

SERMON TO CONGREGATION BETH AM

Rabbi Chuck Briskin Los Altos Hills , CA in February 2002

After noting that, last year, Worth Magazine rated Los Altos Hills as the fourth most expensive town in the United States, Rabbi Briskin reflected on the meaning of the exorbitant rent costs in the area and asked "Do we want to be part of a community where low, moderate, even middle income people cannot afford to live?"

In light of "one of the central values of our tradition: ...love your neighbor as yourself," Rabbi Briskin called his congregants to "stand up and do something about" the housing crisis and described his congregations involvement with PIA as follows:

"A small but dedicated group of your fellow congregants has been working with Peninsula Interfaith Action since July [2001]. PIA is a consortium of 25 congregations—24 churches and 1 synagogue—ours. This faith community struggles daily to break down the barriers that separate us by race, class, and religion, PIA unites this diverse consortium in the sacred work of building and sustaining our community. Through the work of PIA, relationships are developed, communities are empowered, lives are transformed.

"The Beth Am representatives of PIA would like everyone here to become an active participant in this work of Tikkun Ha'ir—repairing our city, and there is one way in which all of us can help. For the past three years, PIA has been a strong advocate for affordable housing on the Peninsula . They have worked with county commissioners to address this crisis and have proposed reasonable solutions. Their goal—our goal—is to create 10,000 units of affordable housing in San Mateo and Santa Clara counties in the next seven years. How do we propose to do this? By earmarking county owned surplus lands for housing and creating a public land trust to pay for and maintain the land in perpetuity. This isn't merely an issue of providing housing for the working poor. This action is about providing housing for working class and middle class families who can afford to buy homes in Modesto , but not in Menlo.

After describing an upcoming PIA action for affordable housing that would take place on March 4, 2002 , and urging his congregants to attend, Rabbi Briskin added:

"If we value diversity—of race, religion, economic level—then we will stand up and be counted. If we want to live in a community that our children can call home, then we will stand up and be counted. If we want to live in a community that our aging parents can call home, then we will stand up and be counted... [at PIA's March 4th action*].

Rabbi Briskin concluded with this:

"We have a sacred duty to support the work of building for our larger community. We owe it to our neighbors, we owe it to our children and our parents, and most of all we owe it to ourselves. Together we will help make the Peninsula a place whose gates are opened wide to all people at all times.

*PIA's Affordable Housing Action on March 4 has already resulted in \$21 million dollars being committed trusts for affordable housing on the Peninsula.