Barbara Penzner Transcript

Ronda Spinak: Thank you, first of all, for coming in. It's a privilege to be able to speak with you this morning.

Barbara Penzner: Thank you. It's an honor.

RS: If you could just state your name and tell us a little bit about what you're doing in your rabbinate, just to start?

BP: My name is Barbara Penzner, and I'm currently Rabbi of Temple Hillel B'nai Torah in West Roxbury, which is in Boston, Massachusetts.

RS: Great. Perfect. So I'm going to take you back a little bit first to your youth, and I would like you to share with us a sacred memory that you have around something Jewish from your youth.

BP: I grew up in Kansas City, in the suburbs, and my parents were kind of an intermarriage. I think every marriage is an intermarriage. My mother grew up with a father who was very traditional and immigrant parents. My father's parents were born in America, and he was brought up in a Reform tradition. By the time I came along, I was the fourth child. We moved to Kansas City, and we joined a Conservative synagogue. One of the fondest memories I have is Hanukkah when we would all gather around the piano. My family is very musical, and my father had gone to the High School of Music and Art, and he was a music teacher. My mother and father both played piano. And at Hanukkah, they would bring out the piano and play every single song from the Harry Cooper Smith album, and we would stand around and sing. We always got to "Ma'oz Tzur" at the end, and we sang in four-part harmony. That was really Hanukkah. We lit candles. We would have presents. We would each give different presents each night.

We didn't get a lot of presents. It was the singing. That was really the most powerful memory for me.

RS: Nice. Beautiful. Can you describe a little bit about your Jewish upbringing? You obviously were raised in the conservative movement. Maybe share a little bit about some defining moments in terms of shaping you to become a rabbi?

BP: Okay. My family had Shabbat dinner every Friday night with candles and full Kiddush, and we all participated. My parents made sure I went to synagogue every Shabbat, though they didn't go. I loved Hebrew school. When I was in third grade, I had the most wonderful teacher, Tsivia Gaba. She was my teacher for two years. She taught us to read Hebrew. When I was in third grade, a defining moment was when she submitted my name to the rabbi as the junior Jew of the week. I got honored in third grade in the synagogue, and then on Sunday in Sunday school, I came up and led the Ashrei prayer, which I'd never learned, but I'd heard enough. I still can't believe I did it. That was a major boost, a real honor for a third grader. She encouraged me, and Rabbi Gershon Hadas, who was the rabbi emeritus, encouraged me to go to Camp Ramah when I was in fifth/sixth grade. I started at Herzl [Camp]. I went to Camp Ramah after that and went to Camp Ramah every summer until high school when I went on the Ramah seminar to Israel. That was a wonderful Jewish place for me. It's where I learned to daven because we davened every day. But I also learned to pray. We had special times [inaudible] where each of us would go off on our own and create our own prayer. I remember sitting under a very big spreading tree and contemplating God one weekday morning. So, I learned a lot there. I learned Hebrew. I learned Israeli dancing. That was a major part of shaping my Jewish identity. Interesting that even though I went through Camp Ramah, I went to Israel; I even went on the first Ramah ulpan to Israel, where we lived on a kibbutz. I had never held a Torah in my life. I was bat mitzvah on a Friday night. I never read from the Torah, and it was only in college where I developed a feminist consciousness that changed the way I thought about what I would become, but it

would never occur to me to be a rabbi because there was no such thing as a woman rabbi.

RS: Okay, great. When did you first start thinking that –? Maybe there was an "aha" moment, like "I'm going to be a rabbi."

BP: So I had an "aha" moment. I had what Ms. Magazine then called a "click moment."

RS: I'm going to take you all the way back to the beginning.

BP: Okay. Start over?

RS: If you could just tell us the story again. You were working in Kansas City.

