

# Spirituality and Engagement Committee Report

Temple Beth Ami 2020

Committee members

Elaine Amir, Chair; Shari Davidson, Eric  
Myers, Rabbi Pokras, Shelly Gordon

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,  
אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו  
וְצִוָּנוּ לְעִסּוֹק בְּצַרְכֵי צְבוּר:

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# What is Spirituality?



Spirituality is notoriously hard to define because it is ultimately the experience of an individual - spirituality will be experienced differently by people depending on their theology, their attitudes, their perspectives about the world

Some of the words often associated with spirituality include:

**meaningful;** purposeful; *experience-based*; healing;  
God; the Divine; life force; clarity; awareness; **sacred**;  
mysterious; *love*; vulnerability; transformation; journey

Source: Institute for Jewish Spirituality <http://www.jewishspirituality.org/our-spiritual-practices/>

# What is Spirituality?

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## The Search for One's Own Spiritual Self

- An individual endeavor and unique for each person
- Mindful meaning making

Congregation can provide space, leadership and inspirational programming that enables each of us to find our spiritual self

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# Research



- Focused on determining the sources of inspiration each person could identify from their own experiences as members of a congregation
  - Interviewed 17 individuals who are active members of religious organizations, both Jewish and Christian
- Readings on Spirituality by:
  - Rabbi Larry Hoffman of Synagogue 3000
  - Rabbi Sid Schwartz of the Reconstructionist movement
  - Methodist Bishop Robert C. Schnase
- Phone interview with Rabbi Adam Scheldt of Buffalo, N.Y. who founded a Spirituality Center
- Review of home meeting notes

# Summary of Findings

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- Primary incentive to attend services or programs was the presence of a charismatic, energized, spiritual and welcoming rabbi or pastor
  - Congregational leaders inspired congregants through personal outreach/engagement and inspiring sermons
  - Engagement increased when religious literature connected to daily life, lessons resonated
  - Music and the opportunity to join in singing were key attractions
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# Summary of Findings

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- Social activism is a major source of gratification and pride - feel enriched by doing good works
  - Study and learning are significant sources of spiritual inspiration – even when it is peripheral to a more social event
  - Congregants like to be part of a group with similar backgrounds and beliefs
  - Successful congregations experiment constantly to determine what works - not afraid to fail
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# Spiritual Fulfillment



## Create opportunities through:

- Logic: Making congregants aware of how activities, services, projects serve to keep Judaism alive and keep us together as a people
- Emotion: A safe space. Being mindful of how we meet our needs for emotional/spiritual satisfaction through music, sermons, poetry, prayer and experiences
- Ethics: Establishing the Jewish basis for activities of Tikkun Olam, making a positive difference in the world, as practiced throughout Jewish history

# Recommendations



- Clarify what is specifically Jewish about the numerous activities and programs which congregants enjoy
- Make the connection to Jewish religion, culture, history by taking a moment to explain the connection at every event, meeting, gathering

*Everything through  
a Jewish lens*



# Recommendations



For example:

- Intensify the excellent musical programs to bring congregants together to serve, to play and to create community
- Explore unique programs to reach the unengaged (new members, seniors, singles, LGBTQ+, young families, millennials)
- Introduce religious sources (Torah, Tanakh, philosophy, history, etc,) into ALL programming
- Create an ongoing Spirituality Committee
- Offer more experiential programs (meals together, shuk, Vashti's banquet, Tu B'Shvat seder, Acted-out Torah stories, mindful baking, hiking)
- Create a spirituality center (a branded initiative within the synagogue) - a Welcome Wagon inviting all comers

# “New” Spiritual Practices for consideration



- Retreats – development of mindful awareness, a mini-sabbatical, a time for renewal – support the development of a spiritual openness and trust
- Prayer - guided exploration in practice so that each person can discover for themselves what “works” and what does not “work” for them as pray-ers (piyyutim – religious poetry set to music)
- Mindfulness meditation – training the mind to cultivate attention, has deeply Jewish roots
- Embodied practices – yoga, movement to restore a sense of physical awareness to our intellectual and spiritual lives
- Studying Torah - address the needs of seekers for teachings that connect text to experience, that offer the esoteric in an accessible and meaningful manner (mussar)
- Spiritual Directors/check-ins (like life coach for spirituality)