it. After a few conversations, I felt hooked intellectually. We have been very comfortable with it ever since. ~ Ruth Stavisky

*We must say that we truly enjoy belonging to a Reform synagogue, Temple Beth Shalom.
~ Rita Perlman and Sigmund Black*

I grew up in a conservative temple and changed to a reform temple when moving to Needham. Relatives of mine are members of TBS, and invited my family to a Friday evening service. We just fit right in, felt very comfortable with the rabbi and the service and joined shortly afterwards. ~ Beverlee Bookman

Even though I went to services with my parents, and my mother was active in our conservative congregation, I never learned to read Hebrew so there was never a true meaning to the prayers for me. Girls weren't in Hebrew school at that time; I was confirmed. My life and Jewish meaning and living have completely changed since we affiliated with our Reform congregation. ~ Ina Glasberg

Though originally my schooling was through the Conservative movement...I ended up affiliating with the Reform movement because I felt more comfortable there...there was a chance for equal opportunity - in worship and in giving service - for women. ~ Trina Novak

I was brought up with Orthodox grandparents, raised in a Conservative synagogue, but today feel more involved and spiritual in a Reform synagogue. ~ Margie Glou

Life Wisdom participants shared the following stories and thoughts about being part of the Temple Beth Shalom community:

Community

The TBS community has enriched our life spiritually, has enriched our life with friendships, and has enriched our life with our children. Our family has very strong wonderful memories. When our children looked for their own congregations after marriage, they used our congregation as an example. ~ Ina Glasberg

The temple is my fourth child - the love continues to grow. ~ Lucille Sands

It was very important when I brought up my children that we were a part of a greater community. Now I love it because it lets me still feel connected. Our parents' names are on the memorial board and it is comforting to me that they are nearby... I feel an obligation to support a temple for the young families. It was there for me and I want it to be available for them. A Reform temple is very welcoming and inclusive. It embraces mixed marriages. ~ Ruth Stavisky

We will always support our TBS community and remain a part of the community where we have met so many good friends. ~ Rita Perlman and Sigmund Black

It is my spiritual home. ~ Mark Rosen

I have always been a part of the Jewish community I lived in, when I was young having Friday night services in our home in Hull as a child, or going to services in Philly when I was in college. I was very active in the Wellesley temple and was president of the Sisterhood there. I joined TBS when Peggy was becoming president and I was so proud of my little sister. I feel welcome and a part of this community now. Programs like Three Score and More make me feel at home as I grow older. ~ Sandra Mills

Even though I am not there enough, it is in my soul. ~ Deborah Halpert

Being part of this wonderful community is very important for me; it is my home. I feel welcomed and surrounded by caring people - congregants and professional staff. I want and need to stay connected to the rhythms of the year, the culture and values of Judaism. ~ Anonymous

*TBS is one way in which I state my identity as a Jewish person. I think as a Jew, it's important to belong to a Temple community to support a place for spiritual worship and community for fellow Jews in the area.
~ Linda Germaine Miller*

After my Dad died, we were seriously thinking about moving away and joining the temple of my youth. On Yom Kippur, as a past president I was asked to hold a Torah, as part of Kol Nidre. As I held the Torah and looked out at the congregation, I was hit with a feeling of warmth. I said to myself, 'this is MY temple.' I have never forgotten that feeling. It resurfaces every time I go to temple. ~ Chuck Levin

The TBS community is the central community in my life. It is the place that so richly holds my values, my spirit, my identity. ~ Jane Scheibel

I love Reform Judaism's approach to living a good life, and I have profound respect for the flexibility it affords. The values it teaches and the sense of community it creates is a wonderful experience. Being part of the Beth Shalom community, especially under the leadership of Rabbi Jay Perlman, has rekindled my interest in Judaism. The trip to Israel my wife and I took with 45 others from the congregation in 2007 had a powerful influence on me and strengthened my identity. ~ David Feldman

Membership in the community affords me a home base from which I can continue my religious journey, partake in activities which interest me, expand/deepen friendships that I did not have time to cultivate before I retired, and offer to volunteer when I am able. ~ Anonymous

I believe in Judaism and believe that it has to be supported. In supporting the temple financially, we are helping younger members of our community. We believe in staying affiliated for our own sense of community. ~ Brenda Nagel

Life Cycle Celebrations

We have had many special moments with our TBS community. The one that was especially meaningful was celebrating our 50th wedding anniversary at a Shabbat service. The congregation was with us and our entire family was on the Bimah. My husband shared heartfelt personal words. There was special music and a surprise solo by Rabbi Wolfman, and a special Oneg with Israeli dancing. It was most memorable! ~ Ina Glasberg

We have had a number of meaningful experiences at TBS - the B'nai Mitzvah of our children, and the baby namings of our grandchildren. This is where we belong, and our children enjoy coming to TBS when they are in Needham. ~ Linda Yampolsky

The Bat Mitzvah of our daughter Kimberly and the Bar Mitzvah of our son Scott. The services were beautiful and meaningful, and we were sharing these special moments with family and dear friends at TBS, our second home. Being called to the Bimah for a 40th wedding anniversary blessing by Rabbi Perlman, Rabbi Markley and Cantor Jonas was a celebration that we will always remember. ~ Beverlee Bookman

