This past year I watched as two full-grown trees in front of a neighbor’s home were cut down. The trees appeared healthy, but I learned that they had been dying for quite some time. No one is sure why—perhaps there was a bug infestation or maybe a tree blight. Or maybe, someone suggested, when the owners built the home the roots of the tree were touched or altered, and it has just taken this long to see the effect. I am not, by any means, a botanist. I have no idea what sickened these trees, but I must say that the third explanation resonated deeply with me. In building something precious, important, and new (a home), the roots of something equally precious (the trees) were altered and eventually lost. Who can say if it was worth it? How can we measure what is gained and what is lost in a time of change?

Over the past six months, Rabbi and I have spent a great deal of time with our Board President asking these same questions. We have been examining the culture, how we connect, programming, and structure of Beth El Temple and trying to determine, as fairly new leaders, what we must build that is precious, important, and new, while doing our best to not affect the equally precious roots of what is already here. At times, we have the luxury of experimenting with change working toward positive outcomes. Adjusting to zoom services is one of these examples. This decision to move all activities online, while not made lightly, continues to be examined and evaluated by Leadership. Other decisions have pushed us to alter our roots, with the hope that such changes will encourage new life to sprout and grow.

When one takes a cursory glance at 2637 North Front Street, one may see a seemingly empty sanctuary and deserted social hall. However, when one takes the time to look more closely, one will undoubtedly witness our beloved congregation as lively as ever. Community outreach, member involvement, social action projects, social experiences...all happening together, just on a new platform.

When Beth El was born, it was surrounded by dedicated and generous families who helped us grow into what we are today. Together, as we move forward, we can plant new seeds and blossom with life in our congregation, while our temple’s deep roots are continuing to thrive during this time of change.

Happy and Healthy to my Beth El Family,

Bill Walter