BP: So I have this "a-ha" moment. When I graduated college, I was back in Kansas City. I had a job, but I was also working in the Hebrew school at the Reform synagogue, which is something I had done throughout college. A friend invited me to come to Simchat Torah at the Reform synagogue as opposed to the Conservative synagogue where I had grown up. We went together, and I was sitting in the back row or standing, and someone came up the aisle and handed me a Torah. I was twenty-two years old. I had been bat mitzvah. I had been through Camp Ramah. I had never held a Torah. It changed my life. I looked up, and I saw the rabbi. He was surrounded by children. I knew, in that moment, that that's what I wanted to do. I had been exploring other things. I had no idea what I wanted to do with my life. I had taken every graduate exam except the medical exams. I just didn't know. In that moment, it became so clear. The next day I started talking to people and writing letters. I wrote a letter to the Conservative movement. I said, "I want to become a rabbi," and I got a very nice letter back. I wish I still had it. It said, "We can accept you, and you can study here, but we don't know when we're going to ordain rabbis." I was twenty-two and pretty impatient, and I said, "Forget that." That's when I started my journey, first applying in the Reform movement, [and] later applying in the Reconstructionist movement. I've never regretted it. It was so right.

RS: Great. So you entered the Reconstructionist movement in the early ’80s, correct?

BP: Right, 1982.

RS: So, can you speak at all about any challenges that you had to overcome in rabbinical school, either personal or institutional?

BP: I loved rabbinical school, and I was very blessed to be in a place where there were no issues about women studying. It was 1982. The Reconstructionist Rabbinical College [RRC] had been ordaining women since 1968, and they’d admitted women pretty much from the second year. When I went for my interview, it was Rabbi Rebecca Alpert who really impressed me and made me feel at home. She was, in a way, a guardian for me. She really watched out for me. I really felt like I was cared for and nurtured through that journey. So I didn’t feel any challenges from outside. I found it all very exciting.

RS: That’s good. Perfect. So, you were ordained in ’87. That’s like twenty-five, twenty-six years ago. Can you share with us any differences in what it meant to be a rabbi twenty-five years ago and what it means to be a rabbi today? Or expectational differences, perhaps? How is it different from being a woman rabbi twenty-five years ago than being a woman rabbi today?

BP: When I graduated from RRC, I came to Boston, and I walked into the Board of Rabbis meeting all fresh-faced, and there was one other rabbi, who was a woman, in the whole room. The men were all in suits. There was this posturing that was going on all the time. I would introduce myself to the same guy over and over, and he would never remember who I was. It was probably about five years ago I noticed that when I go into a Board of Rabbis meeting, more than half of the people in the room might be women. It took some time. When I was president of the Board of Rabbis (2005-2007), I made a point of creating a more collegial atmosphere. By then, a lot of the rabbis who were my seniors were retired. There was a lot of energy among the younger men and women as

well. So, the collegiality has changed dramatically, and the comfort of being together. [It's] a little less formal in the rabbinic community. That's been really an important change.

RS: Great answer. I read you feel the mikveh – let me go back. So I want to ask you first what you feel your mission or your goal in your rabbinate is.

BP: When I graduated RRC, and we had to write a blurb describing our goal as a rabbi, I said that what I really wanted was to help people cope with life through Judaism. I think I've come full circle to that. To feel that my responsibility is to bring Jews together along with their partners, spouses, whoever isn't Jewish – to bring communities together and to use the Jewish spiritual historical cultural tradition, the Jewish civilization, to help nurture meaningful lives.

RS: Great answer. I also read that you have invigorated prayer life at Temple Hillel B'nai Torah.

BP: Did I write that? [laughter]

RS: I don't know. I read that somewhere. Can you speak to what you've done to reinvigorate or invigorate prayer life? What does that look like?

BP: I've gone through a lot of changes in the last several years in terms of my own spiritual practice. I love davening, and I love teaching davening, and I've been eager to encourage people to learn on their own and to empower them. What I've been doing in the last several years that's different is being a little more flexible and fluid and welcoming different forms of Tefillah, of prayer. So in our congregation now, we have several times a year a service that's chanting and meditation. We may not use the siddur, the prayer book, at all. I've been very blessed to be part of the Institute for Jewish Spirituality, to learn from people like Nancy Flam and Shefa Gold, as well as male rabbis who are doing this kind of work. Sheila Weinberg also has been a great mentor for me.

