



From Rabbi Weber

When you invite someone to come to temple with you, or when you introduce yourself to someone you don't know at services, do you ever think that you might be changing history?

Judaism teaches us to treat every person we meet as if they are Elijah the Prophet. If we treat them well, Elijah will stay with us and bless us; if we ignore them, Elijah will find somewhere more welcoming to live. We don't know what Elijah looks like; he could be six or 60, male or female, black or white, Jewish or not Jewish. Elijah may only be a legend, but the lesson is real: no one should ever be ignored.

Paying attention to people is difficult, and it takes work. When we come to temple – for services, for a class, or to pick up our kids – it is human nature to talk with the people we know, not the ones we don't know. Sometimes we've had a difficult week, and all we want to do is relax; reaching out to strangers is not relaxing. Some of us just aren't that outgoing; talking to people we don't know doesn't come easily to us at all. But doing it is important – as important as welcoming Elijah.

What makes someone feel comfortable when they go somewhere new? Some people are happy to enter unfamiliar territory, and put out their hand to everyone they meet. Most of us, though, are more cautious. We wonder how we'll feel where we don't know anyone, when we don't understand the local customs. For many people the discomfort keeps them from trying new things and seeing new sights. It also keeps them from joining a congregation, or even trying one out.

That's why the most important thing we can do to help a person feel comfortable at Rodeph Torah is to invite them to come with us. Whether it is attending a service together, or inviting their kids to go to religious school with our kids one day, everyone feels better when they know they won't be alone. Make an evening of it, or a morning: invite your neighbor to grab dinner and then join you for services, or to have their child accompany your child to religious school then both families hit IHop for lunch. (A personal favorite of mine is Shabbat evening services followed by dessert at Jersey Freeze – nothing beats a warm Friday night with ice cream and friends!)

Once people enter the temple, it's our job – yes, our job – to help them feel at home. No less than our ancestors Abraham and Sarah were known for their hospitality, for running to greet visitors and invite them in. We can do no less as Jews and as a Jewish community. Every person who enters our building is the future of the Jewish People, and helping them feel a connection to God, to the temple and to us is our part in building that future.

Here is the job: the next time you come to the temple, talk to one person you don't know. Don't just say hello and walk on; take a minute, or a few minutes, to talk with them. If you meet at the beginning of services, make a point to find them after the service, and continue your conversation. They may not be new to TRT at all; we have nearly 1,000 people in our community, and no one knows everyone. At the very least, you'll have one more person you recognize the next time you're here; at best, you could help someone decide that TRT is a nice place to be, and help them decide to come back again.

In the same way, I ask you to talk with your Jewish friends about our congregation. Tell them why you belong, why you educate your children here, and why you feel comfortable here. Then invite them to come with you, or with your kids. (Just give Rabbi Stern a call to say your child will be bringing a friend; she will be happy to welcome them.) Even invite them to an Adult Education class; there's always room for more.

Could your neighbor, or your neighbor's child, be Elijah? Could your welcoming look, your kind word, your invitation to join you, really change history? There's only one way to find out: Invite them in!

Comments? Sign on to the rabbi's blog at www.rabbi.trt.org.



From the Desk of Rabbi Stern:

I always get asked the question: "What do your kids do in school that's so special, and what possible difference can this make in the long run? Most important, why would anyone

spend 5 years in Hebrew School before they become Bar or Bat Mitzvah?"

We try to do a lot: we give our kids the basics of Hebrew, mastery of important Jewish prayers, a

sense of Jewish history, culture and music. And of course, we teach the annual continuum of Jewish holidays.

As they get older, we raise the level of conversation to include the Holocaust, relationship to God and mitzvot and to themselves: we ask them the question: what kind of Jewish adult will you be? To concretize this, several years ago we instituted a new course called "Social Justice: Putting Jewish Values into Meaningful Action." Our students have studied all year about the challenges that we face in the world today, how they have the power to effect positive change, and how important it is for them to take the initiative and become social justice leaders. Una Tedoff has tweaked the curriculum to include timely subjects that need further exploration, so this year especially, bullying people and trusting those around us has become a focus of their study. And they learn through a whole spectrum of media: from text books and novels, to Wikipedia and YouTube videos, to Power Point presentations and iTunes. By incorporating the reality of their everyday lives and including all the social media available to them, we can communicate the same information faster and more efficiently, avoiding the disconnect that can set in with "talking heads" frontal learning.

The year is culminating in a plethora of social action projects that the students have been addressing. Each student has chosen a topic that is meaningful to him or to her, and is completing a research paper and a visual representation that will be presented to other students in the school. The topics cover a wide range of issues including child abuse, animal abuse, sexual assault, bullying, substance abuse, war, AIDS, and hunger, all of which are underscored by the monthly middah, or Jewish value, that are included into the entire K- 7 curriculum.

We also invite you to come to our student-led Yom Hashoa service, remembering the Holocaust, on May 2nd from 5:30 – 6:15, to see how the students wove their personal Holocaust diaries into the structure of this brief but soulful service.

Want to see how they react to this variety of Jewish learning? Come in any Thursday and see for yourself, especially if you have younger children. If you want to visit any other grade, give the Religious School a call and we will accommodate you.

This isn't your old-time Hebrew School anymore!



MAY HIGHLIGHTS

We apologize for omitting the following invitation from the last newsletter



It is with love and tremendous pride that we invite you to join us on Saturday, May 21, 2011, at 10:00AM as our daughter and sister, Kerin Leigh Miller, is called to the Torah as a Bat Mitzvah. Please join us for the oneg following services.

Bonnie, Richard, Jordan, and Jared

TRT Social Action Committee Spring Food Drive

Did you know that...

- Over 127,000 people received emergency food in Monmouth and Ocean Counties in 2009?
- Two out of every five people who receive emergency food are children?
- Last year, the Food Bank provided almost 7 million pounds of food to people in need through over 200 pantries, soup kitchens and other food programs in our two counties.

We will once again be collecting food for the Food Bank at A&P of Marlboro and Shop-Rite of Marlboro

May 15 from 8:00AM to 6:00PM

Please contact Bill Fireman, at 732-972-2572, if you are available for a 2-hour shift to distribute flyers to shoppers entering the market and receive their donations upon exit.



Rodeph Torah Senior Youth will host Shabbat Services

Friday, May 6, 2011 at 6:30PM

This year, RTSY chose to focus our service on:

- **Living in the moment**
- **Appreciating every life**
- **Honoring ourselves**



Shabbat is an opportunity for each of us to review the preceding week, reconcile our emotions, and appreciate ourselves and our loved ones. Therefore, we have chosen to incorporate ways throughout the service for each of us to focus on the basic necessity of life: living. RTSY looks forward to sharing this Shabbat experience with you.

