Welcome Back to Beth Shalom!

As we are poised to enter our second century, we have come to understand that our future depends on our willingness to think creatively about what this congregation can be. Contained within this booklet you will find a vision for a new wing of Beth Shalom – not a physical wing, but an intellectual, cultural, and spiritual space – that has the potential to secure our future as the community center for progressive Jewish engagement in Western Pennsylvania. Our goal is to create more entry points, to invite more people in, and to give us more tools for enriching lives through community, lifelong Jewish learning, and spiritual growth. Please take a few moments to look this over.

Shanah tovah! A year of meaning, of understanding, of trust and patience and building the future to you, your family, and the entire community.

Rabbi Seth Adelson
Executive Summary

Purpose:
accessible portals to Jewish engagement for the entire community

Why do we need this?
To reframe the synagogue model for better sustainability

LIMMUD PORTAL (Jewish learning):
Inform, guide, and infuse, with a sense of the sacred, every aspect of our lives through Jewish learning.

Future initiatives:
● Traditional “hevruta”-style partnership learning
● Small-group learning, retreats and outdoor experiences
● Social programs with a learning component
● Special events featuring the avant-garde of contemporary Jewish learning

HESED PORTAL (acts of loving kindness):
Raise the level of awareness and dialogue to engage more people in our community in social action.

Future initiatives:
● Bring in high-profile speakers
● Train volunteers to visit the ill and homebound
● Prepare food to deliver to shiv'ah homes or homes of the ill

MINDFULNESS PORTAL:
Offer alternative means to achieve spiritual reflection to those for whom the traditional synagogue service does not resonate.

Future initiatives:
● New modes of tefillah / prayer, including yoga, meditation
● Lectures and guest speakers who are current in teaching mindfulness and the intersection with Jewish practice

CULTURE PORTAL:
Provide enriching exposure to accomplished Jewish authors, musicians and artists to inspire members of the community of all ages and interests

ISRAEL PORTAL:
Deepen our relationships not only with Israel but also with the cultural and spiritual connections it offers.

Future initiatives:
● Lectures by Israeli authors, artists, academics, journalists
● Musical, dance and theater performances by Israeli artists
● Regular congregational trips for various affinity groups, building stronger connections with Israel and Israelis
● Holiday and special event program aimed both at Israelis in Pittsburgh as well as American Jews
Introduction:

As Congregation Beth Shalom enters its second century, we aim to build a new center for Jewish life and learning that will reach into and beyond the membership of the congregation. The goal is to provide a new range of programming that will benefit the Squirrel Hill community and transform Jewish life in Pittsburgh by providing new and accessible portals to Jewish engagement and lifelong Jewish learning.

Concept:

The foundation of Judaism is a commitment to the compelling, ever recurring question: "How do I become the best person I can be?" Derekh is Beth Shalom's acknowledgment of and commitment to creating accessible portals to Jewish learning and experience for anyone who seeks answers to captivating, essential questions. Derekh will be the address in Squirrel Hill for those for whom Jewish identity is faithful, ethical, cultural, or for anybody who simply wants to broaden their perspective and heighten their daily experience. The hub of this new initiative will be the Open Community Beit Midrash, a dedicated, contemporary space at Beth Shalom, which will feature programming, speakers, films, mindfulness activities, music, and so forth, all intended to make new connections and transform our community’s relationship with Jewish tradition.

Why do we need this?

Increasingly, individuals are rejecting the traditional institutions of Jewish life, particularly synagogues. While there are many reasons for this, it is undeniable that Judaism is a communal tradition, and that strong institutions yield strongly identified Jews who are connected to their tradition and understand and benefit from its thousands of years of wisdom. One reason that synagogue affiliation is declining is that synagogues have not made a good case for why what they do is valuable. Most Jews think of synagogues on a fee-for-service basis: your membership entitles you to attend services and gives you the assistance of the clergy and staff when needed.

However, the potential for the contemporary synagogue is much greater. The synagogue traditionally fulfills two roles: in Hebrew, "Beit Kenesset," a place of gathering (i.e. for services, celebrations, and lifecycle events), and "Beit Midrash," a place for learning the lessons of Jewish texts, lessons which are as fresh and applicable today as they were in the ancient rabbinic study halls. By rethinking the synagogue model to highlight the Beit
Midrash component as much as the Beit Knesset component, we have the potential to reinvigorate Jewish life here in Pittsburgh and around the world.

Why Beth Shalom?

