

Message for Our Congregational Meeting 2017/5777

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Unlike years past, when my remarks would focus on our programmatic year accomplishments, tonight I want to use my few moments as Rabbi and teacher. Always, the *Torah* offers guidance and insight. This week's portion is no different. The opening of the 4th book of *Torah*, *Bamidbar*, Numbers, concerns itself with the very first census taken of the Israelite people. It is similar in nature to this concluding meeting. Attention is given to the practicalities of running the organization of the Israelite people. There are by-laws to ponder; budgets to balance; facilities and a sanctuary to maintain; and people of all ages to be fed, cared for, educated, blessed, married and buried. It all sounds very familiar!

Yet, there is one significant difference between our ancestors and our modern Jewish community: the way we measure success. In *Torah*, the fits, starts and stops of a 40 year journey, that should have taken 10 days, is described as a sacred pilgrimage where the needs of the people trumped all else. Those who were tired were given time to rest; those ill, given time to heal; those who broke the laws were punished; those who led with strength and dignity were properly thanked and 3 times a day, the community gathered in prayer. In other words, the Israelites were rewarded with entrance to the Promised Land when their focus shone on relationships and meaningful encounters.

I truly believe that we, as a 21st century synagogue, need to embrace some of this thinking when it comes to our own measure of success at Temple Har Shalom if we are to reach our promised land of sustainability. The years of conveyor belt Judaism are long over. No synagogue anywhere in the world can rely on a steady stream of members because of location or programming. Our measures of success which so often include the number in attendance; whether we met budget; whether we ran out of food; whether staff seemed on task; whether we had enough volunteers or how many complaints we received, is no longer sufficient to drive our conversations and sacred work. We need not discard these traditional measures of success, but we do need to add and incorporate new ways of thinking if we are to remain vital and relevant for another generation.

In all that we do, we first need to discover ways to **impact** our Congregants and the world around us. We cannot be a programmatic Congregation alone, but we must be a **people driven culture**. Second, we need to assist our Congregants in developing deep, meaningful **relationships** with our professionals and each other so we become co-partners in sustaining a community as opposed to functionaries and customers. And third, **Jewish wisdom and tradition** must infuse all that we do in helping our Congregants to face and cope with life's modern challenges. Judaism and its teachings are a life line of hope, inspiration, comfort and

sustenance in an unpredictable world. We need to make and keep Jewish practice worthwhile and infectious.

Lastly, we need to be better at showing our gratitude and saying thank you. Gratitude, recognition and appreciation are all *middot*, Jewish values that increase happiness and improve our health, relationships, emotions and keep us connected and coming back. Thus, allow me to end by offering heartfelt gratitude to our tireless leadership and volunteers and all who have shared of their energies, gifts and means in sustaining our Temple family. A special note of appreciation goes to the entire staff that does their very best in servicing our community. Together may we create new successes and enjoy the journey before us!