

## Rabbi Zamore's Message for February, 2014

### Let Your Hearts Be Wide Open

As recorded in Pirkei Avot (Ethics of the Elders), Yose ben Yochanan of Jerusalem used to teach: “Let your house be open wide.” This has always been a favorite quote of mine. It recalls the type of hospitality, rooted in Middle Eastern culture, that Abraham modeled by waiting in the open flap of his tent.

We are told in Genesis 18 that Abraham was sitting in the open tent flap during the heat of the day when he saw three men approaching. In order to be welcoming, he sprung up and ran towards them. Then, he urged them to come in, have their feet washed, and rest. He alerted Sarah to get to work making a feast for the strangers. The rabbis ask why is it that Abraham was sitting looking out into the vast desert. The Midrash answers that Abraham was always in the habit of scanning the desert horizon for sojourners in order to welcome the strangers into his home. In fact, throughout Jewish texts, Abraham and Sarah are upheld as exemplifiers of the value of *hachnasat orchim*, welcoming guests.

Needless to say, in these modern times we are not required to go that far to help others; we do not need to expose our families to danger by inviting strangers in to our homes. However, I like the Pirkei Avot quote and the mitzvah it describes because of the spirit it demands.

Being open to others' needs and treating them like they are part of your household or inner circle of friends is a valuable goal to strive towards. Too often we go through life putting up barricades; we seek to protect what we already have; we limit our interactions with others to include only the superficial. “Let your house be open wide” can be read as “let your heart be open wide.” After all, when we open our hearts, the rest follows.

As I am settling into the Jewish Center of Northwest Jersey, many people have greeted me with open hearts. My family and I deeply appreciate the warm welcome. Please know that while I work with part-time hours, I strive to incorporate accessibility (especially of spirit) into my rabbinate. One of the ways I hope to connect is through the picnic Shabbat dinner.

Before most Shabbat services, I have dinner in the community room with my family and/or Cantor Lilah. We have candles, wine/juice, and Challah. It is open to anyone who would like to join us. Feel free to bring your dairy dinner or just sit and keep us company. It is a wonderful way to connect and get to know one another better. Watch

for the announcements of the picnic Shabbat dinners. Looking forward to connecting with open hearts.

L'Shalom,

Rabbi Mary L. Zamore