My children's Bar Mitzvahs were especially wonderful. It was a chance to bring our entire family together with all of our friends to celebrate a milestone for our little nuclear family. ~ Linda Germaine Miller

Jerry and I renewed our wedding vows not once, but twice at TBS. The second time it was a formal service and our children were our attendants - what a journey! ~ Lucille Sands

There have been many meaningful moments: the Bar Mitzvah of each of our three sons; the conversion ceremony of a daughter-in-law; the Bat Mitzvah of two granddaughters; the blessing of my wife and me, before the ark, marking our 50th wedding anniversary. ~ Jerry Silverstein

I have had many meaningful moments - the B'nai Mitzvah of my three children, and the naming of my grandchildren. But the most meaningful was my own Bat Mitzvah. ~ Anonymous

Our five children became B'nai Mitzvah at TBS. Passing the Torah from our parents, to us, and to our children was an all time high. Now it is a special joy to watch our grandchildren become B'nai Mitzvah. ~ Margie Glou

An incredibly meaningful experience that I have had as a member of TBS is becoming an (adult) Bat Mitzvah. The event itself and all the learning that led up to it was absolutely invigorating, stimulating, fun, moving, touching, spiritual, and joyous. I came to know and love my ten other classmates, and we shared a moment in time unlike any other I have ever experienced. I felt so accomplished and proud, happy and awed, thrilled beyond words! I had accepted Torah and all the responsibilities that accompany it in a public and meaningful way. What a delicious joy it was! ~ Jane Scheibel

For every milestone happy or sad, the synagogue is there for me. ~ Deborah Halpert

Volunteering

When my family joined TBS we became involved immediately...I became president of Sisterhood; Richard became president of Brotherhood and then president of the temple; our daughter Kimberly became president of BESTY and then president of NEFTY; and our son Scott became involved in BESTY. By volunteering I feel my whole family's lives have been enriched by what we have done. We made lifelong friends at TBS, and to this day are still involved. ~ Beverlee Bookman

My most memorable moments are being a part of Sisterhood when I first came to temple, serving as Sisterhood president, president of our district, and the privilege of being elected to the board of Women of Reform Judaism. ~ Arline Aransky

I have been fortunate to be at the right place and time to begin our temple's commitment to Project EZRA. Each year I am grateful for and fulfilled by our community's commitment to this project. ~ Lois Sockol

A memorable moment was when I first became president of the temple. ~ Mark Rosen

I think the temple has made me a better person. It's taught me to help others and to offer my expertise in various arms of the temple. I have made wonderful friends who have definitely enriched my life. ~ Anonymous

I have been able to volunteer my time in many capacities, especially in Sisterhood, and as a member of the TBS Board and Executive Committee. I have also taken adult education classes and have participated in Torah study since 1994. I feel a part of the community, and that I have been able to give of myself to the community. ~ Trina Novak

Comfort During Difficult Times

The strongest experience I had was looking up from my hospital bed and seeing Rabbi Jay. It was Rosh Hashanah, and he visited me after a very long day of services...His commitment to his congregation spoke of an exceptional love. ~ Brenda Nagel

The Bat Mitzvahs were special. The presence of Rabbi Todd Markley being with us when my husband died was very meaningful. ~ Anonymous

I can't pick just one memorable moment. Sharing the joy of the baby naming of my granddaughter with my family and the congregation. The life cycle events are all very meaningful, but especially the spiritual guidance and comfort provided to me by both rabbis during my husband's terminal illness. This included Rabbi Jay's hospital visits, his returning to the hospital to be with me and our family when my husband passed away, and officiating at his funeral and Shiva. Rabbi Todd was on paternity leave and I was astounded and so happy to see him participate at the funeral. ~ Anonymous

A meaningful moment for me was when the board voted to erect a plaque on the memorial board for my first wife. ~ Irving Baker

The loss of both my parents and having the temple for my support has been especially meaningful. My parents came to High Holy Days every year and TBS was important for them too. ~ Deborah Halpert

*When I was recovering from extensive surgery, Rich and I were enveloped by the wonderful friends and other temple members in the most incredibly caring way. It was a time that we will both always remember.
~ Bev Luskin*

V. Life in Needham

Because many of our Life Wisdom participants live in or around Needham, Massachusetts, and because the town recently celebrated its tri-centennial year, we were curious to hear stories about the evolution of Needham's Jewish community. We asked the following question:

- *If you have lived in Needham for many years, how do you feel the Jewish community, and/or the community at large, has evolved over time? Please share any personal experiences that you think may be interesting to others.*

Nearly all of our Life Wisdom participants agreed that in the past 50 years, life has changed dramatically for the Jewish community of Needham. Our sages who have lived here since the 1960's or 1970's reported that there were very few Jews in Needham at that time, and the two synagogues in town were just getting off the ground. Further, very few Jewish people participated on town boards or committees during those years.

