

Guiding Principles for TriBEs

“When two people relate to each other, authentically and humanly, God is in the electricity that surges between them.”

- *Martin Buber*

“...friendship is not in great shape in America today. In 1985, people tended to have about three really close friends, according to the General Social Survey. By 2004, according to research done at Duke University and the University of Arizona, they were reporting they had only two close confidants. The number of people who say they have no close confidants at all has tripled over that time.”

- *David Brooks*



“Why most institutions disturb us so: they regularly treat us more as objects than as persons. We then begin to long for social structures that encourage people to reach out to one another in dialogic concern. Buber terms such a group a ‘community’...Normally this humanization of society takes place quite slowly, by individuals meeting and developing relationships...Then, as we may have experienced on a small scale in work, recreation, prayer or study, we all momentarily become bound up in a unity that does not negate our individuality but fulfills it, not person to person but in mutuality with many others.”

- *Rabbi Eugene Borowitz*

“Love and belonging are irreducible needs of all men, women, and children. We’re hardwired for connection -- it is what gives purpose and meaning to our lives. The absence of love, belonging, and connection always leads to suffering.”

- *Brene Brown*

“The Torah clearly teaches what our own life experiences affirm: We were not created alone, or to be alone. We are part of a larger community of human beings, whose presence in the world adds texture to our lives, individually and collectively. Because we know that we are not alone, we must always be aware of others as we attempt to understand the world and what it means to be alive. As a result, how we see ourselves is often dependent on how we see others and how others see us. Only in the process of recognizing the “other” can we begin to understand what being human truly means.”

- *Rabbis Kerry Olitzky and Rachel Sabath-Halachmi*

Nitzavim: TriBE - Find Your People

Atem nitzavim, hayom, kulchem lifnei Adonai –

You stand here today before God. Moses speaks to the people for the last time before they enter the Promised Land. He reminds them of their Covenant with God. He reminds them of their promise to uphold this Covenant in honor of the past and in anticipation of the future.

Standing on the cusp of change the Israelites lean in as they choose to affirm their covenant with God after a long, harrowing journey through the desert. The text explains that every Israelite stood there: from the chieftain to the water drawers, from the richest to the poorest, the oldest to the youngest, from the leaders to those fulfilling the most menial tasks. All were equal and accepted the covenant equally. This teaches us that standing together in community, in all our diversity, is critical to living a life of covenant.

The Vision for TriBEs at Temple Beth El

TriBEs are regular gatherings of five to fifteen members in people's homes, offices, and other places that promote relationship building. They are led by TriBE Leaders. Some TriBEs will connect around common interests and affinities. Other TriBEs will gather to discuss topics of deep concern or importance to their lives. All will engage in meaningful conversations and learning through curriculum provided by Temple Beth El.

TriBEs are a multi-year effort to deepen connections with one another, to Temple, to God and to the rhythms of Jewish time and life. We began with the watchword of our faith: Shema: Listening. We trained members of Temple Beth El to listen deeply to the diverse voices of our congregants. Hundreds of people met in members' homes and in small group conversations.

How did we get here?

The experience helped us discover both troubling truths and enlightening visions about our community. Geographically spread out, some members did not

realize that they live on the same block with other Temple members. People lamented that they do not have deep relationships. People are frustrated with surface-level friendships. Some people spoke about serving on a committee at Temple or even coming to the congregation for years and feeling like no one really knew them. We heard sadness that people felt imprisoned and fragmented by the broader secular culture of ambition, busyness, and superficial interactions.

We also heard a sense of possibility and optimism. People raved about the small group gatherings. They also spoke about moments of sacred connection here at Temple. Members want to connect with other Jews and build relationships that add substance, support, and meaning to their lives. Jews with deep spiritual practices and Jews with secular backgrounds told us that they want a paradigm shift in congregational life. We heard that people are ready to build face-to-face connections in a digital age and slow down in a culture that often rewards us for speeding up. We heard that people need friends who can be relied upon during the ups and downs of life. People were inspired because the experience was an invitation to share their unique gifts and insights with others. We heard that people are seeking opportunities to grow and to become the best within themselves. Perhaps we also hear a piece of ourselves in these desires.

