

Shabbat Parashat Vayeilekh/*Shabbat Shuva*
A *Tz'dakah* Tradition for Yom Kippur

This week is a special Shabbat. It is our Shabbat that falls between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur. Our tradition calls it "*Shabbat Shuva*," "The Shabbat of Repentance," as it occurs during the *Aseret Y'mei T'Shuva*, the Ten Days of Repentance. In the liturgy of the High Holy Days, we read that there are three actions that bring us to a resolution of our overall process of repentance and introspection during this Holy Day season: *T'shuva*/Repentance (making apologies and resolving not to repeat our previous missteps), *T'filah*/Prayer, and *Tz'dakah*/Charitable giving. I would like to draw special attention to the third of these in my message this week.

Having grown up in Vancouver, I have many strong memories that bubble to the surface of my consciousness whenever the Jewish festivals, especially the High Holy Days of Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, roll around. In the years after my Bar Mitzvah, I remember leaving my house across the street from Douglas Park early in the morning on Yom Kippur to make the trek uphill to the JCC, where my family always *davened*. It was the old building back then, still with an entrance off of 41st Avenue. Looking down into the gym through the glass windows, I can still see the baskets of plants sitting as decoration in the basketball rims and the red carpeting adorning the gym floor. To enter the gym, we even got to walk down the set of stairs that could not be used as an entry on normal business days. I would look out at the hundreds of people who were there with me, amazed at the size of the crowd in my younger years. Perhaps the most vivid memory that has stayed with me, however, is what the community had placed at the top of the stairs from before Kol Nidre until the end of Yom Kippur: a metallic shopping cart to be filled with non-perishable food items for the Jewish Food Bank.

On the day when we are commanded to refrain from physical pleasures, two of which being drinking and eating, and to "afflict" ourselves in order to focus on the spiritual meanings and processes that allow us to renew ourselves for a New Year, we are reminded to think of those who unwillingly suffer from a lack of food on a daily basis in our community. As a child and youth, I could never fully grasp what it meant to be hungry, but the custom of giving away the "food we cannot eat today" made a lot of sense to me. Every year, I scrounged around the pantry for some canned goods that I could drop into the metal shopping cart. I can still hear the clang of the tin cans colliding with the metal rails of the cart.

In these difficult economic times, the needs of the Jewish Food Bank are only growing, which makes the efforts of Project Isaiah, the Food Bank's annual food collection campaign, all the more important and pressing for those of us that have the ability to give. Each synagogue distributed the brown paper Project Isaiah collection bags on Rosh Hashana (and we also have a few here in our school if you did not receive one) and I urge you to collect and place some items into the bag and drop it off at any of the local synagogues on Yom Kippur or back here at VTT in the days following. There are certain staples that the Food Bank needs regularly and would appreciate receiving at this time: canned tuna/salmon, jams, and honey (particularly for families with young children), but all non-perishable items are greatly appreciated. I encourage our whole community to make Food Bank shopping trips, taking the kids along to explain the purpose of the outing and teaching them about this Yom Kippur tradition and the commandment to feed the hungry.

While we may struggle through the fast of Yom Kippur once a year, there are those for whom a similar struggle takes place every single day. Let's see what we can do to change that!

I wish you all a *G'mar Hatimah Tova*/May you be sealed for goodness in the coming year of 5773, an easy fast on Yom Kippur and a Shabbat Shalom!