

Rosh Hashanah President's Appeal
September 5, 2013
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Shanah Tovah and Welcome to Temple Aliyah!

In Exodus, Chapter 25, G-d commanded Moses from Mt. Sinai to build a tabernacle. “And let them make Me a sanctuary that I may dwell among them. Exactly as I show you - the pattern of the Tabernacle and the pattern of all its furnishings – so shall you make it.”¹

By descending from the mountain to dwell among them, G-d would become a constant presence in the hearts and souls of the wandering Israelites. G-d designed a simple, yet luxuriously decorated tent structure to hold the law given by G-d and to provide a place where the Israelite people could worship. The instructions given to Moses for the ark, the altar, and the Tabernacle were elaborate and detailed and specified a wide array of exotic materials including gold, silver, and copper; blue, purple and crimson yarns, goat's hair, tanned ram skins, dolphin skins, acacia wood; lapis lazuli and on and on, verse after verse.²

This was no small undertaking. These could not have been easy times for the Israelites, having recently fled Egypt with few possessions of their own. And G-d did not call for commonplace materials – he specified rare and precious things.

Yet G-d did not command the Israelites to make these gifts. G-d did not call for a tax to finance the construction of the Tabernacle. Nor did G-d prevail upon the Israelites to fulfill the obligation of tzedakah. Instead, G-d said to Moses:

“Tell the Israelite people to bring Me gifts; you shall accept gifts for Me from every person whose heart so moves him.”³

The offerings that G-d asked for were to be made voluntarily and were expected only from those whose hearts inspired them to generosity. What a request this was, and what a challenge! At a time of limited resources and other pressing needs, G-d asked the Israelites to make gifts of property and their time to build the Tabernacle. What was G-d thinking? What might inspire the Israelites to voluntarily give these precious materials and their labor?

Perhaps they believed, as some have written, that by giving gifts from their hearts they would make the space that G-d commanded them to build a holy place in which G-d could dwell among them. Or, maybe they were moved by the knowledge that whatever the cost, the gifts would provide a benefit greater than the value of the gifts themselves.

¹ Exodus 25:8-9

² Exodus 25:1-7

³ Exodus 25:1-2

Or possibly, as noted in the commentary in our chumash, Eitz Hayim, it was knowing that:

“One who gives, receives something in return – the sense of being generous and making a worthy undertaking possible, the sense of sharing with others in an important venture, the sense of self-worth that comes from knowing that we can give away something of value without feeling diminished.”

Whatever the reasons, the hearts of the Israelites were moved to make the offerings to construct the Tabernacle that G-d requested. As the Torah tells us, “... everyone whose spirit moved him came, bringing to the Lord his offering for the work of the Tent of Meeting....”⁴

So too,... here in Needham, ... we built a temple. You can look for a very long time, but I am certain that you won't find goat's hair, tanned ram skins, dolphin skins, or lapis lazuli anywhere in this building ... unless someone is wearing them today. Yet our modern day synagogue was built, continues to grow, and will continue to thrive and endure with gifts no less precious and no less valuable than those from which the Tabernacle was constructed.

The greatest of these gifts is the dedication, commitment and selflessness of our members – past and present – who have made possible all that we treasure here at Temple Aliyah, and our success in the future will depend on the commitment and hard work of members to come.

The founders of Temple Aliyah - some of whom are with us today - had a vision of a conservative synagogue here in Needham and they were moved to give their time and money to lay the groundwork for this synagogue. They engineered a foundation upon which a very special place has been constructed – a place for us to pray, to learn and to make personal connections with other Jews.

With gifts of hard work and money, this land and the farmhouse on it were purchased and a new building was constructed and later renovated to accommodate a growing congregation.

Together, we have built a place of worship for all of us – a place to come together during these High Holidays and throughout the year to pray, to connect spiritually with each other, to learn, to sing, to be a part of this community. We owe a great deal to our clergy – past and present - and to so many of you who lead us in prayer, today and throughout the years, helping make our experience complete.

Together, we have built a place for all of us to learn, especially our children. Initially, classes were held in a local Needham home. Over the years, our religious school has grown and evolved, and this month, thanks to the hard work of those within our

⁴ Exodus 35:21

congregation who work so hard, hand in hand with our clergy and professional staff, to educate our children, we are launching Mercaz Aliyah, a cutting edge Jewish education program with an enriched curriculum, scheduling choices that recognize the demands of busy families, and a commitment to meeting the individual needs of our students in the most inclusive manner possible. And we are exploring the feasibility of establishing an early childhood learning program at Temple Aliyah for pre-kindergarten children in order to continue to attract young families.

