

RABBI'S MESSAGE

What is a Ner Tamid?

If you turn off all the lights in the Temple Beth Torah sanctuary, one flicker remains. There it is, twinkling away with the tiny strength of 20 watts or so. Not enough power to read, but just enough to make its presence known. Follow that light and you'll find the Torah. We call it *Ner Tamid*, or Eternal Light, that is meant to stay lit for generations to come.

About thirty years ago, I was principal of a high school learning program and youth group advisor at a large synagogue in Houston. The rabbi said to me, "Look at the teenagers for leadership. Young children dream of being older, when they can be teenagers. Adults dream of being younger, when they *were* teenagers. If you find some good teenagers, they will influence both younger and older people." I'm not sure if it always works that way, but I saw a great example of leadership and role modeling on the sixth night of Hanukkah at Temple Beth Torah.

We were in the middle of a spirited Hanukkah/Shabbat service. The room was full and over 120 little candles were glowing. Cantor Francyne had gotten the children dancing like dreidels. I played my traditional "stump the rabbi" game with the *I had a Little Dreidel* song, challenging people to propose a different word to rhyme than "I made it out of clay." The first example was a child who suggested, "I made it out of wood," and I responded with "I ate too many latkes/that didn't feel so good!" It seems every year a child wants to hear what I can rhyme with "glass."

The evening was getting long. We had three songs left on our play list, and only time for one. The cantor and I decided to sing Debbie Friedman's silly and lively rendition of *I am a Latke*. A fourteen-year-old boy started dancing by himself in the back. A few moments later, a younger boy began dancing with him. I made a subtle motion with my eyes and gestured for them to bring it to the front of the room. The two enthusiastic dancers caught the eye of three young girls in the front row, and the teen gave them the same eye contact and gesture I had just given him, inviting them to join the dance. Moments later, there was an all-ages parade of a dozen or more young people from two to 27 making circles throughout the sanctuary with adults clapping along, enjoying the spectacle.

This was a moment that will have lasting memories. When those who were there think about Hanukkah in the future, the sight of a full spectrum of young people dancing around the synagogue will bring us smile. The *ner tamid* is a little spark that can ignite brightness and warmth. Our small temple's Hanukkah celebration, between the dozens of burning candles and the dancing youngsters created the kind of spark that can help our temple shine continuously. All it needs is for us all to notice, and find our own ways to ignite the passion of sharing a community.

On February 28, we will have a chance to celebrate four sparks, the lights of a family who each has spread warmth in different ways. The ***Blumin Family Four***. As the sixth annual

Ner Tamid/Eternal Light honorees, the Blumins follow the legacy of **Hy Penn, Joni Levy, Jeff Kaufman** (of blessed memory), **Carrie Keith** and **Anita Bonanno**. Jeremy, through his devotion to the physical building and grounds, Stacey with her tireless efforts to keep us organized and informed, Rachael with her incomparable teaching skills and ability to connect with young children, and Aaron, with his unbridled enthusiasm, are all examples of what a TBT family can be. Each has unique ways of enhancing our community. And together, they touch almost every aspect of temple life. With their devotion, their individual and collective sparks help keep our community strong.

Please join us at the Ner Tamid celebration, as we honor the Blumins and the spirit of Temple Beth Torah.

L'shalom,

Rabbi Dan Gordon