



# ANNUAL REPORT 5782-83 / 2022-23



# CELEBRATING OUR FIRST 75 YEARS

Plans are underway to do three significant things all at the same time as we celebrate our 75th Anniversary in 5784 (2023-24): Write a new Torah scroll for our congregation, hold a 75th Anniversary gala, and secure our future by coming together in our new Annual Giving Program.

**People—all of us—are the heart of Beth Israel Center.** Our members invest time, talent, money, and love, showing up for each other to celebrate, provide comfort, uphold our traditions, and bring healing to our world.

Our volunteers and professional staff work hard to coordinate what you see and everything behind the scenes so that we can be a community that upholds and lives our values.

As we gear up to celebrate our 75th Anniversary in 2024, we are responding to the demand that we provide the kind of programming that thriving synagogues need today. The time has come to launch a new Annual Giving Program to replace a system that does not meet our needs.

Come to the Annual Meeting on Sunday afternoon, July 9, to hear more about all three components of our 75th Anniversary celebration and how they connect to ensure a bright future for Beth Israel Center.





# FROM YOUR PRESIDENT



We stand on the cusp of our milestone 75th Anniversary. Your Board of Directors, our many lay volunteers, and our small professional staff have used this approaching milestone to reflect deeply upon where Beth Israel Center has been and where we need to be.



We have weathered the worst of the covid pandemic and have joyously returned to prayer and programs, school and s'machot, Kiddush and kehilla. Most of the time, our daily routine—while not exactly like before—is comfortable and allows us to renew friendships, interests, and commitments. At Beth Israel Center, this means close and careful attention to aligning our members' needs and desires with our religious, programmatic, and social justice offerings. We applaud each and every person who commits to these efforts. Still, our desires continue to exceed our offerings, and our budget needs to expand if we're to meet all of our goals.



Our 75th Anniversary reflections reveal that we are a vibrant and growing kahal—a success story in a challenging time for religious institutions, including many of the congregations that affiliate with the Conservative Movement. At the same time, a close examination of our budget shows that our current revenues cannot fully fund our many efforts to develop new, expanded programming that our members want us to provide. We also see that the very basic costs of operating our facility have increased markedly. That is why we are exploring a new approach to financial resource development focused on each of us supporting the organization with an annual contribution that both feels appropriate and acknowledges the very real needs of an institution that is not just surviving, but thriving. As you hear more in the next few months about our updated Annual Giving Program, please think hard about what Beth Israel Center means to you, and how you can demonstrate your commitment to its important mission. Your Board of Directors, its Development Committee, and our professional staff are ready to talk and listen closely.



*Bennett Berson, President*

## FROM YOUR RABBI

I used to write songs. I once produced an album containing my entire repertoire minus one, the first song I ever wrote, whose chorus went: "I want to be real, and I want to be part. I want to feel my life [as] a universal heart." Deeming it unsophisticated, I cut it.

I was mistaken. I now understand that to live authentically, to be significant, to belong, and to be accountable to a story larger than oneself form, for most people, the essential components of a thriving life. As Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel stated eloquently, "The cry for meaning is a cry for ultimate relationship, for ultimate belonging." Organizational leaders understand that member engagement requires that members experience personal significance, interconnectedness, and purpose.

People remain with organizations when they feel they belong, can grow, and are connected to a larger purpose. Synagogues today require precisely the core commitments affirmed in our Strategic Plan: Belonging, Joy, Learning, and Purpose. I am proud of the steps we have taken to live into those values. They have yielded membership growth, and they strengthen connections among members who participate in the variety of programming we offer.

Our staff is committed to expanding these efforts and needs the entire kahal to join us in taking the next steps.

I look forward to celebrating Beth Israel Center's 75th year secure in the belief that we are positioning ourselves to meet the challenges of today's synagogues. Our sages taught:

**"אם אין קמח, אין תורה. אם אין תורה, אין קמח"**

**If there is no sustenance, there is no Torah. If there is no Torah, there is no sustenance. (Avot 3:17)**

This is a time to celebrate and honor who we are and can be. It calls for new energy and ideas. I believe we have the necessary warm and thoughtful spirit. I feel blessed to be on this journey with each and every one of you.

*With love,*  
Rabbi Betsy / רב בתיה



**Rabbi Betsy Forester**



**Elissa Pollack**  
Executive Director



**Dr. Stephanie Kirklin**  
Education Director



**Deborah Hoffman**  
Program/Youth Director



**Katie Hauth**  
Administrative Assistant



# WE SHALL WRITE FOR OURSELVES



After hearing almost a year ago—at what could have been his 613th Ritual Committee meeting—about Beth Israel Center's need for a new Torah scroll, Si Hellerstein told his wife, Billie, and grown children Joey, Judy, and Lisa, about the condition of our Torah scrolls and that we need a new Torah scroll.

