

Rabbi Lewis' Message for September, 2009

Last Shabbat, I paused to appreciate one of the little things that makes me happy. As I walked down the center sanctuary aisle on my way to the bimah, I saw the front row filled with students from my classes. No one tells them to sit there; they just decided on their own a few years back that that was where they belonged. Maybe that's why I am the worst person to ask how full the sanctuary is on any given Shabbat. I just look at the first row and feel inspired.

I asked one of them to help me with something. Then I teased the lone seventh grader among them that soon, once she becomes bat mitzvah, she won't be able to say no to me. The older kids laughed; they have heard that speech before. The truth is, it has nothing to do with my being the one to ask. Our tradition says that when you reach the age of 13, you assume both the privilege and the obligation to perform mitzvot. Depending on how you understand the meaning of the word mitzvah, the requirements may have to do with your relationship with God but certainly have to do with your relationship with the community.

We broaden that obligation in our congregation, as all of you know. There may be no mitzvah that says if the front garden is overgrown, don't wait for an invitation to weed, but that doesn't stop an occasional member from getting down on her knees on her way into the temple. There may be no mitzvah that says you should jiggle the handle of a running toilet or change a burnt out light bulb or mop up a wet floor, but there are those among you who take on that responsibility without thinking twice about it. I love it when I see our children absorbing that communal value and reporting to me when they see something awry in the building.

It is useful to be reminded occasionally about that sense of obligation lest anyone take our Center for granted. It is easy to lose that sense that your efforts not only matter but are necessary for the good of the whole. The [Religious Practices Committee](#) is spending untold hours this summer assigning honors for the high holy days. They spend time during the year assigning bimah honors for services, ushering duties and dates for hosting the oneg shabbat (for you Hebrew purists, the plural of oneg shabbat is ongei-shabbat). Say yes to them when they issue you an invitation to participate. They are just delivering the message of our tradition. And as I tell the kids over and over ("We know, rabbi, we know"), in Judaism you can't say no.

This coming year, despite its social and economic pressures, remains filled with promise. That promise can only be diminished if you aren't part of it.

Enjoy what remains of summer. We will soon come together again in prayer and celebration as we welcome 5770.

Rabbi Ellen Lewis