

Kol Nidre Appeal – September, 2017

Good *yontif*.

I'm sure you've all had the experience of being told something that you know quite well but, for whatever reason, at that particular moment, it hits home.

At the beginning of the summer, I was having breakfast with a friend – who's also a fellow Bet Am member and a former president here – and we got onto the topic of fundraising. At one point, he looked at me and said, "You know, there are a lot of other good causes out there for people to give their money to." That obvious fact struck me anew, and stuck with me throughout the summer.

Tonight, it's my job to ask you for the funds we need – on top of dues and any Torah La'am tuition – to be able to pay our dedicated staff, maintain our beautiful space, and welcome everyone into our tent for another year.

At the same time, I cannot ignore that implicit question posed to me over a cup of coffee and two eggs over easy. Why Bet Am? Why does this institution deserve more of our money than some other worthy cause?

My musings over the summer led me to an answer that, again, for me, hit home: Our synagogue deserves it because there are few institutions that have more of a meaningful presence in our lives and in the lives of those around us.

Here's my thinking.

For most of us, engagement in our community ebbs and flows. There are times, years perhaps, when other needs or wants take priority. Yet, for all of us, at different times, in different ways, there are significant and consequential moments, sometimes momentous or pivotal moments, when we engage.

I wish I could individually remind you of those moments in your lives that would hit home; or even more miraculously present you with those that are in your future. But, to quote a central prayer of these Days of Awe, we do not know "who will live and who will die; whose death will be timely and whose will not...who will live safely and who will suffer harm, whose life will be tranquil and whose will be tormented, who will be poor and who will be rich, and who will be humbled, and who will be raised up."

I ask you, though, to consider some common moments and, through them, perhaps, find your remembrances or the possibilities in your future.

There are so many times at Bet Am Shalom when we are "raised up." At the simplest level, it may be when we notice welcoming smiles under our tent, recall them from years past, and hope to see them again in years ahead.

Even more so, we are raised up at moments when a member's newborn child or grandchild or great grandchild or nephew or niece is given a Jewish name; when our children display their readiness for Jewish adulthood; when our teens graduating from Torah La'am express thoughtful Jewish values; and when our young adults show themselves ready for lifelong commitment and intimacy.

These are not just celebrations for you and your family. In the faces and voices of our congregation, there is gladness, there is pride, there is a sense of fulfilled communal responsibility.

So, too, when we "suffer harm" – when there is struggle, and hardship, and grief, there is Bet Am Shalom's presence.

Repeatedly, for weeks or months on end, representatives of our Bikur Cholim committee visit ill and disabled members, cook and deliver them meals, drive them to doctors and distant hospitals for treatments, read them books and newspapers in hospitals and homes, and keep them company during hospice.

BAS Connections reaches out to those who want to remain a part of our community but, for whatever reason, are unable to make their way here on their own. For years, these now encumbered colleagues celebrated with you, broke bread with you, served on committees with you, delivered food to the needy with you, sat under this tent with you – and they wish to continue to be present and make a difference. The committee makes this possible by bringing them to our synagogue, or, when that isn't feasible, connecting in their homes, bringing them the latest Bet Am scoop and some of our presence.

There are more of us than we often care to admit who are “tormented” – debilitated by a mental health issue of their own or a family member. The Refuat HaNefesh, Healing of the Spirit, committee worked for over two years to bring the resources and practices to our community which allow any member to comfortably obtain professional help, or the support of another member who has gone through a similar experience.

“Timely” or “untimely,” the pain of a “death” is a communal matter. Grieving families find a “meal of consolation” in their home when they return from the cemetery. One member of the committee that provides this sustenance told me that what attracted her to it was being able to perform a *mitzvah* while remaining anonymous.

For up to seven days, members of our Shiva Committee arrange and lead services in mourners' homes, often traveling with their cases of prayer books and yarmulkes to far-flung residences.

Perhaps ironically, it is often at these *shivas* when our members are most “raised up.” The *shiva* callers learn about the deceased, and help the mourners celebrate his or her life. The mourners feel the embrace of a community that has been with them through good and bad times, and are uplifted in knowing that embrace will be there through those times to come.

For some of you, *dayenu*; this would be enough. But for many, what Bet Am does for those outside our community is just as important.

Our Social Action Committee, for decades, has kept us aware of our less fortunate neighbors, and helped us give back. “Turkey or tuna?”, one of our members asks the homeless, giving them a choice, recognizing them as human beings. Going to shelters and food pantries not just to deliver food and clothing but to have a conversation.

At the same time our Green Chevra takes on matters of global importance, it leads our effort to become a more ecologically sustainable institution, and ensures none of our food goes wasted, bringing remains to local shelters.

Most of you are aware of our Tikkun Olam immigration initiative, which has organized education and action on this crucial matter for us and our children. And we stand ready to adopt an immigrant family whenever they are enabled to arrive at our door.

There are other benevolent committees and programs I could reference, and I'm sure even then I would leave some out.

Just as significantly, I could point to numerous examples of spontaneous support running across our community almost every day.

Recently, during the hurricanes, emails flew through our network to begin to determine how we will send-out rebuilding assistance teams, as we did for years after Katrina and Sandy.

And, I could talk about members who come to Bet Am for spiritual and communal sustenance as they go out and perform acts of lovingkindness, often through other institutions.

But, in this short interval between our Kol Nidre prayers, I tried to convey to you what I thought would best substantiate my answer to "Why Bet Am?".

As I ask for your contributions, I do want to reference one other "unknown" in the prayer I mentioned earlier, "who will be rich and who will be poor". Just as we open this tent to all, we open our synagogue to anyone who wants to be part of our community no matter what their financial situation; and we are thankful to those who make that possible with their generosity.

As I said at the beginning, engagement in our community ebbs and flows. Perhaps you are "ebbing" at the moment. But, tonight, please recall those moments, big and small, when the community made its mark in your life.

Please consider how in the future it might do so again.

Please know that there are many in our community and beyond who need Bet Am's presence in their lives right now.

And, please recognize that it takes a financial contribution from each and every one of us, to whatever extent we can, to maintain that meaningful presence for yet another year.

If I've fallen short with my justification; if my appeal did not hit home for you; let's talk over breakfast, or, more timely, over break-fast.

*G'mar chatimah tovah.*

Our Executive Committee members will be coming around to collect your envelopes, after which we'll return to our service.