The idea to create TriBEs developed directly out of listening to the needs of our members. Sometimes, we need the anonymity of our robust communal events. Other times, we desire smaller settings in which to grow and share in the lived experience of being a Jew. In truth, we need both large and small gathering moments: to pray, celebrate and learn from our tradition and to experience our Jewish values in personal and relatable smaller settings, where we are seen for who we are, and where we see others for who they are.

Small groups are not new to this congregation: over the years we have had Chavurot, Jewish Living Groups, Shabbat Supper Clubs, Torah Study, the

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choir and much more. What is new, however, is the structure and shared responsibility that we all shoulder in creating a more substantive web of relationships that make up our community and combine to create the Jewish world we hope to see for our future. Therefore, the TriBEs become the intentional connections that we make in order to inspire each other and transform ourselves and our world.

Imagine coming into a group of people who you do not know well. You begin to share yourself with others and open yourself to learning from others. Together you dig into our tradition and discuss big questions of life. You begin to invite each other into your homes with regularity. When you are sick or hurt or need help, the TriBE members will be there for you. When we are celebrating good times in our

lives, we are dancing and singing with members of the TriBE. When we are trying to determine how we will live with our values and even make difficult decisions, the TriBE is there for us. When we stand (*nitzavim*), well-connected with each other, we can better care for the well-being of one another.

When we stand *nitzavim*, in support of one another's spiritual growth, we will live better, richer, and fuller lives. When we stand (*nitzavim*), we gain the strength to participate in the world's healing. That is the essence of what it means to build a living and breathing community of faith that can strongly face any obstacle. This is the core of what we strive for through Temple Beth El and TriBEs. This is at the core of what it means to be a place where God dwells among us.

TriBE Vision Statement

Imagine hundreds of congregants gathering regularly in small groups to learn and laugh, to rest and rejuvenate, and to deepen connections to one another, to Temple, to the Jewish people, and to the rhythms of Jewish time and life. TriBEs will help Temple Beth El realize this future of a connected, committed membership through the formation of small groups which will:

- Focus on the lives and significant concerns of our members.
- Organize around shared interests, life stages and geographies.
- Feature shared Jewish experiences, learning and celebration.
- Be self-led by lay leaders working in a group dynamic.



Core Purpose & Mission

TriBEs are about creating relationships and deep connections that inspire personal growth and cultivate meaning, so we can transform ourselves, our communities, and our world. TriBEs are about developing stakeholders, where Temple Beth El members own their own Jewish lives and feel intimately connected to each other and our community. TriBEs are about small groups of people that are **learning together** through the pursuit of Jewish wisdom; **praying together** and developing personal spiritual practices and inspiring worship that uplifts the soul and connects to God; **Acting together** through ongoing significant acts of loving kindness and world repair; **Playing together** in fun social settings where people can relax, laugh, and be ourselves; **Caring for each other** by valuing and supporting one another in times of joy and sorrow; and are **Accountable to each other** through shared leadership that serves the best interests of the individual and community.

Our lives are at the center of the Venn-Diagram. TriBEs are about the holistic Jewish soul, opening the door to sacred encounters where the relationships developed in small groups help to cultivate relationships, inspire personal growth and meaning, so we can transform ourselves, our community, and our world.



TriBEs are intended to engage Temple Beth El members to become stakeholders and to develop a living Judaism that speaks to their daily interests, needs, concerns and aspirations. We want TriBEs to weave a strong social fabric and a meaningful and living Judaism. We want to be able to hear success stories that people can feel, experience, and touch. We want our members to say:

- My TriBE has become a center of my life.
- My TriBE is a place where I can be myself and it is non-judgmental.
- I look forward to my TriBE and it is worth making time for it.
- My TriBE is like an extended family with connection to others, responsibility for others, and accountability to others.

