

Thoughts from the Congregation Manager

Dr. Joel S. Goldman

During the coming season of *Hanukkah*, it has become a time in America for gift giving. In Jewish tradition, *Purim* was usually the time for gift giving, and *Hanukkah* was more the season for bestowing "*Hanukkah Gelt*" – some small coins (nowadays replicated using chocolate money) - to our children.



But new customs develop, and there is no harm in that. Let me offer this alternative, however; that every family with children at home suggest to their children that they give at least one of their gifts to charity or to someone in need. This should be, by the way, one of the nicer of their gifts, not the ones they don't want. That's not *tzedakah* in the way that it should be taught.

I'd like to make another suggestion for a gift. Sometimes it is possible to give a gift to a loved one who has passed away. That is the gift of remembering them through the rituals of our tradition. I have found that people who follow annual mourning rituals find great comfort and solace in them. For example, on the anniversary of the death of a loved one (*yahrzeit*), it is customary to honor their memory by performing the following good deeds: giving *tzedakah* to a worthy cause of your choice, studying a passage of *Torah*, and reciting *kaddish* in the synagogue. I can think of no finer way to honor the memory of our loved ones. Saying *kaddish* on the *yahrzeit* has the added benefit of being in the synagogue and sharing your mourning with other mourners and fellow Congregants. So many benefits come from a few simple acts of kindness – a *Hanukkah* gift, if you will, to those who gave us so much. I think we owe it to them and to ourselves to perform these acts of goodness, kindness and thoughtfulness. It is the Jewish way to honor our deceased parents and other loved ones.

On another note, as the calendar year draws to a close, many of us begin to consider making good use of the income tax charitable deduction with a year-end contribution. A 2016 year-end gift to Temple Har Shalom can significantly reduce your income taxes, while providing meaningful support for the Temple. If you itemize, then regardless of your income, you may be able to lower your income taxes by giving *tzedakah*. The potential tax savings will depend on your tax bracket.

You can contribute stock to a charity such as Temple Har Shalom and pay no capital gains tax, as well as get a tax deduction for the full market value amount. Use your stock to fulfill your appreciated gifts to Temple Har Shalom Annual Appeal. (i.e. - Stock you may have purchased years ago at \$10.00 a share may be worth \$40.00 today. You can donate those shares and receive a deduction worth 4 times your original investment). In our lifetime, there are some institutions that truly make a difference in our lives. It can be a school, a service organization and it can be a synagogue. Too often we fail to acknowledge the important role which these institutions play. But even that would not be enough. At the end of our lives it is essential that we acknowledge and remember the most important institution of Jewish life - our Temple.

The Temple's role begins with our families at birth and continues without interruption throughout the entire course of our lives and the lives of our children. Every major event finds us involved in an important way. Our children are named, educated, become *Bar/Bat Mitzvah*, confirmed and married here. The Temple symbolizes the home of our religion and our culture. It is our refuge in time of sorrow or stress. By remembering the Temple in our wills, we can do our part to assure a continuing religious home for future generations, truly *L'Dor v'Dor*. Bequests can provide funds for any aspect of our Synagogue, such as Religious School, Mountain Top, Youth Programs, Social Action, Holidays, Outreach or our Clergy Discretionary Funds.

Eileen, Joshua and I wish you and yours a *Chag Sameach* - Happy *Hanukkah*