

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Lately, I have read about the changes that are happening in Jewish communities around the world. Not only have I read about this phenomenon, I have experienced it. When I was in Cuba I visited what was left of the Jewish community. It is a miracle that they still exist since most of the Jews exited the country. A small number of people are trying to keep the Jewish community alive. They truly believe that we are one people, one nation and that we all need to prevent another Shoah. Members of the synagogues participate, study and learn ways to deepen their traditions. The future though, of Cuban Jews, rests on the shoulders of the local teens. If they decide to leave Cuba to start a new life with more opportunities in Israel, the United States or Panama, they will take what is left of Cuba's once thriving Jewish community with them.

London's East End has been home to a vibrant community of Jews since the 1880's. Today, in this area, once home to almost 200 synagogues, just four functioning synagogues remain; three Ashkenazi and one Sephardi. By the end of the 1930's thousands had moved further east. Today there are about 1000 Jews living there. Praying there are tourists and visiting youth groups. Also, there are a number of young Jewish professionals who decided to live where they work. The leaders of the synagogues, especially the Sephardi synagogue are trying everything to move the synagogue forward, including welcoming new people, hosting meals, promoting and sharing information about the synagogue, cultural events, lectures and services. Bevis Marks Synagogue has held regular services continuously for more than 300 years, garnering an underlying commitment of the people within the community to its preservation.

In the *New York Times* in April there was a story about the Jews of Bukhara, Uzbekistan. This community was one of the oldest and largest Jewish communities in Jewish history. There are now 270,000 Muslims and 100-150 Jews. The Muslims and the Jews co-exist. They work together and go to school together. There is a constant exodus because it is difficult to find a minyan or a spouse for any young man or woman of an eligible age. A few Jews are determined to stay put in Bukhara so as to preserve a Jewish presence that, according to local lore, dates to the Lost Tribes of Israel, exiled from their homeland in the eighth century B.C.E. "Without history, you have no future," said Abram Iskhakov, the president of the Bukhara Jewish Community. "Just being here to preserve our history, our language and our traditions is a big victory."

Recently, the Jewish Federation of Pittsburgh visited Morocco. They found that the Jewish community, at one time 350,000 strong, is now reduced to 3000 Jews, most of whom are located in Casablanca. The American Jewish Joint Distribution committee is providing Jewish knowledge and identity to the next generation. In other cities there is much more sadness. In Rabat there are only 75 Jews, and the leaders know that their children will never again live in Morocco.

These are but a few examples of the changing demography of today's Jewish population. The question that comes to mind is what will the Jewish future bring to Jews around the world? Some say that there may not even be a Jewish people with the high rate of assimilation and intermarriage. Other questions have plagued the Jews over the centuries, but we have continued to survive and thrive. We could be a smaller community with a diverse population, including a significant number of Jews by choice. Of course, outside factors play a role in this future as well. What I think about is that for the present, we must promote the passion that these dying Jewish communities have on the importance of being Jewish and how much it means to them. They study, they participate and they reach out to others to make sure that their threads to Judaism are not broken. I am not sure if we realize how fortunate we are to have the choice to pray, to learn and to keep our religion alive here in the United States, and especially at Temple B'nai Israel. Let's all do our best to ensure a Jewish future. We are having our Annual Meeting on Sunday morning June 3, having finished the 2017-2018 year. Let us look ahead to 2018-2019 and make it a banner year for Temple B'nai Israel. We need you to make this dream a reality!

Janice Greenwald
President