Congregation Beth Shalom is growing. Our Early Learning Center is bursting at the seams. Synagogue membership has increased by more than 6% in the last year. An infusion of young, committed families has enlivened the congregation.

Beth Shalom is poised to be the center of Jewish learning for a number of reasons:

- The core membership of the congregation is committed to learning and engaging with traditional and yet progressive Judaism and their enthusiasm will bring others in.
- As the largest congregation in Squirrel Hill, we have the potential to reach the greatest number of people.
- Our building has room to accommodate more activity, including space which can be dedicated for Beit Midrash activities, as well as a large sanctuary that can accommodate high-profile presentations with wide appeal.
- Our location is ideal within Squirrel Hill, close to the central business district and easily accessible to the community we intend to reach.

As the only affiliated Conservative congregation in Squirrel Hill, Beth Shalom is the neighborhood’s official home to traditional, egalitarian Jewish practice that is aware of and deeply engaged with current social trends, and committed to maintaining both our relationship with the Jewish past while creating an open, inclusive Jewish future. Now is the time to capitalize on the congregation’s recent successes to craft a new model that will continue to engage more people.

Who is Derekh Designed to Engage?

Although we hope to engage the members of Beth Shalom, a primary goal is to reach beyond the Beth Shalom core to the wider community beyond, to open new portals to those who might not otherwise be heavily engaged in Jewish life. We hope to target:

- Current members of Beth Shalom:
  - Highly-engaged members
  - Less-engaged members
- Non-member affinity groups (a non-comprehensive list):
  - Young professionals
    - Parents with young children
  - Interfaith families
  - Empty nesters
  - Midlife singles
  - Active senior citizens
  - Homebound
Non-Jews who are interested in Judaism
LGBTQ community

Given Beth Shalom's experience in the launch and subsequent success of the Joint Jewish Education Program (JJEP) in collaboration with Rodef Shalom Congregation, we are eager to expand our partnerships with other Pittsburgh Squirrel Hill congregations which are energized by the Derekh concept. This collaborative model has proven to expand the capacity for each congregational partner while maintaining our respective denominational and congregational identities. We invite our congregational neighbors to explore partnerships with us as we develop programmatic offerings for each of our portals.

Programming will be organized through five portals:
- The Limmud (Jewish learning) Portal / שער הלימוד
- The Hesed (acts of lovingkindness) Portal / שער חסד
- The Mindfulness Portal / שער הערבנות
- The Culture Portal/ שער התרבות
- The Israel Portal / שער הארץ

The Limmud (Jewish learning) Portal / שער הלימוד

Maimonides codified an eternal principle of Judaism: that Jews are to study Torah from "cradle to grave." The underlying principle of the Limmud Portal is that Torah, in the most comprehensive sense of the word, has the potential to inform, guide, and infuse with a sense of the sacred every aspect of our lives. Building on Beth Shalom's stunning success in developing our award-winning Early Learning Center, our collaborative JJEP Jewish supplementary education program created and sustained with Rodef Shalom Congregation, and our varied and engaging congregational adult education offerings, the Limmud Portal will expand our community-wide offerings to offer an assortment of text-study programs, and develop adult learning offerings responsive to a wider range of participants, schedules and interests.

Future initiatives for Limmud might include:
- Small-group learning experiences in varied settings
- Retreats for different affinity groups – families with young children, empty nesters, seniors, couples, singles, etc.
- New contexts for encountering Jewish text
- Incorporating outdoor experiences
- Beit midrash "hevruta"-style partnership learning
- Social programs with a learning component
- Special events and programming that would feature the avant-garde of contemporary Jewish learning along the lines of New York’s Mechon Hadar, Rabbi David Ingber of Kehilat Romemu, Rabbi Irwin Kula of CLAL, Rabbi Benay Lappe of SVARA, Rabbi Amichai Lau-Lavie, Rabbi Judith Hauptman and Dr. Ruth Calderon
The **Hesed (acts of lovingkindness)** Portal / שעון החסד

Judaism was never meant to be only an intellectual exercise. The dynamic of *mitzvah* / commandment compels action. As Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel reflected on his experience marching to Selma with the Reverend Martin Luther King Jr., he remarked, “Even without words, our march was worship. I felt my legs were praying.” This engaging metaphor embodies the inseparable threads of faith and social justice that are woven into the fabric of our tradition. *Hesed*, which means “loving kindness,” is the principle that we all have the potential to make the world a better place through helping others.

