

Friends,

As I write this, our Board of Trustees is getting ready to vote on a new budget for 2019-2020. In that budget is a brand new allocation for \$2500. Small as that number is in the scheme of our entire financial picture, it might be the most important new item in a Bet Am Shalom budget in a long time. The funds will provide up to \$500 each for new shul projects and innovations, things we decide we want to test and try out.

We don't know yet what these innovations will be. That's where you come in.

Recently, I spent an amazing night at Bet Am. With me were about a hundred other congregants, from five months to nine decades old. We tried something new – an all-night (or as long as we could hang in!) program of study, davening, music, food, drink, laughter, and just being with one another – an incredible way of ushering in the holiday of Shavuot.

Pre-teens and octogenarians studied together about kashrut and the essence of Buber, while kids of all ages enjoyed a Sinai scavenger hunt. There was a drum circle at midnight, and a few families put tents on our lawn and camped there. We learned about food and social justice, the purpose of blessings, Rabbinical tough love, fasting, and even Jewish attitudes about breastfeeding. There was joyful dancing at our evening service. We ate Mount Sinai Cupcakes. We went to bed late, and yet many of us managed to crawl out of our beds (and tents) the next day for a beautiful Shavuot morning service in the sanctuary.

It was one of the most amazing times I've spent at Bet Am. Kudos to Abby Goldman, Rachel Posner and Michelle Stern for their leadership, to our wonderful staff, and to all the teachers, bakers, service leaders, chanters, and volunteers of all kinds, all the parents who brought your kids, and all the congregants willing to try something different.

There is a sense of excitement at Bet Am these days. Several people have mentioned it to me – it's a feeling of vibrance that is powerful and energizing. With our Future Visioning taskforce underway and two SPARK fellowship innovations unfolding in our community, with our rabbi and cantor deeply

involved in the meaningful expansion of authentic Jewish expression, and by continuing to nurture good ideas, we are creating new energy in our thriving, active congregation.

And those grants I mentioned at the beginning of this article? They are for you.

What would you love to start at Bet Am, if only there were a little funding? Maybe it's a program of Shabbat dinners in one another's homes, a class we hold outside the shul for people who might not know about us, a youth program, a trip somewhere, a different type of special service you'd like to try once, a weekend away together, a special event for tots, or a program for seniors. Maybe it's a further enhancement of what we're already doing especially well. Maybe it's an experiment you heard about another shul doing that seemed "Bet Am'ish" to you. Bring it to us.

When our fiscal year starts on July 1, we will be ready to start listening to ideas. Until we have a committee formed, ideas will go to the Executive Committee for consideration. Not every idea suggested will end up happening, and not all those we do try will be successful. And that's all okay. We are building a culture of innovation, and you are a very important part of it.

Large ideas and small ones are equally welcome. Shabbat Kulanu, Shorashim, our distinctive Purimspiel, Hurricane Katrina rebuilding, supporting an Afghan refugee family, and Sinai Together: Edible Torah – all originally were the brainchildren of congregants like you. We're counting on you to bring us the next idea.