So my goal is to help people understand that they're there for an experience of their own and that the language of prayer brings us together as a group and connects us so that we're not alone, but we're all doing our individual work through prayer. I really am eager to do that, even when we have a room full of families, people who have never been there for a bar mitzvah or bat mitzvah so that they feel like they're not just there as spectators; they're participants, that that is something that's for them. That's really my mission in reinvigorating prayer.

RS: You said that your own spiritual practice has changed. Maybe you could share with us a story of how your that's changed and what it looks like today.

BP: Through the Institute of Jewish Spirituality (joining the sixth rabbinic cohort in 2010) , I started using tools like meditation and yoga in my own life, and I have a regular yoga practice that helps me become more grounded and also helps me to feel prayer within my body, that it's an embodied practice. I also have a number of spiritual outlets outside of my congregation, so that when I come in to lead whatever I'm leading, whether it's a Shabbat morning service or it's an evening Minyan or whatever it is, that I'm also praying, and that was really new for me. I was always orchestrating and thinking about the time and worrying about how long things were going and if I made a mistake. That's not foremost anymore. It's still there, and I'm still in charge, and I'm still trying to create the container that people don't feel like this is going to go on forever. Yet, when I stood in front of the ark this year for high holidays, I had an intention that whenever the ark was open, I would see it as our hearts opening and that I was going to open my heart every time the ark opened, and that it wasn't simply some symbolic ritual that was an honor for someone to do. That it all had to have meaning for me if it was going to have any chance of having meaning for the rest of the congregation.

RS: That's a beautiful image, having the arc open and the heart open. I hadn't that quite like that before. It's lovely. It's really beautiful. I'll have to be mindful of that myself. I

love that. So, I read that you – [Recording paused.] Can you share with us a personal story that illustrates the meaning of mikveh to you personally?

BP: I became interested in mikveh my first year of rabbinical school. I was getting married at the end of my first year. My good friend and colleague Rabbi Amy Small and I were both getting married. We were creating a ritual for brides to go to the mikveh. We embraced it as feminist. As brides, we wanted to have a ritual that prepared us for entering into married life. So we wrote something, and we published it in a Reconstructionist magazine back in the '80s and began to gather stories, articles, friends, Rabbi Elyse Goldstein, all kinds of people who were interested in mikveh. Eventually, I would have these long talks with my friend Anita Diamant. I've read every one of her books before it was published. We would take these walks talking about conversion and talking about the mikveh that we were using. We developed a vision of a mikveh that was truly open to all Jews, where no one had to feel they were sneaking in or they had to rush through because our time was limited, a place that was really meant to welcome converts as well as anyone who had a spiritual need. I had developed a practice of going to the mikveh before Yom Kippur. That was important to me, again, as setting an intention and preparing myself for the holy work in the same way the high priest would prepare but not necessarily with that metaphor in mind. Once we opened Mayyim Hayyim, I began to explore mikveh as, again, an embodied practice, a way to put my full self into my spiritual life. So one of the best immersions – I had two great immersions. One was two years ago. We moved. After twenty-two years in our house in Newton, we moved closer to the synagogue in West Roxbury, and after we moved out of our house before we moved into the new house, I went to the mikveh for an immersion and contemplated the notion of Makom, of place, which is another word for God. It was really a wonderful, important ritual for me. And then, I had the wonderful privilege of immersing in the mikveh at the same time that my daughter immersed for her wedding last summer. So, for me, it is a quintessential ritual for marking transitions in life.

RS: Great. Well, one of the things I also read is that you're in the business of transforming. So obviously, mikveh is transformative. What other ways can Jews transform? What other rituals? Well, I guess all rituals are transformations. If you could share another story about a ritual that maybe was transformative for you.

