

D'var Rav: Words from the Rabbi

THE CIRCLE OF OUR LIVES

The lyrics to “The Circle of Life,” the signature song from the wildly-popular Broadway production of *The Lion King*, reflect an idea that has been an integral part of Jewish religious thought for millennia: as day follows night, as season follows season, so does generation follow generation. The perpetuation of life represents, literally, the death of death.

Fall has followed summer. The Days of Awe are near. And so we begin, together and as before, a new season—our sixth—with fellow members of our New Shul community. We continue to pulsate with that selfsame life-force that keeps creation itself in a constant state of renewal; we continue to grow and develop, to improve and enhance, to nurture and challenge.

What is it that keeps that life-force vibrant, that keeps a spiritual community dynamic and alive? What prevents ossification, decay, and death? The answer is *investment*.

In my almost dozen years as a rabbi, I am still amazed at how many people complain (as did our ancestors in the desert!) about the commitments entailed in being part of a Jewish congregation. Why should I stay on after my child’s bar or bat mitzvah? Why should I volunteer my precious time to serve on one of the shul’s committees or its Va’ad? Why should I offer financial support beyond my annual dues?

The New Shul isn’t a health club. It isn’t a commercial institution where we simply exchange goods for services. It is a context for community, a place where we try to touch people in the deepest, most profound areas of their lives—and where, once we ourselves have been touched, we try to make sure that others have the same opportunities and experiences we’ve had.

So what inspires us to make that serious commitment? How do we get “hooked” on this ethical and spiritual philosophy of action? *Investment*. Nobody really gives a damn about the stock market unless they’ve put funds into their own portfolio. No one really cares passionately about the school system until they themselves have children in it. And nobody is going to find the synagogue as meaningful as it could (and can) be unless they give *to* it in a meaningful way.

We can give of our time, our talent, our prosperity. It is only if we give, above and beyond mere membership requirements, that we will get—and what we will “get,” ultimately, is wisdom, the satisfaction in the knowledge that the giving itself *is* the getting.

My rabbinic challenge to each and every one of you this year is to invest in this wonderful shul. Overall, we've done an adequate job—I would give us a B. Clearly, we can do much better. With five years of history behind us, it's time to get serious.

May this Season of Renewal renew all of us. May the circle of our lives—and the circle of this community—grow from strength to strength.

B'shalom, Niles