"The news came at the perfect moment for our family," Joey recalls. "Covid had abated, we were all fortunate to be more or less healthy, the grandkids largely off to college and beyond. Lisa had recently ridden out covid in Madison with our folks, and seen the way the community came together during hard times. All the Hellerstein kids were coming to Madison more frequently post-covid, savoring the present and remembering the past. It all caused the extended family to reflect on Beth Israel and our community there—the formative role it played for us kids, and the central role it continues to play in our parents' lives. Especially given my dad's decades of service as a Gabbai and Ba'al Kriya, a new Torah scroll was such a natural opportunity for us to embody our family's involvement with Beth Israel in a tangible way—a sacred object of learning and scholarship, and also something softly wrapped in warmth at the very center of the shul. It was clear it would mean a lot to us all."

Now, as we await the arrival of Beth Israel Center's first new Torah scroll in our history, we extend our immense gratitude to the Hellerstein family for making it possible with their generous combined family gift.

It is incumbent upon all of us to follow their example, as we work to secure funding for at least one more Torah scroll.



# A NEW TORAH SCROLL

Many of our members can relate to Judy's sense of Beth Israel being her "second childhood home." When she thinks of Beth Israel, what comes to mind is "the comfortable familiarity of regular Shabbat mornings spent there, the many weekday and Sunday hours spent in Hebrew School and Midrasha, the easy social connections of USY, and pick-up basketball in the social hall.

"Beth Israel was just woven completely into the fabric of my childhood," she continues, adding: "We grew up in Madison without any relatives nearby. But the close friendships with many Beth Israel members that our family has been fortunate to have made over almost 60 years has created deep connections for all of us that extend across the globe and down the generations to our children. I am grateful for all of those friendships."

Not surprisingly, Lisa expresses a similar fondness. "Beth Israel has been a part of my life since I was a small child," she explains. "I remember being a child in Talmud Torah and Junior Congregation, a teenager in Midrasha and USY, a college student coming to services while home for vacation, a bride under the chuppah, and a young mother watching my children up on the bimah for Adon Olam. When I go to Beth Israel now, I am delighted to see old friends and to meet new people. Beth Israel continues to be a wonderful shul and a wonderful community."

**When the community comes together on September 4, 2023, to collectively complete our new Torah** and welcome her to her new home, Joey says it will "warm [his] heart to see [his parents, Si and Billie,] recognized in the community for their decades of service, much of it done quietly and out of view." He is "proud to give back to this place that helped raise me."



# INCOME

*Examples of some of the specific funds that support special programs, projects, and purchases outside of our operating budget:*

- Building Capital Fund
- Building Maintenance Fund
- Alfred A. & Lois Frank Congregational Life Fund
- Herman Goldstein Fund
- Irving and Dorothy Levy Rabbi's Discretionary Program Fund
- Judith W. Pierotti Social Justice Fund
- Prayerbook & Ritual Objects Fund
- Rabbi's Discretionary Fund
- AJ & Celia Rosenberg Library Fund
- Talmud Torah Fund
- David Temkin Camp Ramah Fund
- Weinshel Torah Maintenance and Repair Fund
- Youth Fund

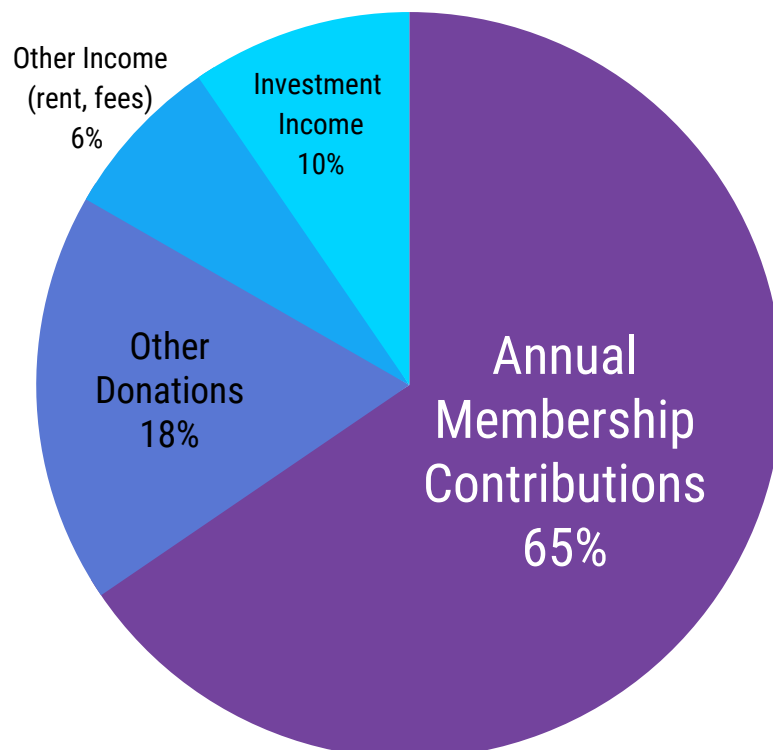
*Questions? Ask Elissa Pollack.*

**Beth Israel Center depends on annual membership contributions**, tribute and memorial gifts, and other donations **for 83 percent of our annual operating income**, as shown below.