BP: I need to think about that. I think all ritual have the power to transform. When I approach a bar or bat mitzvah, I understand that this is a moment in time between someone who's a child becoming an adolescent. We talk about them becoming Jewish adults because that's how they're treated, and I say to the parents, "This is really more about you than about your child." The kids don't have a sense of how big an event this is most of the time. The parents are going through a transformation at bar and bat mitzvah, and it's really important for me as a rabbi to help them recognize what's going on for them and to escort their child in this place and then to feel like they have launched their child as we do throughout life – once they're born until we launch them to college or wherever ever they end up – that this is a major launching point. I also talk about, for the kids, bar and bat mitzvah as Jewish Outward Bound. I want them to work hard. I don't want it to be easy. It can be fun, but at the end, the day that it happens, I want them to feel proud that they have done something that they didn't expect they could do. Most of the time, I see a transformation on that day. The next day, they are completely different, these kids. They have developed some sense of themselves and self-confidence that they didn't have before.

RS: I want to ask you about an old favorite piece of text and explain why. Something you go back to over and over again.

BP: It's hard to call this a favorite text, but I think it's one of the most powerful texts that's present for me, and that's the Unetaneh Tokef prayer on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. For me, it's a reminder of the fragility of our lives on the one hand. And on the other hand, when we conclude this litany of all of the ends that we could meet and not

just deaths, but we could rise or fall, we could become rich, we could become poor, all of the cycles that can happen in a person's life – in the end, we're given a formula for responding to the things that we have no control over. That teshuvah, tefillah, and tzedakah, which for me are reflection – or repentance, and prayer – or practice, and giving – or connecting to other people. I firmly believe that because we all know that these things are bound to happen, we all need to recognize that we're not in control of those things on the outside. If we can cultivate those practices, we can actually live a rich and meaningful life in the face of all of the suffering that we might face.

RS: Great. I'm going to dovetail this question with – [Recording paused.] – in your life and how Judaism helped you get through?

BP: It's all a question of how personal I want to be about this.

RS: Take your time.

BP: All right. Well, much of my identity as a Jew and as a Rabbi goes back to when I was six years old. I had an older brother who was ten years older than I was, and he died of leukemia. I was six years old. I had three older siblings. He was the oldest. So we didn't have much of a relationship, but his death shaped our family for several years. In those days, children didn't go to funerals, and I never went to the cemetery. So, it was a few years later when our synagogue, which had been located downtown in a beautiful, beautiful building, was moving to the suburbs, and they were breaking ground for the new building. They were shoveling the earth, and something hit me at that moment, years after my brother Stephen had died. I said, "Stephen's never going to enjoy this building." I was crying more than I'd ever cried. The rabbi came to me because I had a relationship with him at that point. He was there for me, and he was always there for me, and I knew I could depend on him. But for me, that moment of shoveling the earth has always been an important ritual for helping us understand the finality of death, and it's really shaped how I approach the pastoral work that I do.

[Recording paused.]

RS: I want to dovetail into the next question, which is, can you share with us your understanding of God?

BP: When I was at camp as a kid, I decided God is knowledge. I already knew at some point God wasn't some old man in the sky. From that time, I thought a lot about what it means to be connected to the divine. I've gotten to a place where it's not so important to me to try to describe or define or prove that there is a God. For me, all I can do is describe my experience and have the full understanding, belief, and trust that everyone has an experience and that even if we added them all up, it wouldn't shape what God is. If I were to give any kind of metaphor – there's a wonderful image that I learned from Rabbi Ira Eisenstein about the electricity in the walls. There's power surging through the wires in our houses. But it can't do anything unless you plug something in, and the blender can't turn on unless you plug it in. The computer can't do anything unless you plug it in, and so that's how I understand God's presence. It's there, but it's not going to jump out of the socket and electrify me. It's up to me to be plugged in, and then I'm able to access that presence.

