



A Message from Morah Miriam

When I was first exploring the idea of moving to Arlington, I wasn't initially certain I'd like it here. I considered myself more of a suburbs person. Then, I visited Etz Hayim. As I explored the space I could see myself building a sense of home here, feeling a sense of home here. I wasn't quite sure how that would play out, or how long it would take. All I knew was that I felt it, and I was willing and eager to lean into whatever it'd take to build that home, for myself and the community.

Rewinding this story back about 3.5 years, when I first moved to Memphis, TN, where I had never been before, and knew no one, I threw myself into my work. At first I didn't attend synagogue on Shabbat, and then as the year progressed I started attending more frequently. I started becoming friends with some of the congregants. Eventually, one of the congregants started asking me to come in the evening to help make a minyan. Like many people I usually said no because I was often staying late at work, and didn't want to go to minyan. I didn't see myself as a minyan person.

One day, I received a text asking me to come the following day to help make a minyan. Since it was spring break, I had no other plans....and I hate lying. I said fine. The next day we had exactly 10 people. I said to myself, "Hmm. That felt pretty good, helping make a minyan." So I went back the next day, and the next, and so on. There were more than a dozen times I showed up where we barely made a minyan, had more than a minyan, and despite some of our best efforts, didn't make a minyan.

One Shabbat morning, several months later, a few of us were talking and someone referred to me as a minyan regular. I gave them a not so pleasant look. "I'm not a regular!" I had a picture in my mind of what a "regular" looked like, and I was definitely not it. I went because it helped make a minyan. This made me feel better because it forced me to leave work at a more decent time, provided a space for me to decompress, and feel a sense of purpose and value in a way that didn't take too much out of me. In fact, it filled my figurative energy, emotional, mental, and spiritual tanks, which had been running on low for a while.

It's also through going to minyan more frequently that I built a stronger sense of connection to myself, the shul, and the other shul goers. If you had asked me a year prior if I'd ever become a "minyan regular" I probably would have given you a look, or responded, "Yeah, no!" However, I leaned into (what I thought was) being temporarily uncomfortable and found myself leaning on the people at shul who'd become my best friends.

Sometimes we think we know what builds community, but in that journey we miss leaning into opportunities that build ourselves. Sometimes we think we know what builds, what strengthens us, but in that journey we miss opportunities to check in to make sure our lives' floor plan aligns with our true foundation.

What does this mean? What can this mean? (I'm glad you asked!) While only you can truly answer that question for yourself, I hope these few principles will help you (re)build a sense of home within yourself and the home that I'm so grateful to be building alongside all of you, our CEH home.

This Year:

Lean into exploring opportunities (more than once) that call out any preconceived assumptions you may have on what it is, or the “type of person” who does that thing.

When more community members lean in, we provide a stronger space for community members to lean on. While there's no one right way to build a house, a strong foundation must come first to ensure the lasting power of the home.

You can't spell build or community without “u” and “i”, so let's work together this year to help strengthen the home that is our body, our family, and our greater CEH home.

All the best,
Morah Miriam