This is why TriBEs are focused on personal and communal transformation. On a personal level, we want our members to feel changed, different, less lonely, and unburdened because they are able to share with others, a strong feeling of belonging and connectedness - that our members are not living life alone. We want our members to feel transformed in their Jewish lives through an increased connection to their spiritual selves, the development of spiritual practices and living with Shabbat with the seasons and cycles of Jewish time.

Through small groups, members will experience Judaism as having increasing relevance to their daily lives. After time in a TriBE, we want our members to be able to say:

- My TriBE experience has helped me create better clarity about the meaning of life through Jewish learning and meaningful conversations.
- Everything about being Jewish is clearer: the importance and possibility of connectedness, accountability and responsibility to and for others.
- The increased exposure to Jewish texts and learning has helped me improve my comfort level with Judaism.
- Because of my TriBE experience, I have attended Shabbat services, or holiday worship, a program, or learning experience that I may not have previously attended.
- As a result of being in a TriBE, I feel I have increased clarity about living a Jewish life.

Key Elements of a Healthy TriBE

Expectations of Members

- Meet regularly in a home or in an agreed upon setting that is conducive to creating a safe space.
- Agree to and observe a Brit (covenant) with each other.
- Create real and honest relationships.
- Have meaningful discussions of provided materials where applicable.
- Encourage regular attendance by the majority of its members.
- Include sharing by all members.
- Create a place where members are present for each other.
- Embrace all members of the group.
- Have fun and look for joyful opportunities.
- Participate in acts of justice.
- Celebrate Shabbat, holidays, and life-cycles together.
- Attend Temple programs or larger gatherings together.
- Support group members in times of need and celebrate in times of joy.

Expectations of TriBE Leaders

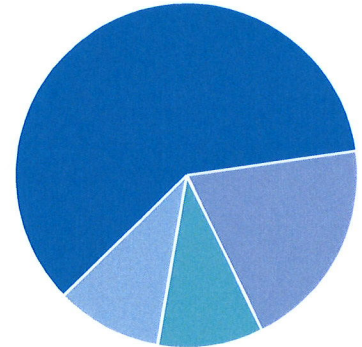
- Communicate outside of meetings.
- Tend to the group as a whole.
- Encourage shared responsibilities.
- Provide feedback to Coaches and the Core Leadership Team.

Well Balanced TriBEs

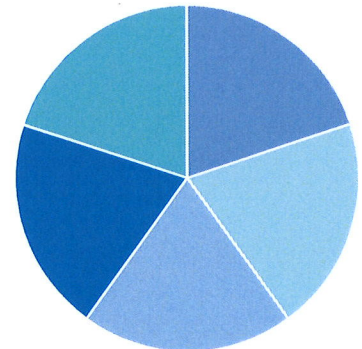
We are a vibrant Jewish community that strives to be sacred where learning, prayer, and deeds change our understanding of ourselves, our world, and our responsibilities in it. For us, community means a sense of warm welcome, meaningful relationships, and mutual responsibility. We seek to bring Jewish learning and values to our daily lives, to nurture spiritual practices, and build an exciting and relevant Judaism that elevates our souls and challenges us to make an impact on a world in need.

To bring this vision of community to life, we engage within our groups in ways that seek to balance many factors: personal vs. communal transformation; sacred time vs. regular time; listening vs. speaking; compassion vs. speaking truth; and balancing time devoted to exploring the variety of Jewish values such as prayer, learning, social justice, and commitment to Israel and Jewish communities abroad. In all of these elements, the key is to continue evaluating the health of the group and its needs. Coaches are great people to consult in these matters.

- TriBEs are about personal and communal transformation.
- TriBEs understand that **balancing Temple Beth El's values** (learn together, pray together, act together, play together, care for each other, and be accountable to each other) is the key to a healthy group.
- Not every value needs to occur when your TriBE meets. Over time, you should try to seek balance.