Beth Shalom is a proud and longstanding supporter of the Squirrel Hill Food Pantry and has recently embarked on a new project providing monthly meals for the participants of the East End Ministries Circles training program. The *Hesed* Portal will expand our capacity to serve as a compassionate and proactive presence as we engage a larger circle of ethically engaged members of the community.

The goal is not merely to raise the bar of social action, but also to raise the level of awareness and dialogue on the subject to engage more people in our community in acts of *Hesed*.

Future initiatives of *Hesed* might also include:
- Bringing high-profile speakers to elevate the discourse surrounding social justice
- Training volunteers to visit the ill and homebound
- Preparing food to deliver to *shiv’ah* homes or the homes of those who are ill
- Raising the level of involvement with the Squirrel Hill Food Pantry by coordinating food drives at Beth Shalom
- Creating and send out get well and condolence cards
- Participating in tutoring and/or big brother/big sister efforts in the community
- Partnering with other social justice organizations to elevate communal involvement
- Implementing changes in our physical plant that will make the Beth Shalom building more sustainable

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The **Mindfulness Portal** / שעון הערנות

There is a sense among many contemporary Jews that the traditional synagogue service does not speak to them. And yet, people have a demonstrated need for spiritual reflection, the rare opportunity to focus in silence or to meditate on a piece of traditional liturgy or to join in fellowship with others in being transported away from the madness of the day to day.

We are entering a period of great change with respect to how we understand our relationship with the spirit, and the Beth Shalom community can and should reach beyond traditional forms of worship to connect. The synagogue has offered a very popular meditation service on High Holidays for the last few years, and we hope to build on those offerings.
Some of the pieces of this portal would be:

- Yoga
- Meditation
- New modes of *tefillah* (Jewish prayer)
- Lectures and guest speakers who are current in teaching mindfulness and the intersection with Jewish practice, e.g. Rabbi Jonathan Slater of the Jewish Spirituality Institute, Rabbi James Jacobson-Maisels

**The Culture Portal**

A close and informed reading of the *Tanakh* (the Hebrew Bible) and rabbinic literature reveals that Jewish cultural expression have always been shaped by local influences.

The Culture Portal will provide enriching exposure to accomplished Jewish authors, academics, musicians and artists to inspire members of the community of every age and interest. Examples of the kinds of presenters that we may feature include:

- Authors: Nathan Englander, Jonathan Safran Foer, Gina Nahai
- Academics: Jonathan Sarna, Ron Wolfson, Amy-Jill Levine
- Artists: Burton Morris, Moshe Safdie
- Music: Joey Weisenberg, Basya Schechter

**The Israel Portal**

From Abraham’s first encounter with the Divine, God’s covenantal commitments to our people have involved both nationhood and land ("I give this land to your progeny" *Bereishit* / Genesis 15:18), the land of Israel. From that moment, Israel has been our spiritual center.

Beth Shalom’s Israel Portal will build on Pittsburgh’s lively Federation-based partnership with the Carmiel/Misgav region of Israel to include engagement with our Israel “sister,” the Masorti Movement. Through the use of the most accessible technology, our children and youth as well as our adults can create meaningful relationships with our Israeli peers. When we introduce ourselves and our communities through Skype “visits” and the exchange of information about our histories and our communities, we will go beyond general impressions and deepen our appreciation of Israel’s culture, traditions and people. When we travel to Israel as a community, we will be meeting old friends and will immerse ourselves in an Israel that most tourist experiences miss.

We will seek to deepen our relationships not only with the people of Israel but also with the cultural and spiritual connections it offers. To that end, we hope to enhance the current local offerings with:
• Lectures by Israeli authors, artists, academics and journalists
• Musical, dance and theater performances by Israeli artists
• Israeli films
• Regular congregational trips for various demographics (e.g. empty-nesters, young families, active seniors, etc.), including enhanced opportunities for building connections with Israel and Israelis
• Holiday and special event programs aimed both at Israelis in Pittsburgh as well as American Jews

People

Derekh's professional staff will be led by a senior rabbinic presence, a person with a proven track record in Jewish education and communal life, a visionary individual with a commitment to collaborative leadership. The Derekh Director will be a full partner with Beth Shalom's senior rabbi in envisioning and setting policy and parameters for the program and will be responsible for the implementation of those policies and programs.

The Director will also operate in consultation with a dedicated lay committee consisting of members of Beth Shalom. Additional staffing needs will be addressed by the Director according to need and budget.

