

Hi Ho Appeal

2008 (5769)

Shanah Tovah.

In the spirit of the season, I have a confession to make. When I was asked to give the High Holiday Building Fund Appeal Speech, all I could think of was this joke my dad (who is here tonight) told me years ago.

A Rabbi, a Cantor and (in this case) a Youth Director go to Israel and are kidnapped. The kidnappers say they are going to kill them, but they can each have one last request.

The Rabbi says “I want to give the sermon I gave on Kol Nidre that was so moving it was reprinted in the CCAR Yearbook and is taught today as a model sermon at Hebrew Union College.”

The Youth Director says “I would like to give the High Holidays building fund appeal speech I gave that raised more money than any synagogue appeal in the history of synagogue appeals”

The Cantor says, “Shoot me first”.

I mention this right up front because, believe me, I feel your pain.

And so, I promise this shall be brief.

We need money.

As you can see behind me, we suffered an unfortunate roof leak this summer. As you have read about in the bulletin, the ark and the Holocaust Torah were damaged. So far we have gutted the ark down to the cinder blocks, and are in process of interviewing architects for the reconstruction. The incident pointed out some missteps in the original construction of the Ark, like there probably shouldn't be a drainpipe running through it...

Of course it is heart-wrenching to hear that the Ark, the heart of our Sanctuary, the home of our Torahs was damaged. And none of us is pleased that (as someone dear to me wryly commented) “the Torah could survive the Holocaust but not Temple Beth Shalom”.

While it is incumbent upon us to care for the Torah scrolls, our scrolls are also living reminders of our history and heritage. The Czech scroll, which indeed survived the Holocaust, existed for decades before the Nazis, in a synagogue building far less modern than our own. All of our Torahs have a history, each of them beginning long before they arrived in our congregation, and evidenced by the variety of repairs and replacement parchments within them.

To the horrible events the Czech scroll witnessed, we have (in the 19 years we have hosted it) added countless simchas. It is appropriate that this is the scroll we unroll and encircle our children with on

Simchat Torah. And as it has been carried into and among our congregation on the last 18 High Holidays, we have affirmed the resilience of our people and the miracle that is Jewish life in Santa Fe, New Mexico.

We will repair and conserve the Torah scroll, but it will bear the evidence of this summer's bountiful rains as part of its history. This has got me to thinking about our role as keepers of the Torah. On Bar and Bat Mitzvah mornings, Rabbi likes to say "We have Torah on this day because in every generation there have been those who chose to study it and bequeath it to the next generation." And while he says that before literally handing the Torah scroll to the next generation, truly what we pass on is not the scroll, but what is contained within it.

I spend a lot of time with our Torahs, I teach our 7th graders here in the sanctuary on Sunday mornings, and as a B'nei Mitzvah tutor I have the pleasure of chanting, reading, studying and learning with

our students. I love the Torah. But it occurred to me that many of you have perhaps not seen the inside of a Torah scroll since your own B'nei Mitzvah, if at all. So I thought I would share a couple of things I adore about the handwritten, scroll-version of the Torah.

Look on the back of your program; there's a line of Hebrew. The first thing to point out to you is a teaching I learned from Rabbi Ben Morrow: The three Torah's in the temporary Ark tonight are known as "vav" Torahs. This is because (like the line of Hebrew on your program) they are written so that each column of the Torah (except for the first) begins with a Vav. This takes some skill: each column is the same length and width after all. The letter vav at the beginning of a Hebrew word means "and"; so, by having each column begin with a vav, it is as though the entire Torah is one continuous thought.

The second teaching is one I learned from Rabbi Marvin Schwab. The letter with the arrow pointing to it is a pey. If you look at the white space inside the pey you will see a "bet" (if your Hebrew is

rusty, bet is the giant letter on the top right above the ark). In Hebrew, the word for “house” is Bayit, or Beit (we say Beth Shalom: house of peace). Also the word for “here” is “Po” (Israeli dreidels have a pey instead of a shin, because they say “a great miracle happened HERE”, whereas we say a great miracle happened there). So by writing the letter pey with a bet inside it we are reminded that our home is here, within the Torah.

The Torah is ours, tomorrow morning they will be carried around the sanctuary because we believe that the Torah belongs equally to each of us. Nearly every b'nei mitzvah speech begins with the phrase “my torah portion is”, and they really do feel ownership of “their” portion, (and some of them even remember something about it a few years later).

I didn't have a Bat Mitzvah, following the classical Reform tradition of Confirmation instead. However, I think if I had to choose, my adopted Torah portion would be Vayera, because it contains the

Akedah, which we will hear read tomorrow morning. I have studied, contemplated and related the story of the Binding of Isaac from nearly every possible vantage point during the youth services held in the upper sanctuary. I love this story because it is so difficult, and because the main characters are such a puzzle. As I contemplated the story this year it seemed to me that we are all, each of us, right this moment, *one* of the characters in the tale.

Are you Abraham? Abraham is so dedicated to Temple Beth Shalom that he blindly does his part, but perhaps has stopped asking critical questions (is there more I can do? Is my time/energy/money directed to what the *Temple* needs most?)

Perhaps you are Sarah? Maybe you feel shut out of the process. Once you tried to find out when a committee was meeting and didn't get a satisfactory answer? Or maybe you're just not interested in taking a more active role.

Some of you are God, or think you are. You set up conditions and tests for the Temple and when we fail, you blame *us*.

Are you Isaac? Taking whatever the Temple gives you? Do you feel you ask questions, but don't get answered or heard? Do you feel constrained by the Temple?

And some of us are Angels. We see that things have gone awry and swoop in to save the day. Were it not for the Angel in the Akedah, the Torah would be a lot shorter, because Judaism would have stopped at Abraham.

I believe that at some point in our membership to Temple Beth Shalom, and Judaism in general we are each of the above. Tonight, however, I need us *all* to be Angels.

In order to ensure that we have handwritten Torah scrolls to support the internal Torahs of our souls we need some very real money. We

need the money to repair the Ark and to re-fund the building fund so we have money for regular building maintenance in the future. This money is *in addition* to the building fund pledges we have already made as part of our membership.

A generous estimate puts our goal at \$50,000.00. If every person present tonight gave \$100.00 we would have it. Not every family, not every member, every *person*.

Tonight as you leave you will be handed an empty grocery bag for our annual Yom Kippur food drive. Included on this bag is a special pledge card written by our high school students to you. The cards tell you the Torah portion from that student's b'nei mitzvah, and some things they love about their portions and Temple Beth Shalom. I hope you will be inspired to join them in trying to ensure that what was placed into their arms at their Bar and Bat Mitzvahs will be able to be placed into the arms of those who come after them.

So to kick things off, here is my check for \$100., along with a \$100.00 check from the Youth Group's Tzedakah fund. So, two down, 498 to go.

Just think: if we really were all Angels here tonight I would have a valid last request if ever kidnapped.

May this year be a year of peace, blessing and *prosperity* for all of us and Temple Beth Shalom,

L'Shanah Tovah.