RS: Great answer. Can you share with us a holy moment in your life?

BP: It's hard to choose. The holy moments in my life have come when I've been open and trusting and able to see something that I might've missed. I recently had an experience; I was traveling to New York, and I had hoped to make plans for dinner that night with someone. How can you not have dinner with someone in New York? It didn't work out. And I got on the train, and I thought, "All right, I'll just let whatever happens happen. We'll see." I had work to do so I went to the café car. I set up my laptop. A lovely woman in her forties sat across from me and acknowledged me. I acknowledged her, but I had my work to do. Then after I finished my work, I closed my laptop, and I got into this conversation with a perfect stranger that got so deep. Within about half an hour,

we were sharing what we were doing, and she ended up saying to me, “Whatever you’re doing, you’re on the right path.” We parted, and I felt so buoyed, so hopeful, and so supported. I had met an angel, a messenger meant to give me this message that I was going to be okay. I ended up having a really lovely evening on my own, finding a great restaurant to eat in, where the people next to me started chatting away. It turned out to be that being trusting made it possible to be open to a person that I would never have spoken to. Two days later, she started texting me, and I don’t know that we’ll – I hope we’ll see each other again, but it’s those connections. That’s one example of what I feel is holy.

RS: That’s great. Did I read that you were president –?

[Recording paused.]

BP: I was president of the RRA [Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association].

RS: Maybe you can speak to your tenure there and what you were trying to accomplish for your colleagues and yourself, and what years those were. Maybe a story around that.

BP: I was president of the Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association from 1997 to 1999. I, at that point in my career, was very committed to the Reconstructionist movement. It was an important cause in my life. I’m still committed to the movement in different ways, but I really wanted to build it. I’d been nurtured by it so much. To be honest, when I was president of the RRA, I really just wanted to make the structures work. The organization had been around for twenty years, but we were still finding our way. So, during that time, we finished our [Reconstructionist] Rabbi’s Manual. It was Yael Shuman who was our executive director; she wasn’t a rabbi. She worked hard on it. Rabbi Seth Reimer worked hard on it. I had worked on it with a number of committees, and we were very proud of putting that out. I think one of the best things that happened under my tenure was inviting Rabbi Richard Hirsh to become our executive director, and he’s still there to

this day [until 2014]. I can't say that I engineered it, but I can feel good that it happened under my watch.

RS: That's great. He's wonderful. You're absolutely right. Amazing man.

BP: Yeah.

RS: I also read that you are focused on interfaith work now. You're laughing. Is that not correct?

BP: It is true. It's very new.

RS: Okay.

BP: Well, it depends [on] what you mean because I've done interfaith dialogue for a long time, but I'm thinking about interfaith couples in our congregation more. So, I don't know where you were going with that.

RS: Well, actually, I want you to share a story that illuminates its importance to you in your community now. So, it's a little bit of both.

BP: Almost a day doesn't go by without my thinking about how the Jewish community is changing, and it's not what I grew up with; it's not what I envisioned when I became a Rabbi, even though I thought I was changing the Jewish world. It's changing faster than I can change at this point. I was very happy when a couple of years ago, one of the young couples in our congregation – he's Jewish, grew up Reconstructionist, she grew up Catholic – said to me, "Why don't we have a group for interfaith couples?" I said, "Sure, let's do that." There were actually a whole number of couples. Three of them, the husband is Jewish, the wife isn't, and then we have a lesbian couple where one's Jewish and one isn't. They've been together now for over a year, and I've learned a lot from them, and they ask really interesting questions about how to be fully involved, how to

