

Beth Israel 100 Year Anniversary  
January 30, 2022  
Rabbi Lisa Vinikoor

It is so wonderful to see you all here today. Beth Israel members, friends, allys and neighbors thank you for being here. What a blessing it is to celebrate this truly momentous event for our congregation!

I want to begin by recognizing my clergy colleagues who have joined us this afternoon  
Rev. Carolyn Eklund, St. Paul's Brunswick  
Rabbi Lily Solochek, of NAZUN  
Rabbi Erica Asch of Temple Beth El in Augusta,  
Reverend Holly Morrison, Phippsburg Congregational Church

Thank you all for being here to support us.

There is a famous story in the Talmud about a great teacher name Choni<sup>1</sup>

who walks one day past a person planting a carob sapling in the ground.

Choni does the math and realizes that the person planting the sapling won't be alive in 70 years when the carob tree would finally bare fruit to eat,

And so he questions the entire endeavor.

To which the tree planter responds:

just like I found the world full of carob trees planted by my ancestors,  
so will my grandchildren find this tree here full of fruit. I plant for them.

Our Beth Israel founders were like the tree planter in this story. Full of faith that if they plant good things will grow for future generations.

Now there is a second part to the Choni story which we often don't tell.

You see this second part involves a fantastical bit of time travel

wherein Choni travels 70 years into the future.

There he sees the same carob tree  
replete with fruit.

He even meets his future great grandchildren.

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<sup>1</sup> Babylonian Talmud Taanit 23a

Then he decides to visit the *beit midrash*, the study hall, where he used to teach.

As he enters he hears the students there talking about *him*, a great teacher from long ago.

He approaches them to introduce himself- "I'm honi" he says enthusiastically."  
It's me you are talking about."

But none of the students believe him, he's not recognized, and he despairs.

Our ancient rabbis conclude from

this story that indeed being recognized

and a part of a community is one of the most important and necessary parts of human life.

This lesson of the importance of community remains as true for us today

as it did for the rabbis of the Talmud,

for the founders of this synagogue

and will certainly remain for our children, grandchildren and great grandchildren far into the future.

When Beth Israel's founders envisioned this synagogue building and congregation, they had no idea what the community would become, how it would grow and evolve, what challenges it would weather or if it would even survive.

And yet 100 years ago, they were filled with passion for Jewish life and a vision for building Jewish community here in the city of Bath.

We, their grandchildren and great grandchildren are the beneficiaries of their hope in the future.

If our founders were to magically time travel and return to Bath today in 2022, they would be honored to be recognized as laying the important groundwork for who we are today.

But not only is today about remembering and reenacting the past,

today we honor each of us here

who through your creativity,

thoughtful contributions and energy help our community to thrive.

Beth Israel Congregation, like the tree planter, may you plant seeds to enable life to blossom. May you continue to be proud of being Jewish

May you be seekers of peace and justice  
May you be devoted to deeds of loving kindness  
May you treat yourselves and others with *kavod*- respect  
May you engage deeply with Jewish tradition  
May you grow in mind, body and spirit  
May you flourish as a *kehillah kedosha*  
a holy community,  
for another 100 years, and another, and well beyond what we can even imagine.

Amen.