

President's Appeal — Rosh Hashanah — 1 Tishrei 5764

Shabbat Shalom, Shana Tovah,

This morning I have the deepest honor of standing before you as President of Temple Aliyah. One of the traditional obligations of this honorable office is the delivery of this address – the annual appeal for funds for our Temple. I'm supposed to ask you for money today. Let me tell you – I have never been so nervous in my life. I am not a professional fundraiser and standing here today asking you to contribute to the Temple is not an easy thing to do.

The story is told of a Jewish man who lived in a large European city who grew so tired of being asked for money by the Jewish solicitors that he decided to pretend to not be Jewish at all. When the solicitors would come to his door, he would claim that he was not Jewish, nor were his parents. One year soon after his father had passed away, a new Rabbi came to the door. "I was sure you were Jewish" said the rabbi. "No," protested the man, "my mother was not Jewish, and my father, *alav ha shalom*, was not Jewish either."

Well, I won't beg you so strenuously today that any of you would want to deny your heritage. On the other hand, the President's High Holiday appeal is a well-intended enterprise and the beneficiaries, all of us, and our children and grand children, are well deserving of a truly great Temple. So allow me to start with the easy part – I want to talk for a few minutes about our wonderful shul.

Do you remember 10 years ago? 1993? Believe it or not, the renovation and addition to our shul was completed 10 years ago and today marks the 11th time we have gathered for the high holidays in our "new" sanctuary. Can you believe that this High Holiday season marks for our Rabbi his 13th high holidays with Temple Aliyah? Of course, it is trite to say, but my how time flies! But if we can look back and reminisce for a moment, I think we will all appreciate a bit of context. When we built our new building 10 years ago, we had 270 member families. Our Hebrew school had 125 students. We did not have a full time educational director and there were 6 teachers in our religious school. We did not have a family educator, a ritual assistant or a bookkeeper. The Temple's billing system and general ledger was not computerized. Just 10 years ago the temple's annual operating budget was \$350,000. Today, we have 425 member families, 220 students in our religious school, a full time educational director and 12 teachers. We have a 3/4 time Family Educator, a part time ritual assistant, a part time bookkeeper and 3 people who are involved with our youth and teen activities. The annual operating budget for our fiscal '03/04" year is \$1.3 million dollars. We've come a long way in 10 years! While we have grown tremendously in terms of membership, staff, facility and our budget, there is more.

Our program offerings are tremendous, as evidenced by the mailing that you should have recently received entitled “Synagogue Program Booklet” which was put together by Terri Swartz Russell, our Family Educator. Inside the booklet, there are 35 pages describing the various programs and activities offered here at Temple Aliyah. If you have not already done so, please take a look at this wonderful resource. I would like to encourage you to get involved in something new. I invite you to actively participate and help yourselves of all that our synagogue has to offer to you and to your families.

But let me be frank. In order to have the superb professional staff, educational opportunities, programming for all ages and our beautiful facility, it all costs money. As I mentioned a moment ago, our operating budget is \$1.3 million dollars. For those of you who were unable to attend the Temple’s annual meeting this past May, let me briefly explain the major sources of revenue and expenses under which we operate. I’ll start with the expenses first in order to explain to you how it could possibly cost so much to run a shul. There are 6 areas that comprise the expense side of the budget, the 3 largest of which are “Ritual”, “School” and “House” and together these costs represent “2/3” of our operating expenses. The remaining “1/3” relates to: (1) administrative operations including the cost of providing health insurance to our full time employees, the cost of maintaining equipment and the computer network, (2) family education, (3) youth and (4) the Temple’s contribution to the Passport to Israel Program.

Ok, so I’ve told you about what the major costs are to run our shul. Now I will tell you how we try to pay for everything. If we relied simply on our dues and fees to operate the shul, we would have to drastically reduce the activities, programs, services and quality of our professional staff. Our dues and fees account for 70% of what is needed to run our synagogue. Dues alone do not support all the endeavors of our synagogue. Twenty percent of our revenue comes from sources including “regular donations”, rentals, High Holiday tickets, grants from the Combined Jewish Philanthropies and pledged income from both Sisterhood and Men’s Club. Therefore, the balance of our budget relies on voluntary contributions beyond the regular dues structure. Major fundraising, primarily, the annual High Holiday appeal, is what we use to balance the budget. This High Holiday appeal should be a cushion that would enable us to fund programs or services that currently do not exist such as a special needs program in our religious school. If we had a cushion, we could provide scholarships to our teens to encourage them to participate in teen programming in Israel. Ten years ago the goal of the President’s High Holiday appeal was \$ 30,000. The goal for this year is \$130,000.

