

“Why?”

A Yom Kippur appeal by Erica Harris
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5782

Yom tov, and welcome back to those who have been away for a while, as many of us have, and to the new friends joining us. Welcome also to all the members and guests joining us by Zoom. My name is Erica Harris, and I am proud to be the President of the Board for Congregation Sha'are Shalom.

First let me say thank you to everyone who has worked to make this High Holy Day season as meaningful, as accessible, and as welcoming as possible. Our services wouldn't have come together the way they have without the dedication of volunteers like Kate Passow, our ritual chair, Heidi Dodds, our communications chair, Brian Dodds, our house chair, Alan Hankin, our security chair, and many others.

Thank you also to those who contributed to our High Holy Day sponsorship programs, and you can see their names and what they sponsored posted around the building.

I appreciate all the work Jessica Wadler has put in to create meaningful and engaging High Holy Day programs for the religious school students, and all the energy put in by Sheryl Brotman and Allison Musa for their lovely preschool service. Also Laurie Mangold, who wears so many hats and does so many things behind the scenes that both literally and metaphorically keep our congregation whole.

A very special *toda raba* to our returning rabbi, Rabbi Tow, who leads services with energy and humor, rhythm and harmonies, and meaningful words. Sha'are Shalom is very blessed to have you back on our bima, and we're looking forward to, G-d willing, the good things the next many years will bring. I say returning, for those of you who don't know, because Rabbi Tow was a student rabbi here at Sha'are Shalom many years ago. Talk about beshert!

As I was doing some research to get ideas of how to write this appeal to you, I kept coming across a theme that I'd like to explore for a moment. That is the question of “why?” Let me start by answering some of my why's.

*Why are my family and I members of Sha'are Shalom? About a year before our daughter was born, Greg and I found ourselves at CSS for High Holy Day services. It was a difficult time for us, but just being in the physical space felt right, not to mention how much we enjoyed the service. We joined somewhere else, a little closer to our physical home, but found it wasn't our spiritual home. CSS was, so we came back, and I can't imagine leaving.

*Why am I so involved, or why did I become president? I assure you, there are days I ask myself those questions, but I always know the answer. Being with my

congregational family, by zoom or in person, and being in our sanctuary are the warmest places that give me the most peace, outside of my own family and home.

*Why am I doing what is called the Yom Kippur Appeal?

Ah! That is an important why, and the answer comes very easily. It is because of everything I've already told you. We're only able to provide streaming services because we invested in audio-visual equipment that would allow us to do so. We're only able to provide this beautiful, physical space for our sacred times because we use funds to make repairs, keep it clean, and keep the AC running. Super important on days like today. We're only able to offer a fantastic religious school and preschool program by hiring dedicated directors and engaged teachers, and by purchasing equipment and supplies needed for classrooms.

My whys and my answers aren't what is most important right now. I'd like to ask you to take a moment and think about your whys. Why are you in the space you are in, doing what you're doing right now? I'd imagine there are several answers that aren't exactly what I'm getting at, but one that does get there is that you feel at home spiritually, or somehow otherwise connected to the community around you. This sacred space is special to you. Why? Was your granddaughter's brit hanerot in this space? Was your child called to the Torah, on this bima, as a bar or bat mitzvah? Do you remember the day, about 18 years ago, when the building was completed and Loudoun Jewish Congregation finally had its forever home? Did someone hug you while you cried as you were in mourning or going through a difficult time? Are you sitting here now thinking of all the blessings to be shared in this space with others in the future?

One final question for you, and this one is a what. What do you want to see in the future? Assuming moving past the pandemic, of course (G-d willing). Do you see yourself cooking in a new, updated kitchen for a beautiful, community Shabbat dinner? Can you imagine eating that dinner outside at some permanently installed picnic tables? Are you able to envision a brightly lit admin pod, with creative artwork on the walls, maybe even created by your current or future kids or grandkids? Can you picture yourself sitting down with a few friends to discuss a shared novel or meaningful Torah passage in an organized and welcoming library/learning center?

Well, with your help financially and your involvement in committees and volunteering, we can do all of these things, and more. So much more.

Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, of blessed memory, once said "One lives not just for oneself but for one's community." And here at Sha'are Shalom, our community breathes life back into us. That's a really beautiful, cycle, don't you think?

May you have a meaningful Yom Kippur and an easy fast if you choose to do so. I look forward to asking and answering many more questions with you all in 5782.