raise Jewish children, when the person who isn't Jewish is very supportive, very involved, and still not interested in becoming Jewish. And that's been a very important mind shift for me because I've been involved in a number of conversions long after a couple's been married after they've had children. I have a number of men who've converted to Judaism before their child's bar or bat mitzvah. It could still happen with these couples. But it's really opened my eyes to including these people as full individuals in our community with everything they have to offer. We're going to have to change some of our practices in our congregation. I came, in '95, to our synagogue. In '98, we had a committee to talk about the involvement of non-Jews in our community, something the Reconstructionist movement had been working on. We came up with this wonderful decision that we liked and seemed to work that a non-Jewish parent would come up on the bimah for their child's bar mitzvah, for their Aliyah. I wouldn't call them by their Hebrew name, and they wouldn't say the blessing, but they would stand there because I wanted the family to be together. We also said the leadership of the synagogue would be restricted to Jews. I re-read that document just a few weeks ago, and we don't allow non-Jews on our board. Now that seems silly to me when I see people who have been involved for years, who had three kids go through bar and bat mitzvah. They've been active and involved, and we give them honors on high holidays, and they'd be great board members. So I think it's an important time for us to be rethinking the things that we thought were settled.

RS: That's great. What does that mean for the Jewish people? Let's say we continue to move towards inclusivity. That's really what we're saying. You're acting. You just haven't done it in name. What does it mean? Let's say we move towards that. Non-Jews can be board members. Continue to fully integrate in every way and to accept maybe a Jewish member – what does that mean? And incorporate that into your answer. Before you do that, let me just …

BP: For a long time, I've gone back and forth about the future of the Jewish people and how challenging it can be to maintain our culture while bringing in people who have

different experiences, backgrounds, faiths. In the years that I've observed families, I've come to believe Judaism is changing because of the Jews, as well as anyone else who's among us. Judaism is really changing, and if it's going to be dynamic and it's going to speak to people and if people are going to continue to not just say, "I'm proud to be Jewish" but to find reasons to connect through synagogues or other Jewish organizations, to find the richness in Judaism, then it's all about relationships. What we need to do is, in a Buberian sense, really treat people as full human beings. You never know the potential of where they're going to go. So, yes, Judaism is going to change. I find that the spirituality of many of the people who come to Judaism, whether they convert or not, changes the way that the Jews, who I've watched grow up, think. Because the Jews don't know about spirituality, they don't know about faith, and they're learning from the non-Jews among us. They've been among our best teachers. I think they're among the most inspiring people to folks who grow up Jewish [and] take it for granted. I'm not talking about the most committed, the most active. I'm thrilled to have those people who know Hebrew and who want to daven and who want to serve in the synagogue, and I know that there's many, many more people who haven't had that experience, don't know what it means, it's not part of American culture, and we have to make relationships in order to get people in so that they can discover what we offer. And in the process, what we offer is changing.

RS: Two more questions. You have been a congregation rabbi for a long time, and you have children [and] a husband. How have you managed to –? I don't know if balance is the right word. How have you managed to do it all? How has that worked for you in your family? How have you made that work?

BP: Being a mother and being a rabbi have been the two most important jobs of my life, and I've been very blessed that I was able to work part-time for many years as my kids were growing up. I've been supremely blessed to have a partner who was a feminist before I even met him. Brian and I have managed to balance our roles in remarkable

ways. He's been a tremendous support, including when our son Yonah was born and we were living in Israel. I was there for a two-year fellowship with the Jerusalem Fellows. My husband took care of the baby and took care of the house for the first year while I was in classes. So, I've been able to have Friday night dinners most weeks for our kids. In my current synagogue, we have a Friday night service once a month. We have always had friends over, and the kids have had friends over, and they've had that kind of Shabbat. The holidays have always been wonderful family time, whether it's building the Sukkah together and taking pictures of the kids as they grew each year in the Sukkah or creating a Seder. Each year that would speak to them. So, at this point, I feel so proud of my kids and who they've become. My daughter had a Seder last year of her own for nineteen people while we were at home having a Seder for seventeen, and she sent me her spreadsheet with the whole Seder plan, and all the foods, including rituals that I didn't even know had become rituals. For example, I started a practice of giving out chocolate chips. When someone would ask a good question, they would get a chocolate chip at the Seder, which I lead. She started doing that at her Seder. So I've been very fortunate that people have welcomed my kids and that we've had a place for them in the synagogue and that I've been able to say, "I'm not going to be there because I'm going to an event at the school." I have to say it wasn't easy. It was hard work. It was years of hard work, of focusing on my kids and focusing on my work. Thank God I remembered to focus on my husband, too, because now that the kids are out of the house, we're having a wonderful time. Don't tell them. I think the kids know that. So it's been a struggle to create those boundaries. I also was very aware of the role model that I was for so many other families, about really paying attention to your kids and not being a workaholic, which I know I was at times.

