Spring has arrived – yes, it snowed for the first day, but it’s spring nonetheless. Which, of course, means that Passover is on the way.

Chanukah is great. So is Purim – thank you to our miraculous Clergy, our extraordinarily talented Teen Band led by Cantor Appelbaum, our energetic and ubiquitous Director of Youth Programming, Dr. Jodi Mishkin-Michaelson, our incredible teachers, kids, parents, Sisterhood and Brotherhood volunteers and our tireless office and maintenance staffs for making last weekend’s Megillah reading and Purim Carnival so successful, and so much fun!

Still, I think there’s no holiday or festival we celebrate that is more wrapped in individual “nostalgia” than Passover. We each have our own special Passover memories and associations – tastes, smells, the comforts of family near and extended. Yet for all of us collectively, as Jews, Passover is the eight-day period we devote every year to remembering our release from slavery and the beginning of our fitful and meandering forty-year journey to the land promised to our forbearers. After 400 years of captivity, the offspring of Jacob – of Israel, the second-born twin who finagled the first-born’s blessing for himself and then “wrestled with God” until dawn – had grown into a people. But it took four decades for that people to mature into a nation able to take, and worthy to possess, the land that had been covenanted to it. We are reminded of our deliverance from bondage throughout the Torah and in our weekly prayers, but Passover refocuses our attention on it.

Skip ahead a few millennia. Viewed even through a narrow lens, the birth of the modern State of Israel took longer than the ancient journey from Egypt to Canaan – from August 29, 1897, when Theodor Herzl convened the First Zionist Congress, to May 14, 1948, the day David Ben-Gurion announced the Declaration of the Founding of the State of Israel. From the ashes of the Shoah and the devastation wrought upon our people and so many others by the forces of bigotry and hatred, Israel was reborn, a haven for freedom and democracy, civil and religious, in the long-troubled and long-fought over cross-roads of the world. The homeland of our people.

We have always had our enemies. As the joke goes, the theme of every major Jewish holiday is “They tried to kill us. We survived. Now, let’s eat.”

The latest threat to our existence is “BDS,” the seemingly anodyne acronym for a world-wide campaign to bring about the death of Israel as a Jewish state and to destroy everything that Israel stands for. The “Boycott, Divest and Sanctions” movement is well-organized and well-funded, and it aims to destroy Israel as a Jewish state and as a refuge for our people, not only by closing off world markets to Israeli goods, services and know-how, but by challenging the Jewishness of our children and their commitment to the State of Israel and the principles for which Israel stands.

Unfortunately, BDS “activists” have gained a foothold on numerous American university and college campuses. And on many of those campuses, they have been permitted to engage in increasingly hostile, aggressive and intimidating behaviors. It is our obligation not only to raise our voices and to demand that administrators take action against the proponents of BDS and the hate and destructiveness they stand for and the actions they are taking, but also to ensure that before our children head off to college, they are well educated and fully prepared in every respect for the challenges they will be facing there. And we must also ensure that we are ready to support our children when they call upon us. To that end, we have joined forces with a growing number of area synagogues and are working with a

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spectrum of national and international pro-Israel, Jewish and anti-BDS organizations to establish our role in educating and supporting our children and in defending our faith, our people and the State of Israel against the onslaughts of the BDS movement. We will be reaching out to you continuously in the year ahead for your help and participation in this most important undertaking. Please continue to support our efforts in every way you can.

And, as always, one of the best ways to support your Jewish community and to express your Jewishness is to participate fully and wholeheartedly in the life of our synagogue. Come to Cantor Appelbaum’s upcoming concert, “The Songbird and the Shepherd”; it will be a beautiful, uplifting and inspiring experience – and a lot of fun. Join us for our warm, inviting, delicious and family-oriented TBT Second Night Seder. Help commemorate those lost in the holocaust at our truly moving Yom HaShoah service and vigil. Come to our Spring Gala, which will be an extraordinary event, an opportunity both to honor a number of dedicated people who have been enormously important to our congregation over the years and to enjoy a fun and entertaining evening with your TBT friends, old and new – and bring your colleagues and neighbors. Join the entire congregation for Rabbi Gellman’s Memorial Day weekend Scholar-in-Residence program. Take part in our fulfilling Shabbat Services and our ADEPT speakers series dinners, participate in our Business Networking Group – always open to all congregants. Drop in on Senior Schmooze. Study with our clergy. Participate in our LATET Walk-a-Thon and fund drive for the benefit of elderly holocaust survivors in Israel. Join our leadership team. Be active and engaged members of your Temple Beth Torah family. There is nothing more fulfilling and nourishing.

I look forward to seeing you!
Hag Sameach, and Shalom,

Sandy