Space

Beth Shalom is housed in a grand, capacious building that was designed and constructed to reflect a concept of Jewish community that no longer resonates in the 21st century. A reapportionment of some of the spaces of Beth Shalom's building, coupled with a reimagining of how that space is used, is a smart choice for the future of Beth Shalom and Squirrel Hill’s Jewish community.

Among the anticipated projects that will contribute to the creative reuse of Beth Shalom’s space:

• The refurbishing of existing space as informal meeting and social exchange spaces (armchairs and sofas, coffee machines, good wifi signals, etc.).
• A thorough revamping of the building's aging HVAC systems to accommodate increased traffic in the building's numerous public meeting spaces.
• Upgrading the stage and acoustics in the Samuel and Minnie Hyman Ballroom and the Faye Rubinstein Weiss Sanctuary to serve as an appropriate venue for professional staging and webcasting of musical and theatrical performances.
• The identification and soundproofing of a space that can serve as a music/theater practice room and recording studio.
• Establishing a Beit Midrash with appropriate books and furniture, plus all the digital tools necessary for research and webcasting.
• Enhancing all the learning in our classrooms with all current available technologies for progressive and collaborative learning.
• Creating an appropriate setting for yoga and meditation.
Collaboration

The possibilities for engaging and enriching Jewish life in Squirrel Hill through partnership are plentiful. The Beth Shalom collaboration with Rodef Shalom Congregation on JJEP has demonstrated how two quite different congregations can sustain an excellent program while maintaining and enriching the identities of the collaborating congregations. Derekh will seed new collaborative partnerships among our neighboring communities in strengthening existing programs and developing new programs within any of our portals.

As a Conservative congregation, committed to the creative tension of a centrist movement, our pluralist approach to Jewish tradition makes Beth Shalom a most promising partner for any of our neighboring congregations and institutions. Our Squirrel Hill community enjoys tremendous human resources: Jewish leaders of dedication and vision who all strive to deepen and enrich Jewish life. We envision Derekh as a laboratory for testing new ideas that will enrich Jewish life and community in Pittsburgh.

Transformative Potential

The essence of contemporary Judaism is commitment to the dynamic of continuity as the tradition evolves. The visionary mitzvah of the Torah commands us to this kind of transformative rethinking in every generation:

“It is not in the heavens... Rather, near to you is the word, exceedingly, in your mouth and in your heart, to preserve it.”
(Devarim / Deuteronomy 30:12, 14)

We must respond to the needs and sensibilities and spirit of our community so that our tradition remains near to us, and that the wider Jewish population remains near to our tradition. The potential of Derekh is an expression of this defining element of Judaism: the world in which we live has transformed itself over and over again and Judaism is still alive and thriving today because our tradition, too, has transformed itself over and over again. Every portal we open in Derekh invites in yet another cohort of those seeking responsive, substantive Jewish experience.

Judaism’s greatest strength has always been its diversity in thought, culture, and action. Derekh will, through ongoing emphasis on these areas, promote ongoing spiritual growth and connection for the entire community.
Please Contribute to the
Beth Shalom Sisterhood
Flower Fund

• To beautify our Synagogue
during Shabbat and Holidays.
• To honor our clergy during the
High Holidays and Pesah.
• To lift the spirits of Sisterhood
members as they recover from
an illness or injury.

Make your check payable to Beth Shalom Sisterhood Flower Fund and return to:

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Congregation Beth Shalom Sisterhood
5915 Beacon Street, Pittsburgh, PA 15217

In Memory of: ________________________________
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Donation Amount: __________________________
As we welcome Rosh Hashanah 5777, we usher in our Centennial celebration. Our Centennial theme, *Celebrating the Warmth of the Past and the Light of Our Future*, is embodied by our Centennial logo designed by internationally recognized Pop Artist, **Burton Morris**.

Two signature events are in the works for the Centennial year, a Luncheon and a Gala.

The Centennial Luncheon will be held on **Sunday, April 23, 2017** and the Centennial Gala will be held on **Saturday, November 11, 2017**.

More details will be forthcoming in future issues of the Mishpachtenu, the Shabbat Bulletin, and our weekly emails about each of these events and other activities!

**A SPECIAL THANK YOU TO...**

**OUR HONORARY CENTENNIAL CHAIRS:**
- Ruth Ganz Fargotstein
- Bernice and Jack Meyers
- Marlene and Art Silverman

**OUR LUNCHEON CHAIRS:**
- Bunny Morris
- Elisa Recht Marlin
- Diane S. Samuels

**OUR GALA CHAIRS:**
- Neila and Daniel Bendas
- Eydie and Adam Kolko