

THANK YOU FOR SUPPORTING DORSHEI EMET



CONGREGATION DORSHEI EMET

Dear Dorshei Emet Member,

Jewish culture is deeply rooted in the family and the home. We learn our first stories from those told to us by our parents; we experience the glow of the Shabbat and Chanukah candles around our kitchen or dining room tables; and we celebrate with the food and music of the Passover Seder surrounded by family and friends.

Yet, Judaism has always gained its strength and been pushed forward by the experience of the synagogue. We often think of a synagogue as a primarily religious space, but let's not forget that in Hebrew, this holy space is not a place of prayer, but a *beit kneset*, a home of gathering. We do pray in this spiritual home, but we also learn, play, mourn and... **we celebrate.**



Making Miriam Cups for Passover

The Power of Community



Mimouna Celebration

This year we celebrated Kabbalat Shabbat from India, Ethiopia and the British Isles (where else would you sing Adon Olam accompanied by the bagpipes?). We celebrated Mimouna, Chanukah, Purim and Yom Ha'atzmaut. We celebrated bar and bat mitzvahs, brisses, baby namings and weddings. Together we also packed and delivered Chanukah baskets to those less fortunate; we provided food and supplies to women's shelters; we learned about burial rights and how to grieve; we discussed books at the

Book Club; deliberated upon numerous other issues over a great meal at our Enlightened Bite series; we sang our hearts out at the Joyous Chorus... The list goes on and on.

Having a place to join with others who share your values and care for one another should not be taken for granted. Indeed, having a place to gather with others is sometimes life-altering. **It is only through your support of Dorshei Emet that we can ensure our *beit kneset* continues to be a strong and vibrant home for all who desire to be part of it.**

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Many of you already know Shifra and Yochanan Lowen and their four children who came from the *Tosh* community. Their journey was a long and often challenging one – and Dorshei Emet has been an important part of it.

Seeking a New Path

“ I was raised in the isolated *Tosh* village outside of Montreal. At a young age I had an arranged marriage and was expected to start a family right away. Although I didn't have any say in my marriage, I consider myself very lucky to have been married to my husband, Yochanan. For many years he dedicated himself to helping me understand the importance of giving our children a good childhood and a proper education. I was completely convinced by my upbringing that life on this planet was not meant to be enjoyed, only to prepare for the afterlife by serving God 24/7.

Twelve years ago, we left *Tosh*. We moved to Outremont in the hopes of finding a better community and a better education system for our children. However, our son's Rabbi in cheder was hitting the children and he couldn't take it and ran away one day. We became isolated, with 4 young kids, struggling financially and we had nobody to rely on or to ask for help. I had no idea how to do it all alone. No idea how to use the internet, and navigating the outside world felt very much like we came to a new planet...

The *frum* community was not going to let us leave without putting up a fight and they actually called Youth Protection Services and tried to have our kids taken away from us. After two years in Outremont, we moved to Côte-des-Neiges. We sent our children to a modern orthodox Jewish day school and that was when our life started to take on a sense of normal. Eventually we got a television and I started learning how to use the internet – and slowly started making new contacts in the world. After much struggle we were finally starting to find our way.

As for belonging to a Jewish community, I had given up on that. I thought it wasn't possible to be a member of a synagogue and still be true to who I am. I was under the impression that I would be forced to “fit into their box”. As you can imagine, after having my full share of disappointment with the Jewish community, I didn't have much hope.

But my husband Yochanan was invited to visit Dorshei Emet, and when he came home, he said: “Shifra, you have to come see this shul. I'm telling you that you're going to like it!” But my answer was always “Please don't even ask me.” I wasn't going to try anymore.



Yochanan and Shifra Lowen at Simchat Torah

My family finally has a connection and community that is so vital.



I was also worried about having to buy a whole new wardrobe, for which I had no budget. I thought a modern synagogue means rich people, maybe snobby, and I would have to 'dress up'... I was also worried about being expected to behave in a professional manner, and I didn't have the know-how to pull that off.

Yochanan, as always, didn't give up and kept on trying until one Sukkot he called me up and said: "They are having a potluck in the Sukkah - just come over and meet some people, don't dress up, come just the way you are." So I did him a HUGE favour and came... and **I was blown away**. The people I met were so down to earth and friendly. They were dressed in every-day clothing on yontif, and I was like "WOW is this even possible? I didn't know that this even exists in the world!"

After we got the great news that my children will be able to join the Pre-B'Nai Mitzvah program, we were delighted. We started meeting new friends and we were overjoyed to see our children blossom, since we were now free and fully accepted without any expectation of following religious rules. It was the greatest joy for me to see our children be appreciated. I love that this is a place where we were able to celebrate our own derech - and Dorshei was almost like our new extended family.

It Takes a Village

I realized how much our life was enriched by finding the right community for us. Connection is so important and having been blessed to have found such a beautiful environment with like-minded people means the world to us.

It takes a village to raise a child and we finally found our village. Dorshei Emet did not only contribute to our Judaism; it helped us fall in love with being Jewish. I feel so blessed and deeply grateful.

Shifra Lowen

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Please – make a donation to this year's Annual Giving Campaign.

A Place Where Everyone Feels at Home

No matter where you come from or what your background is, Dorshei Emet allows you to be yourself as – just like the Lowens - you find your own *derech* (path). While the traditions of our past give us inspiration, it is your voices and stories that lead us to ensure we stay relevant and provide a *beit kneset* where **diversity, happiness, celebration, learning and *tikkun olam* all cohabit under one joyous roof.** As Shifra's story so powerfully illustrates, Dorshei Emet is truly a place where everyone can feel at home.

This is why we are asking for your support. Your contribution to Dorshei Emet ensures that we will continue to be your supportive village as you continue on your journey.

Thank you for all that you do to keep Dorshei Emet strong!



Rabbi Boris Dolin



Elana Cooperberg, President



PS: Shifra's story is a powerful reminder of the importance of having an accepting and loving community. Dorshei Emet would not be here for the Lowens (or for you!) without every single one of our members showing their support. Please – make a donation to this year's Annual Giving Campaign. Thank you!

Dear Dorshei Emet Member - we can't do it without you!

Although we already support Dorshei Emet through our membership dues, these are simply insufficient to sustain our community.

A gift of even \$18 will go a long way towards preserving what is so special about Dorshei Emet. Please consider making a monthly donation. It is so easy to spread your gift out over an entire year!

This year I will donate:

\$180 / month

\$108 / month

\$54 / month

\$18 / month

Other \$ _____

To make your donation,

please visit our website at

www.dorsheiemet.com/payment.php

If you do not have a computer,

you can donate by **cheque**

or call the office at **514 486-9400**

One-time donation:

\$180

\$108

\$54

\$18

Other \$ _____

"It takes just one person to light a candle that will dispel the darkness. From this one light many others can be kindled... reminding us that as we turn our attention to protecting the cultural freedom and human rights of all individuals, we will in the process be engaged in the spirit that will save us as Jews."

-Rabbi Ron Aigen, z"l