

RABBI'S MESSAGE

Answer the Call!

*The LORD spoke to Moses, saying: "Tell the Israelite people to bring me gifts. From every person whose heart is inspired, you shall take My contribution."
Exodus: 25:1-2*

When the first Tabernacle was being built, G-d had some very specific requests. G-d made a list for the Israelites to use certain materials, to make it a certain size and to employ certain colors. But all of it was to be created by gifts from the people, and gifts that came from the heart. The commentators asked (paraphrased), "What about those whose hearts are NOT inspired? Do we reject their gifts? And why does G-d say, 'accept MY contribution?' Shouldn't it be THEIR contribution?"

It begs an important question: What is really ours? In the Garden of Eden, everything was provided for us. When Adam and Eve left the Garden, we began the process of having to work for everything: "*By the sweat of your brow shall you have bread to eat*" (Genesis 3:19). Many commentators encourage us to remember that ALL our blessings, even the ones produced by our labors, are only on loan from our Creator, as the Torah states, "*The LORD, G-d placed the man in the Garden to till it and tend it.*" (Genesis 2:15). How can we give a gift of any kind to G-d, if everything is just on loan for us to care for in G-d's name? One way is to utilize our blessings to create the kind of sacred space that encourages our connection to G-d. "*And let them make for Me a sanctuary that I may dwell within.*" (Exodus 25:8)

This community has been blessed with an incredible spirit. Those who founded Temple Beth Torah thirty years ago had a vision for the future. Much of that vision is becoming a reality. The Jewish community that started in kitchens and living rooms and moved into borrowed churches has now been in our own building for over 20 years. Our membership is at an all-time high, as well as our Religious School enrollment. Young families with children are inspiring energy, elders are providing wisdom, and more and more "seekers" are finding TBT their place for both worship and learning. Personally, I have had the honor to be part of your lives for nearly 15 years. You can hardly imagine the joy I get when I am able to oversee a bar or bat mitzvah for a child who received his/her Hebrew name from me; or officiate a wedding for a bride or groom who I helped prepare for bar or bat mitzvah. And of course, I've experienced the honor of helping a family with grief, even when I am also grieving for someone with whom I've shared prayer and celebration.

And so the excitement that was announced recently regarding building renovations is understandable. It is about our future, and the key word is OUR. WE have built what Temple Beth Torah is, and what it will be. Thirty years ago, we bought a building. Fifteen years ago, we re-designed the sanctuary. And now, we're ready to burst out again to re-create our sacred space into a more community-friendly, inclusive, accessible and loving environment. As elaborated in last month's newsletter and at our congregational meeting in December, the renovation proposal includes a large open space for gatherings, meals, celebrations and learning. We will increase classroom space with beautiful connecting classrooms. And, perhaps most importantly, we will finally become fully accessible to handicapped participants, with men's and women's restrooms and the necessary ramps to enable everyone to join our space without barriers. We cannot fulfill our mission of being an inclusive community while some people crowd the hallway waiting for one restroom and others find it difficult to even enter the building. While Temple

Beth Torah is more about the people than about the facility, we're now looking forward to being able to enjoy a building that is as open as our hearts.

This philosophical discussion turns into a practical concern with the question, "Who is going to pay for it?" WE are, of course. Not two or three people by themselves, but a whole community. *Every person whose heart is inspired*. Obviously, some in our community have more resources than others. Those who are able to make a big difference will have special recognition. But *everyone* will be recognized. And won't it be wonderful to say to your children or guests, "I helped make this happen"?

Our goal is for 100% of those reading this message (too late to stop now!) to make the contribution you can. Some will be able to make a sizable contribution; others will have to make a more modest donation...but everyone can do *something*. Think of it as your home...because it is. Whether you are here every week or once in a while, this is a place to connect with G-d and community. Speak about it with your parents, siblings and friends, and see if they will help support something that is important to you. If our whole community participates, then everyone will feel ownership. If we all do what we can, by Rosh Hashana we'll have a building that is friendlier, more pleasant and more functional. And if we all (myself included) dig deep and stretch ourselves a bit, we'll surprise ourselves and have a spiritual home that would make any Jew proud.

L'shalom,

Dan Gordon