While budgetary and financial concerns are of critical importance, they are not the end or the purpose of our synagogue. On the contrary, the budget is driven by the services and programs that we provide, and that, in turn, is driven by our mission and goals. Our commitment is to meet the needs of our membership, by providing the tools, resources and environment needed to inspire and encourage individual Jewish growth. As a non-profit organization, our bottom line is the level of services and programs that we provide. The measure of our success is ultimately, the vibrancy and quality of Jewish life that is supported here at Temple Aliyah.

Our synagogue is after all, much more than a building. It is a place that is filled with the sounds of prayer, the words of Torah the cycles of our lives. This is the place where babies are named and welcomed into the covenant of our people; this is the place where our children grow to adulthood and are married; a place where lives are touched and where people connect, with one another and with Judaism. Temple Aliyah is a place where we come for comfort and support; this is where we help those in need, support those in sickness and grieve with those in mourning. It is a place where community is created and built. Temple Aliyah is a place where we can express and celebrate our Judaism. It is a place where we can learn and grow as individuals. Most importantly, this is a place where we can create memories and meaningful family experiences through which we instill in our children, a sense of comfort with their Judaism, a sense of pride in their rich past and a sense of commitment to our shared future. “Teach your children diligently” says the Torah. Temple Aliyah is a place where we teach our children how we, as a people, have endured throughout our history. Our synagogue is a place that I, for one, feel proud, and blessed, to be a part of.

One of the things that we Jews learn at a very young age is the concept of Tzedakah. Tzedakah is one of the cornerstones of Judaism. In his book *Embracing Judaism*, Rabbi Perkins says:

“Tzedakah means more than charity; it means justice. Charity is something given by someone to another who has less. Tzedakah is more than a gift; it is an act of justice. Helping others is fulfilling one’s duty, not simply an act of kindness... In Talmudic times, everyone had to contribute to a common fund that was used to maintain a free soup kitchen, provide lodging for travelers and help the unfortunate. Taking care of the needy has always thus been understood to be a sacred obligation”.

Tzedakah means that Jews must take care of other Jews and Jewish institutions. This is how our institutions were built and how they continue to exist. In our world today, participation in Jewish life is voluntary, rather than an obligation. Tzedakah is a prime concern of affiliated Jews.

Earlier this month, I sent each of you a letter. In that letter I asked you to consider, in advance, your pledge for this appeal. It was my hope, that by asking you to consider the appeal in advance, that you will respond today by increasing your contribution over the previous year. For many people, the past couple of years have been difficult, financially. Some of our members are now finding it hard to make contributions, or to pay their dues completely. In fact, 20% of our Temple families receive some form of dues abatement. The recession has taken a much larger toll on our receipts than we anticipated.

On Rosh Hashanah we reflect on the past year and renew our spiritual attachment. We also renew our commitments to our families, friends, community and our synagogue. Now is the time to renew our commitment to Temple Aliyah.

At this time, please take out the appeal card that you picked up prior to services. To make a pledge, simply fold down the tab for the donation amount that you would like to make. If the amount that you want to pledge is not on the card, please use the “other” category and I will personally call you to follow up. But, before you fold down the tab, think about how you can make this High Holiday appeal successful. It is so important to the well being of our shul. I ask you to search your heart in giving as much as you can so that we can get through the year on a sound financial basis. Professor Abraham Joshua Heschel wrote: “do as much as you can and then just a little more than you can. This is vital—a little more than you can”. I ask each of you to make a gift that is significant to your individual ability. Think of the person to the right and to the left of you - it is not their responsibility. It is my responsibility, it is your responsibility, it is our responsibility. It is our responsibility to insure that we continue to have a beautiful building in which to meet and to pray, to have exceptional programs and a superb and talented professional staff. No matter how difficult, we have no choice but to make an individual commitment, to do better than last year’s pledge. Whatever you can do to help our shul will be greatly appreciated.

I am counting on your support.

On behalf of the officers and board of trustees of Temple Aliyah, my family and myself, I would like to express our wish, to all of our members, that you be inscribed for a year of health, happiness and prosperity, and that it be a year of peace and security in Israel and the world over.

Shana Tovah

Lesli Reich, President