

Rabbi Fox's Message for Temple Beth Shalom's
Tammuz/Av 5768 (August 2008) Newsletter

The Mitzvah Right in Front of You

So often in life we are forced to play catch-up, to do later what we planned to, or were supposed to, do at an earlier time. We over-commit ourselves for a variety of reasons, but rarely consider the impact our over-involvement has on how well we live our lives. I believe that, despite the measure of our “busy-ness quotient,” we can approach each day in a way that can result in a calmer and more rich life.

Just as we now try to make plans as to how to group together car trips or how to be efficient with our natural resources (and money!), so too, should we look to how we can engage in the fulfillment of mitzvot (commandments, sometimes considered “good deeds/works”). For some of us, fulfilling a mitzvah feels like a burden, a task to complete and not a joyous (or at least positive) obligation. I believe this sort of thinking to be a trap that holds us back from living life to its fullest.

So, how can we think more positively about the wisdom of our ancestors, the commandments that we have received, generation after generation? Perhaps it sounds trite, but the first and most important thing to do is to re-frame how we see the world – the world is not for us but rather we are for the world. In other words, we must “walk humbly” in the world without pretense that we are owed great things. It is we, for all that we receive, that owe others.

As we enter the time in our yearly Jewish cycle when we recall the sacrifices of our ancestors, we naturally question our commitment to the values that they passed on to us. And so we must redouble our drive to make active the ethical and moral precepts of our heritage. I have found that the easiest way to fulfill a mitzvah is to do what I can when I am presented with an opportunity to serve others. Why spend more time and energy seeking out ways to be kinder and more moral, not to mention an overall better person, when we face multitudes of opportunities that require no effort at all?

If we know someone is in need, we might offer to help. If we know that we can make a difference in the life of someone whose life-path crosses our own, we could take a slight risk by getting involved. No matter what it is – from watching your neighbor's children to give his or her parents a break or donating to your shul your talent (*read: time*) and money – the world is simply waiting for your service, your mitzvah, to be fulfilled. And, I would venture, you'll feel even better about yourself and live a far happier life, day in and day out.

May you revel in your cultivation of fulfilling the mitzvot that cross your path and may you be greatly increased by doing so.

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