

Behaalotcha drash for Annual Meeting 6/3/15 Rabbi Chai Levy

In this week's Torah portion, God instructs Moshe regarding the use of the mishkan/tabernacle. God says: tell Aaron:

Behaalotcha et hanerot, when you light the menorah – literally, when you “raise up the lights,” have 7 lamps give light.

There is some discrepancy in various understandings in our tradition about which direction these lights face:

are they to face out to cast light outside the menorah, as is implied when the menorah is described in Exodus (25:37)?

Or, as Rashi describes it, does the light of the menorah face inward to cast light on central shaft of the menorah itself?

We are instructed to raise up lights, but the question is:

Towards what? In what direction? Shining out or shining in?

Illuminating the world or illuminating inside ourselves?

These are questions that we can ask ourselves as a sacred community –

We come together to “raise the lights” in our mishkan,

to light sacred fires and create holy space,

to be a beacon of light, to provide illumination...but in what direction? Out or in?

The good Jewish answer is, of course: both!

As a Jewish sacred community, we turn our focus outward to do acts of **Tikkun Olam** – to love our neighbor and care for the stranger,

to bring a little healing to our broken world, to do our part to be of service and to give back for the abundant blessings we have received.

And as a Jewish sacred community, we turn our focus inward to create opportunities for us to do **Tikkun HaNefesh**, inner work, the repair of our souls.

In these two ways, I am grateful that two major parts of my work here at Kol Shofar are:

1. to work with our volunteers to build our Tikkun Olam programming
2. To develop our Center for Jewish Spirituality, and, along with Larry Yermack, to create experiences that cultivate our inner lives, our connection to the Divine, to deepen our spiritual growth and learning.

This past year, we've expanded our Tikkun Olam work. I want to acknowledge the work and leadership of Steven Lee, who served as our Tikkun Olam chair this year, and I want to name the various ways that we are shining our light outwards to be

a community that serves the larger community and to acknowledge the people who are making this happen:

1. The Southern Marin Hot Meal Program is thriving here in our building feeding people in need once/month— bringing in new regular volunteers. Thanks to Mark Kaplan for initiating and leading this program, and now Steve Lee, partnering with Mark.
2. Another new program— Adopt a School through Marin County School volunteers. We'll partner with Laurel Dell elementary school to increase literacy through tutoring and mentoring of kids considered at-risk. Thanks to leaders Newt Harband and Ron Brown for initiating this project.
3. Mill Street Shelter continues steadily on a monthly basis under the leadership of Esther Rosha-Stadtler
4. Our Garden is continuing to grow thanks to a new leader – Wendy Dalia – working in cooperation with Southern Marin Hot Meal program to grow food that will be used to feed the hungry. Special thanks to Bob Daniel for building the garden, and Tikva Farber and Jonathan Emanuel have done so much to make this a project that our Beit Binah kids are involved with.
5. REST going strong with new summer dates on the calendar, thanks to Shana Margolis Goldberg, who coordinates the hands-on staffing of the shelter, and to our MOC leaders, especially Gail Dorph, Ruth Jaeger, Gary Appel, and Mark Swoislin, who are organizing the advocacy part of activating us as a community to get county's towns and cities to support permanent shelter, and achieving much success in that project.
6. We've also developed a relationship with First Light Farm, and thanks to Jonathan for helping with this project, we're approaching tikkun olam through our relationship to food and to supporting sustainable food systems.
7. Other one-time projects like trail clean ups - thanks to Dennis Klein and Louise Lipsey - and then the whole slew of tikkun olam work that our kids are doing through our education and b'nei mitzvah program, thanks to Jordan Hopstone.

In all these ways, we are “raising the lights” outward, to be a force in our larger community for light, compassion, caring, and justice.

And in terms of raising the lights that turn inward, it's been a very exciting year, as we've launched the Center for Jewish Spirituality - thanks to the board and Rabbi Leider and Nancy for being supportive of this experiment in offering alternatives

to the traditions in order to make Kol Shofar a venue for spiritual seekers and a place where Judaism is truly a wide path where everyone can find their place.

Ongoing services and gatherings like: Kol Neshama Minyan, Shabbat Sit, Musical Meditation High Holiday and Friday night services have been thriving and well-attended and are creating here a contemplative space for people to deepen their connection with the Divine and to approach Judaism as a spiritual practice. Our series of one-time guests over the course of the year was well-received by our members and also served to bring in newcomers into our building. And class series like Dance Midrash that I taught, Sulam Chi, Shekhina Circle, Mussar with Rabbi Leider, and Kol HaOr Sound Healing group have offered creative ways to grow spirituality, to connect mind/body/spirit, and to create a community of fellow travelers on a shared path of Tikkun HaNefesh, that inner work of spiritual transformation.

Tikkun Olam and Tikkun HaNefesh are two sides of the same coin.

We need both and the balance between the two.

To tend to our inner spiritual lives without caring for the world around us is self-serving; and to do healing work in the world, we need to cultivate our inner resources, to develop our compassion, love, and awareness and our relationship with the Divine.

The transformation of the self and the transformation of society are interwoven, and we are doing both here— in other words, to bring it back to the language of our parasha, the Menorah in the Mishkan shines both in and out, and it is our work at Kol Shofar *B'haalotcha et hanerot* – to raise lights that illuminate both our inner souls and our outer community.