

Andy Farber, President

Across Jewish communities during these High Holy Days, congregants are settling in to listen.

Rabbis and other spiritual leaders are presenting meaningful sermons on the state of the Jewish community, on Israel, on Torah, on how we should be better people. Even on God.

Lay leaders are also addressing their assembled congregations. In recent times, and not so recent times, this is commonly a plea for money. In front of sell-out crowds leaders ask, some gracefully and some more forcefully, for cash donations to run the congregation for the coming year. The High Holiday Appeal, the Yom Kippur Appeal, whatever you call it, occurs in nearly every congregation in the country.

Except here at Woodlands. From its founding, Woodlands chose to be different, to turn away from that tradition. We do not have a high holiday appeal for funds. As I speak to you as your new president for 5779, I will not only honor, but will embrace that Woodlands Way. (I can assure you, when my friends and family asked me during the summer if I was writing my Yom Kippur Appeal, I told them that doing so would set a record for the shortest tenure of a Woodlands president.)

On the other hand, looking back across many of the presidents' remarks of my predecessors, there is a common theme that bears repeating. We ask for your active participation in our programs. And we ask for you to volunteer to help run them.

In Pirke Avot (3:17) Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah said,

*"Im ein kemach, ein Torah, im ein Torah, ein kemach
Where there is no wheat, there will be no Torah, where there is no Torah, there will be no wheat"*

At Woodlands, I'm proud to observe that we already have many active volunteers. Throughout these Holy Days, you will see many different people coming up to the bimah, accepting an honor for the work they have done, and for the time they have given, during the past year. We build this list by asking the clergy, members of the Board, and committee chairs to send in the names of everyone who worked on their committee, on a program, a project, a task force, or anything else, during the year. From this, we honor more than 200 individuals, representing over 25% of our member families.

In reality, I think we undercount our volunteers. Many of you volunteer your time or services without ever making it to a list. When social action sends a call for help with a DATF family relocation, when a teacher asks for help in a classroom, when we ask families to help with the Shabbat oneg, when we remind ourselves that we have a food truck to load, our members line up to help.

And to each of you, I say thank you for your time, and your energy, and your contribution to our community.

Add it all up, that's a lot of volunteers. But could we use more? Absolutely.

So how can I encourage more of you to step up? Let me try to dispel some of the reasons I've heard for why people do not volunteer:

--*Not enough time.* For sure, time is one of our most precious resources. From dawn to dusk, and into the night, we are as over-programmed as our kids. Becoming an empty nester no longer frees up much time, activities

abound to fill the time we once spent driving carpool. But we each can assess our priorities and decide what is important. And volunteering at Temple need not be a long term commitment. Come early one night to help with a dinner setup, or go on a religious school class trip. Help build a sukkah. Almost every volunteer at Temple started with a single event, a single program. And then they came back for more.

--*I don't know anyone.* Volunteering is the best way to meet and get to know people at Temple. Each program, each event brings together a group of members of our congregation. First we learn each other's names, and then we build a community.

--*I don't have the experience.* Some volunteers at Temple have special talents, and put those talents to use. We've accepted the services of doctors and lawyers, accountants and contractors, bakers and candlestick makers. Well, maybe not candlestick makers, but certainly craftspeople. But you don't need to be a specialist. All we ask is that you come with an open mind, and a willingness to help.

--*People fight all the time.* Yes, it's true we've had some heated debates at meetings, some we probably shouldn't be proud of. But I sincerely believe that the participants were all passionate about Woodlands. And there is no reason that everyone has to agree. *We only have to agree that all sides are valid.* Hillel and Shammai always disagreed, but both spoke in the name of God. Hillel always had the prevailing opinion, and Shammai's opinion always lost out. My interpretation is not that Hillel was always right, and Shammai was always wrong. Rather, I believe that the opinion that

prevailed was later attributed to Hillel, and the opposing opinion attributed to Shammai. On today's issue I might be Hillel, and on tomorrow's, Shammai.

We have a big tent here. When we say it's open to all, we usually mean anyone can come and pray with us during the High Holy Days. But as a metaphor, this tent represents our community of volunteers, open to all to come, to join us, to express your ideas and opinions, and to help run our Temple.

Which brings me to the last, and perhaps best (or worst) reason people don't volunteer:

--*Nobody asked me.* This morning, I'm asking you. Consider this a group ask. Next month is Social Action month. Sign up and help a neighbor. Look through the Daf and think about what interests you. If you see something you'd like to help with, call or e-mail the committee chair or a Board member. If you're not sure who to call, e-mail me directly, at president@wct.org. And if you'd like to explore Woodlands leadership, there's still time to join Derekh. For one night a month, we study the history of Woodlands, how synagogues work, and get to know Woodlands from behind the scenes.

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Nobody can make you volunteer, although admittedly we've sometimes gotten a little aggressive trying to encourage someone to do so. But the

payback for volunteering, I can assure you, is enormous. Not for the honor of doing a reading during the holidays, and not even for the honor of addressing you this morning. The payback is your own feeling for a job well done. When a committee completes a project, when the Sukkot BBQ team douses the flames on the grill, they all have that great feeling of having been a part of something larger than themselves. And it makes you feel really, really, good inside.

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On behalf of myself and my wife, Rabbi Joan, our kids, Rabbi Miriam and her husband Rabbi Beni, Adam, and Yael, and our grandsons Shai and Rafi, I wish you all a shanah tova, a sweet and peaceful new year.