In contrast, Needham today is home to a thriving, involved and integrated Jewish community. Needham's two large synagogues - TBS and Temple Aliyah - are growing and bustling seven days a week. A town in which few Jewish residents participated in civic affairs has evolved into an inclusive community where Jewish residents are welcomed and involved in all aspects of public life.

The gradual changes that have occurred seem a result of the increasing number of Jewish families moving to Needham, Needham's Jews reaching out to the broader community, and, importantly, the broader community reaching back with warmth and openness.

Our Life Wisdom participants described the evolution of Needham's Jewish community as follows:

The Early Years

*The Jewish community has grown. When we first arrived, we were the only Jewish family in our neighborhood.
~ Judy U. Shapiro*

When we first moved to Needham there was a very small Jewish community. Over the years the number of Jewish people moving to Needham has increased significantly. The schools in Needham were not always closed on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur; they are now. ~ Beverlee Bookman

I am lucky to have my daughter now living in Needham with her family. I keep reflecting with her how her friends from TBS nursery school are still her friends today. Some of them also live in Needham now. I remember when I lived in an apartment in Needham 35 years ago and was at Volante Farm. The owner of Needham Apothecary, also a temple member, came up to me and told me my prescription was ready. That was it! I never left Needham again. What more can you ask from a town. ~ Deborah Halpert

When we moved here 44 years ago there were two small temples, and places like Newton and Brookline were the favored places for Jewish populations. One of my children experienced some verbal anti-semitism in elementary school. It was not tolerated in the school. ~ Anonymous

Finding Our Way

Needham has definitely changed since we moved here in 1973. Having schools closed for the High Holy Days was unheard of back then; maybe 5% of the population was Jewish. Now, it is quite clear that the Jewish community is an integral part of the town. ~ Chuck Levin

I feel that the Jewish community is definitely more 'visible' in Needham than when I moved here. There seems to be more involvement in town activities such as lighting the Chanukah lights on the town common, participating in Relay for Life, and of course Needham's Art in Bloom. Also joining with Needham's other religions in services which are mutually significant. ~ Anonymous

As more Jewish families have moved into Needham, it has broken down barriers between the Jewish and non-Jewish communities. While prejudice never disappears, great progress has been made in the last 50+ years and hopefully will continue in the years ahead. ~ David Feldman

When I first came to Needham in 1976 Needham did not close the schools for Rosh Hashanah or Yom Kippur. That was one of the first things Rabbi Sonsino fought for when he first came in 1980. ~ Arline Aransky

I have lived in Needham over 40 years... I was very involved in the school system when my children were in school, and was often the only Jew on a board or committee. It was important to me to have a Jewish voice heard and be respected...I have never experienced any anti-semitism in Needham and was proud to be a representative in every way I could. ~ Margie Glou

Ron and I have lived in Needham for 46 years. Almost from the beginning, we became involved in community projects and organizations. In those days, it was rare to have Jews on the board of Community Council. We may have been the first two. Ron was the first Jew elected to the Memorial Park Trustees. I became the only serving Jew on the Board of Library Trustees. There was but one Jewish selectman, Ben Horowitz, and few represented at Town Meeting. How much that has changed! There are Jews represented on every board, and many serve as Town Meeting members. Until recently, three of the five members of the Board of Selectmen were Jewish. In every way, Needham has been a more inclusive town. ~ Lois Sockol

*I think there has been a lot of outreach to various faith communities through the Interfaith Council.
~ Trina Novak*

The town has become much more welcoming for Jews. When I first moved to Needham, my child experienced anti-semitism in the public schools. I doubt that would happen now. I am concerned about the building of so many mega-mansions and what that means for the socio-economic diversity of the town. I am anxious to see what the presence of liquor stores will do to the fabric of the town. I hope it helps economically, but it will change the tenor in town. Glad to see so many restaurants in town. ~ Anonymous

A Growing and Thriving Jewish Community

The Jewish community continues to grow and that's a marvelous thing. ~ Bev Luskin

Needham is a welcoming and pluralistic community for people of different faith traditions and other differences, and I trust it will become increasingly so. ~ Bob Lurie

The community as a whole has accepted their Jewish neighbors. ~ Irving Baker

The Jewish community has become a part of the total community. ~ Jerry Silverstein

Living in Needham since 1974, the Jewish community has expanded, becoming more dynamic and energetic, committed to both Jewish life and active participation in Needham community life at large. The small undercurrent of anti-semitism that existed in this town in the 1970's and 80's and that would occasionally peek through in words uttered by children at school, as well as in more overt incidents, seems now genuinely a thing of the past. Needham appears to have evolved into a tolerant and pluralistic community.

~ Ron and Cindy Matloff

I have seen our temple truly go from strength to strength - from Rifat to Jay and Todd - we have the finest rabbis in our embrace. ~ Lucille Sands

*The temple community has so much to offer that you can be involved in prayer and projects around the clock.
~ Anonymous*

About the Author

Amy Willis is a freelance writer and editor, and a member of Temple Beth Shalom since 2002. Amy lives in Needham with her husband, Ken, and children, Juliana and Daniel.