

# Rabbi Zamore's Message for January, 2015

## Change for the Environment

This month is Tu B'shvat, the birthday of the trees, when we celebrate our connection to God, Israel, and the environment. Through this holiday we are reminded to be *shomrei adamah*, guardians of the earth, as Genesis 2:15 teaches us in the creation narrative that human beings were given the task on Earth "to till it and to tend it."

The Rabbinic tradition builds on other Biblical commandments warning us not to destroy wantonly. As Maimonides wrote in his *Mishneh Torah*, "One who smashes household goods, tears clothes, demolishes a building, stops up a spring, or destroys food on purpose violates the command: You must not destroy – *bal tashchit*." Avoiding wasteful destruction goes hand-in-hand with being thoughtful guardians of our environment. Of course, it is easy to talk about these important values; it is harder to live them.

Now that our beautiful kitchen is completely finished, our congregation is living its ritual and ethical food values, and our conversations have shifted from the ideological to the practical. Being a volunteer based community, the Jewish Center needs to listen carefully when our members struggle to work with the new kitchen and food policy.

Much of the discussion has centered on our new restaurant-grade dishwasher. One of the goals of our food policy was to reduce the disposable items used at communal meals. Therefore, we have purchased new dishes, table clothes, and the dishwasher. However, it has been clear that there is a learning curve to make this work at 10 pm on a Friday night when folks are ready to clean up and go home after oneg (and a long work week). Therefore, we need to help each other learn how to use the kitchen, especially the dishwasher. While the machine is not extremely challenging, we all need to learn how to use the machine, load its racks, and take into account the time needed to dry the dishes. During this transition to a new system, we can all pitch in and help at the end of oneg and other meals.

When logistical problems arise, we all need to think together to find solutions which work for our real lives and our community. Most of all, we need to have the patience to work through this period of change and transition which can feel awkward at times. Rather than getting frustrated and reverting to our former practice of only using disposables for food service, we can have open discussions about the challenges of the new system and seek out practical solutions together. Whenever I falter in my commitment to reusables, I ask myself these two questions: 1) Where does this

disposable product go after I use it and what impact does that have on the environment? and 2) What kind of guardian do I want to be for our earth? The answers usually help me find my motivation again.

In honor of the holiday of Tu B'shvat, I hope we can dedicate ourselves to daily practices which will have a positive impact on our environment. And let's start in our temple kitchen by supporting each other.

L'Shalom,

Rabbi Mary L. Zamore

Copyright © 2015 Jewish Center of Northwest Jersey