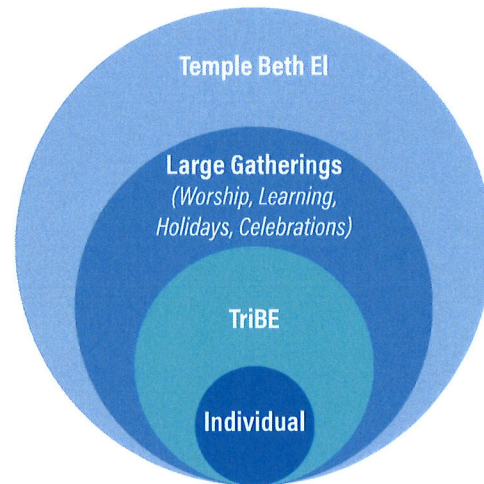
Unhealthy (Unbalanced) TriBE
Focuses too heavily on one value to the exclusion of others.



Healthy (Balanced) TriBE
Balances learning, praying, acting, playing, and caring for one another.

How Do TriBEs Fit into Temple Beth El?

We see a direct connection between the large gatherings of Temple life and the intimate gatherings in TriBEs. TriBEs are about the lived experience of being Jewish. Shabbat worship, holiday celebrations, lifelong learning and social justice will enhance and deepen the TriBE experience. Likewise, the strength of your TriBE can help lead to personal transformation that will enliven and enrich all of Temple life.



What a TriBE is NOT:

If you want a vibrant and healthy TriBE, you have to be intentional. Aim to balance Temple Beth El's values and remember that a TriBE is not the following.

A TriBE is *not* a class. If a group simply becomes an information dump or an academic pursuit, people will quickly lose the point (and you will probably lose the members of your TriBE). Many of us love learning and lectures, but if the TriBE experience becomes an intense learning space where members are pupils and the TriBE leader is a lecturer, you will miss the whole idea of building community.

A TriBE is *not* a social club. Because TriBEs are not a class, it is possible to swing to the opposite extreme by having a group that is too relationally focused and is not transformational or connected to Jewish learning. In our over-scheduled world, most people shed unnecessary responsibilities. The TriBE that operates as a social club will be the first to go. A good TriBE challenges its members to grow. The social club does not concern itself with that – which is a key reason it is not a healthy TriBE.

A TriBE is *not* a weekly meeting. Your role as a TriBE Leader is to help create a positive and intentional experience. You will schedule TriBE gatherings around work, kids, and vacations. A group that meets infrequently risks losing its identity quickly. You should work hard to build and maintain relationships. The meeting frequency should not feel like a chore either. It also should not feel like a poorly thrown-together meeting designed around the convenience

of the group members. It may be worthwhile to offer a few options from which the group can rank/choose so mutually convenient dates/times are selected.

A TriBE is *not* just a group of five to fifteen. You can have a vibrant TriBE with four or twenty – it just depends on how you handle the time, how you share responsibility of guiding the group and its discussion. Do not get hung up on the total group numbers. Focus on the experience of the TriBE!

A TriBE is *not* just “home-based.” We encourage you to begin meeting in homes and in settings where meaningful conversations and sharing can occur. Over time, as your group knows each other better, the locations may change. Find places that are right for you: homes, a nature trail, outside venues, are all acceptable places to gather. We hope that your TriBE will also participate in the larger gatherings of Temple life (Shabbat, holiday celebrations, educational programs, etc.).

A TriBE is *not* group therapy. People in your TriBE will likely share aspects of their personal lives. The discussions will be enriched through the sharing that intimacy and safety provide. Remember, the TriBE is not a time for members of the group to get off-track and describe and discuss their personal problems in great detail. But it is okay for people to share their struggles! Acknowledge pain with silence. Remember, no fixing, advising, saving or setting straight. No advice is necessary. Use the Brit to encourage people to respect one another and bring their full presence and attention to the group.