In addition to annual gifts, donors often choose to contribute to specific funds, which help us afford special programs, projects, and purchases outside of our operating budget. See the list on the left.

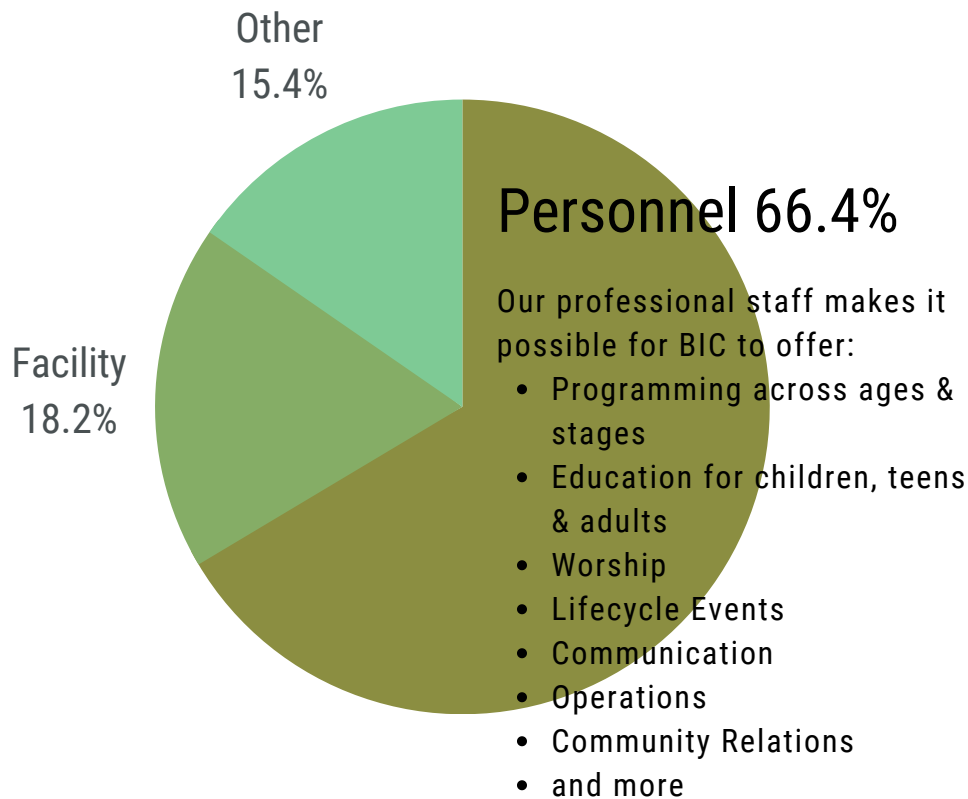
Participation in our Annual Giving Program and donations to our General Fund have the greatest and most direct impact on your Beth Israel Center experience.

## Annual Operating Income Sources:





# EXPENSES



Like all service organizations, we invest more in **Personnel** than any other budget area. We need to increase this investment to a sustainable level so we can build a vibrant future.

The amount we spend to maintain our **Facility** has increased significantly due to rising costs of products and services, even though "Facility" remains a smaller percentage of our expenses.

**Other** reflects new investments in our future, accounting for the first new Torah scroll and development costs related to our 75th Anniversary plans. "Other" also reflects sharp increases in insurance rates.



# BALANCE SHEET



## Summary (thousands)

Assets	As of April 30,	
	2023	2022
Cash	266	128
Other Current Assets	153	101
Endowment Investments	1,900	1,890
Other Investments	1,503	1,546
<b>Total Assets</b>	<b>\$3,823</b>	<b>\$3,664</b>

## Liabilities and Net Assets

Current Liabilities	21	74
Endowment Net Assets	3,044	2,996
Other Unrestricted Net Assets	759	594
<b>Total Liabilities and Net Assets</b>	<b>\$3,823</b>	<b>\$3,664</b>

This summary shows Beth Israel Center's Assets and Liabilities as of April 30, 2023 and April 30, 2022.

The increases reflect early contributions to our 75th Anniversary efforts, including gifts toward the acquisition and care of Torah scrolls, as well as other generous gifts.

Plans include that some of these increased assets will be allocated in the coming year to a second Torah scroll.