RS: Good. Last question.

BP: There's so much more to say about that. But I'm going to let it go.

RS: Do you want to say [inaudible]?

BP: No, I just couldn't find a good –

RS: Do you have a story around that?

BP: Well, I want to talk about my daughter's wedding. So my daughter Aviva got married in June, and she married a young man she met freshman year of college by the name of Colin, who had been raised a Catholic. We knew him for six years. It was a real journey to embrace the fact that my daughter, who I showered with a trip to Israel and so many Jewish experiences – Jewish day school – was marrying someone who wasn't Jewish. It was on the wedding weekend when I really fell in love with my son-in-law. I knew that the two of them were going to create a Jewish family, they were going to have a Jewish home, it was going to be their way, and that he adores my daughter. That's really what counted. We had this wonderful moment. This is the rabbi mom moment. I didn't officiate at that wedding. Everyone asks me that. I think that being mother of the bride was a big enough job, and I really wanted them to have their own rabbi. I worked with them to find someone who they could talk to in Chicago, where they live. Yet, I had an Aufruf at our synagogue on Shabbat morning, so we could invite congregates to something since they couldn't come to the wedding. I wanted to offer them a blessing. When they came up to the bimah, I said, "I try really hard to separate being mom and rabbi. But, in this moment, I'm the rabbi mom." As I started to give them the blessing, I teared up. I pride myself on containing my emotions as a rabbi, but what was I going to do? It was in that moment Colin reached over and touched my head with such a gesture of love and kindness, and it was one of the high points, I think, of my life to be able to feel like something wonderful was happening for my daughter, that she was leaving us in a way, and she was also taking so much with her, and she was going to a good place. I had to share that.

RS: Yeah, that's beautiful. That's a really important story. So thank you so much for doing that. Last question. So, someday, these transcripts and this footage will be viewed by Jews of the future. So I guess I want to offer you an opportunity to say what you hope they remember you for as a Rabbi and a Jew. Big question, I know [inaudible]. You can take a moment to think about it.

BP: There are two things I'd like to be remembered for. I want to be remembered for kindness. I know there have been times when I haven't been kind, and I want to be remembered for the relationships I've had with people and the ways that I've helped guide them through life's journey. I also want to be remembered for being a spokesperson for those who have suffered injustice and as someone who has stood up to change the structures of our world to bring more kindness, justice, and love into the relationships that we build in our world. While we work for Tzedakah and we work to support people who are in need, we also have to remember to advocate for the bigger changes that really need to be made, and I hope to be able to say that I've contributed to that.

RS: Beautiful. Thank you so much. Very nice to meet you.

BP: Thank you for giving me this opportunity.

RS: You're welcome.

BP: It's just wonderful to reflect on. Great questions.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[Addendum April 2023]

I am now preparing for retirement from Temple Hillel B'nai Torah. As of July 1, after 28 years with this congregation and 36 years in the rabbinate, I will become Rabbi Emerita. Serving this congregation has been a huge gift. While I will miss the many connections to

the individuals and families I love, I am certain that this move is as much in their best interest as my own. I look forward to having time to contemplate my next steps and to watching how our congregation grows with new rabbinic leadership. At this point, they show every sign of being grounded as a Reconstructionist community, engaged in creating a new vision for the congregation, and cultivating lay leadership who are imbued with integrity, commitment, and kindness.