And together, we have built a home away from home, a place to be with old friends and meet new ones. Not just bricks and mortar – but also ruach – the spirit of our community. Temple Aliyah has grown and thrived because of the efforts of all of us – whether it is leading a service, planning a program, painting the walls and climbing on the roof to fix a leak, attending meetings (and more meetings), or simply greeting us at the door with a smile – each one of us – and all those who have preceded us – has given something from the heart.

As we proudly state in our mission statement, “we are a dynamic and egalitarian congregation with a warm and inviting atmosphere, where we encourage our members to enrich their Jewish lives, to enhance their Jewish identities, and to engage in lifelong learning.” These are not just empty words. We are what our mission statement says that we are.

Of course, and yes, this is what you have all been waiting for, it costs money to do all of this, a lot of money. Out of necessity, we look to everyone to contribute financially to help us maintain and improve this building, pay our employees, and fund our ritual, educational and social programming initiatives. The Board of Trustees strives to keep our annual dues as low as possible so that no one will feel that they cannot belong to our community. As a result, the dues and tuition we pay do not and cannot fully fund all of our operating costs. Therefore, we depend each year on your generous gifts, particularly at this time of year, to meet the financial needs of our congregation.

This year, in order to meet our contractual obligations and at the same time uphold a commitment to offer engaging and meaningful programming opportunities for all ages to enrich their Jewish lives, the Board of Trustees adopted an ambitious goal for this High Holiday appeal ... and then we increased the goal a bit more. Fortunately, I like a challenge!

But we are faced with uncertain economic times and many find it difficult to meet all of their own financial commitments. So how can we even consider making voluntary gifts to support Temple Aliyah? What will move each of us to give more to support our synagogue than the dues we all are expected to pay? What moves our hearts to give so that our synagogue may continue to grow and thrive and endure?

I know that I am moved to give my time and money to Temple Aliyah by the knowledge that there is a place to come on Shabbat morning and at holidays to pray and connect spiritually with other Jews, to learn something new from Rabbi Perkins, to sing a new melody with Cantor G, to enjoy being with friends and friends-to-be alike, and to stay

connected with our community.

I'm also moved by the memory of my daughter Rachel, my son Jacob and my wife Linda becoming b'nai mitzvah here on this bimah, in this synagogue, chanting Torah and haftarah for the first time. These are memories that will be with me for my whole life.

I'm moved, too, by having watched my children grow up with a strong connection to Judaism, Israel and this synagogue and by knowing that they will always feel comfortable returning here to Temple Aliyah. And I'm moved by seeing my own connections strengthen by playing a meaningful role as a lay leader and by spending time here with my family and with our Temple Aliyah community.

And I am moved - greatly moved – by the way that we care for each other here at Temple Aliyah. I am moved by the selfless work of our Hesed Committee and our shiva minyan leaders, caring for those in our community who are ill or grieving or otherwise in need, and by knowing that there will be a minyan here on weekday evenings if I need to say Kaddish.

And these are just some of the things about Temple Aliyah that make me want to give from the heart – both my time and my money.

Give it some thought. ... What makes this a special place for you? What brings you here today and throughout the year, to this shul? What will move you to give generously – voluntarily and from the heart - to support Temple Aliyah?

Whatever it is that moves you, be assured that your gifts will help Temple Aliyah continue to grow and thrive and endure. Be assured, too, that your gifts will benefit all of us in ways far greater than the monetary value of the gifts themselves.

Whatever your reasons, I am confident that your hearts will be moved to give in order to help make Temple Aliyah an even better place to pray, to learn and to make personal connections with others. And I think you will find that it just feels good to give to support this synagogue when it isn't required that you do so.

If you are able, please consider giving more than you normally might. If you haven't participated in our High Holiday appeal in the past, please consider participating this year for the first time. And we welcome not only gifts of money but also gifts of your time. Get involved – in whatever way feels right to you - help us to continue to build a place we can all be proud of. Our synagogue gains strength when you contribute your time as well as your money.

On behalf of myself, my family and the Board of Trustees, on which I am proud to serve, I wish you all a sweet and healthy New Year. L'Shana Tovah.

Thank you.