# BOARD OF DIRECTORS

## Your 2022-23 Board of Directors

Bennett Berson, President  
Jennie Edes-Pierotti, Immediate Past President  
Michal Engelman, President-Elect  
Yonah Drazen, VP-Ritual  
Jen Hadley, VP-Education  
Steve Jellinek, VP-House  
Marci Katz, VP-Finance  
Zach Masa-Myers, Secretary  
Ziva Wear, VP-Membership

Mimi Aron, director-at-large  
Livia Asher, Investments Committee Chair  
Beth Fisher, director-at-large  
Joshua Gabai, director-at-large  
Sylvia Grunes, Women's League Representative  
Sally Jones, Social Justice Committee Co-Chair  
Allan Levin, director-at-large  
Maureen Miner, Personnel Committee Chair  
Judy Pierotti, Social Justice Committee Co-Chair  
Steve Sheiffer, director-at-large  
Judith Sone, director-at-large

**One nominee for Board service beginning in 2023, to be presented for election at the Annual Membership Meeting, is Michelle Minkus.**

***In addition, Livia Asher is being nominated for a new term in her current position.***



Bennett Berson



Jennie Edes-Pierotti



Michal Engelman



# JOY, LEARNING, & PURPOSE: YOU BELONG HERE

Check out these highlights of our novel and traditional offerings...

## **Social Gatherings**

Boating, Arboretum walks, meet-ups at the Terrace, fruit picking, and other gatherings bring us together and foster connections across all ages.

## **Young Adult Programming**

Young adults find community at Beth Israel Center—participating regularly on Shabbat and holidays, socializing in shul and out and about, and bringing vibrancy, skills, and enthusiasm to our kahal.

## **Young Family Programming**

Young families find each other, learn a little, and joyfully celebrate in our new B'Yachad B'Kef (Together in Fun) programs and our long-running Matchilim family service on Shabbat mornings.

## **Social Justice Work**

Now in the third year of our work with the Nehemiah Center for Urban Leadership, our Confronting Racism efforts are focusing on criminal justice, our emerging relationship with EXPO (Ex-incarcerated People Organizing) and recruiting another BIC cohort to take the Justified Anger course together this fall. We are also planning a trip to the U.S.-Mexico border to witness and lend a hand in the refugee crisis.

## **Greening**

In 2023, we completed our long-anticipated move away from disposable plates, cutlery and cups for Shabbat kiddush to Corelle plates, stainless steel flatware, and glass cups and mugs. We're also proud of the solar panels on our roof, chemical-free lawn care, and regular use of cloth tablecloths. Watch for more green developments and contact Cynthia Hirsch or Leslie Fields via email at [cynthiaraehirsch@gmail.com](mailto:cynthiaraehirsch@gmail.com) or [lindfield1144@gmail.com](mailto:lindfield1144@gmail.com) to get involved in sustaining these efforts.

## **Lifelong Learning**

Members broaden and deepen their knowledge and connections to Judaism and each other through our Adult Ed Mini-Series, monthly "Let's Talk About Israel" discussions, visiting scholars, and more. Stay tuned for details about Rabbi Josh Warshawsky's artist-in-residence Shabbat-Chanukah with us, coming up December 8-9, 2023.

# COMMITTEES

Beth Israel Center has many active committees that foster belonging, joy, learning and purpose for our kahal.

**Budget/Finance**

Builds our annual budget

**Bylaws**

Updates our bylaws to reflect institutional growth and evolution

**Chesed**

Provides loving support to members experiencing infirmity, isolation, and bereavement

**Development**

Secures our financial future, focusing on long-term sustainability

**House**

Cares for our facility, inside and out.

**Investments**

Advises the Board to ensure wise and effective fiscal stewardship of our investments.

**Membership**

Engages prospective, new, and long-time members with each other and our congregational family

**Mikvah**

Explores ways to expand awareness and use of our beautiful and accessible mikvah

**Personnel**

Develops policies and procedures that support our staff and help them serve the kahal

**Ritual**

Meets a wide variety of needs in our kahal with thoughtful approaches to worship and tradition

**Safety & Welcoming**

Plans and evaluates how we safely welcome people into our building

**Social Justice**

Leads us to confront racism, address food insecurity, support diversity, equity and inclusion within the congregation and beyond, and more

**Talmud Torah**

Guides our nationally recognized school program

*If you would like to get involved with any of these committees or with other endeavors, please contact our 2022-24 President, Bennett Berson, at [president@bethisraelcenter.org](mailto:president@bethisraelcenter.org).*

# AT BIC, WE...



learn  
lift  
eat  
sail  
schmooze  
grow  
celebrate



and do our part to repair our world



- Morah Elissa and Kitah Bet
- Meredie learns to lift
- Adrienne and Barry with another masterful menu
- MOUSY and Geshen go boating
- Sara and Rav Batya schmooze
- Simon and Isaac smile
- Jim and Ziva dolled up for Purim
- MOUSY makes a meal





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