



## Rabbi Weiner's Nov. 2008 Bulletin Article

Those who were with us for Yom Kippur will recall that I challenged the members of our congregation and community to strive to incorporate more of our Jewish heritage into our lives in the coming year. By doing so, we will ascend a ladder of holiness that can add so much to our lives in the year to come. On Yom Kippur I suggested three (3) areas, which I believe, need our special attention. In this column, I am sharing them with you once again. I hope you will consider them.

\*

\*

\*

.... I want to challenge each and every member of our community to reconsider the importance of Shabbat in their lives. The truth is that Shabbat is by far our most important observance. Yet at the same time, it's beauty, and its depth, and its true purpose is experienced by only a fraction of our community. I am always proud that our synagogue has a large Shabbat attendance each week. But let me tell you a little secret. On our best week it will only be 10% of those who are here today. And if we continue to parse the numbers, only about 80%% of the congregation is actually with us on the High Holidays. Do you understand what I am saying? That only a tiny fraction of our community joins us weekly for our most important service. I am asking you to make a real commitment to greater Shabbat attendance this year. To our families with young children, come to a Young Family Service that meets the first Friday night of each month. They are wonderful, they are spirited. Your children will enjoy, and so will you. For those of you who used to attend Friday evenings at our late service, and who drifted away over the years, we want you back. No more excuses, and no more putting it off. And if you are coming once a month on Shabbat morning, I want you here twice in the New Year. And if you are not coming at all, this is the year you need to start. We have babysitting for your kids, we have wonderful programs for the older children, and men and women who look forward to welcoming you and helping you find your place in your heritage and in your synagogue.

On Rosh Hashanah, I spoke at some length about the ethical concerns which have been divorced from the ritual aspects of *Kashrut*. But these concerns fall on deaf ears if we cannot reinvigorate and rededicate ourselves to our dietary laws. Do you want your children to carry on the Jewish heritage? Nothing, nothing will save them like making *Kashrut* a priority in your life, and in theirs. There is no reason for any Jewish family in our community to bring food forbidden by the Torah into our homes. For those who have not made any type

of commitment to *Kashrut* in their lives, this is the logical place to start. For those who think that this is hypocritical because they eat shellfish and pork and the like outside their homes anyway, let me liberate you from such ideas. Remember this New Year is about setting small, reasonable goals that remind us who we are, and what we are all about. And as we do, we will remember that *Kashrut* in all of its guises is about self discipline, about justice, and about sensitivity to all life, the values that Judaism gave the world.

There are so many ways to start. The last one I will share is a renewed commitment to *Tzedakah* in all of its various forms. *Tzedakah* is loosely translated as charity. But *Tzedakah* is charity, but not only charity. *Tzedakah* is righteousness, acting with honor and dignity and compassion and generosity at all times, and in all places. Our nation is suffering because our government and leading institutions are devoid of these values, and thus we, the descendents of those who first taught the world that G-d cares about this, have a personal responsibility to act according to its principles. I want to see greater devotion to this synagogue in your personal lives – because you need us, and we need you. I want to challenge you to be even more generous to the synagogue, and to the needs of the larger Jewish community. For there is no one to carry this burden but you. I want to challenge us to understand the difficulty that is being experienced by so many of our neighbors. For years I would send in a small amount of money, maybe \$200 or so to our Paramus Dept. of Human Services, and it would last them for months. Now, it doesn't even make a dent in meeting the needs that your neighbors have shared with them, and our governments, federal, state, and local can offer little to no help. Do not ignore the food collection box in the synagogue lobby. Do not ignore the outstanding work of our social action committee. And whatever you did last year, I thank you. But I need you to dig a little deeper this year if you can. You may not think that your own commitment to *Tzedakah* makes a difference. I assure you—it does, and when combined with the efforts of others in the community, it can make all the difference.

Shabbat, *Kashrut*, and *Tzedakah*: I have shared these three places to start or restart as the case may be. But there are so many others to start as well. And this synagogue will help you ascend that ladder of holiness, one tiny step higher at a time. And if we do so, it will make a difference in the lives you lead, I promise you that.

\*

\*

\*

There is a story of three demons who come together in order to compare results in their efforts to corrupt human beings.

The first one says: “I tell people that there is no G-d. But it does not work. People are too smart. They see all the wonders of the world so they don't believe me.”

The second one says: “I tell people that there is a G-d but he did not give the Torah. But it doesn’t work. People are too smart. They look into the Torah and see how much wisdom and guidance it contains, and so they don’t believe me.

The third one says: “I tell people that there is a G-d and that he gave the Torah, but I say to them what’s the rush? You have time to do what he wants tomorrow – *and that works.*”

The simple truth is that we don’t have tomorrow. All we have is today. The challenge that I have set before the congregation is not for some future time. Let us resolve to achieve it now.



**Jewish Community Center of Paramus**  
**E. 304 Midland Ave., Paramus NJ 07652**  
**Phone: (201) 262-7691 Fax: (201) 262-6516**  
**© 2007 Jewish Community Center of Paramus**