

**May 2010**

**Message From Rabbi Bob Mark**

When I first accepted the position at Beth Tikvah I was warned that synagogue attendance was not the strong suit of our members. I was told that there will be times on Friday night that we will not make a minyan, perhaps even on Shabbat morning. I was also told that one of the reasons that attendance was so poor was that people wanted more from their attendance, in addition to prayer, they wanted to take back something from a sermon. Since my predecessor did not –as I understand it do much speaking – some people seemed to drift away. And so, I made it my business to prepare a sermon for both Friday night and Saturday morning. I try to mix up the sermons and topics can range from modern day politics, to bible thoughts and lessons, to combinations of the two and random subjects that are pertinent to the portion of the week or the times. However, synagogue attendance has remained at a relatively steady, less than satisfactory number, though we have had with two exceptions a minyan for all our regularly planned services.

On the last day of Passover, our attendance surpassed fifty for a few brief moments. I made an appeal – not for money, but for attendance. If all of those who came for yizkor – who are not regular shul goers would come once a month, our minyanim would be fuller, more inspiring and more enjoyable.

We started to serve a relatively respectable, well received Kiddush after services on Shabbat morning and put out a more appetizing collection of cakes on Friday night oneg after services. If we get more attendees, we can enlarge both.

We have done everything that we can to alleviate and change the two major reasons presented for lack of attendance. (No sermon, no Kiddush) It is now up to the rest of you who do not attend to make a commitment. A shul with so many empty seats is not only sad, it can be very discouraging. Even if we get new people to drop in on our services, we can be assured that if they are one or two of ten or twelve, it is unlikely they will be back. I know our membership is limited and I know many of our members are elderly and not able to make it all the time. But, attending services serves more than one purpose. Aside from praying, it offers a means of socialization to those who may not have cause or reason to leave their homes very often. It can lift up one's spirits and yes, it can even help medically.

We have wonderful and generous members who have been able to provide a ride to shul for those unable to drive at night or even in the morning for that matter.

Looking out at a room with more than 10-15 people will help me as well. If you want to know what it is like to be discouraged, try preparing two sermons weekly to deliver to an attendance of 25 people over two days. At times, it becomes hard just to sit down and think of what to say.

People want and wanted to keep Beth Tikvah alive. I want to help, I made a commitment and in doing so, I turned down another position that was closer and more lucrative to my home than this one. There are members who are doing more than their share to keep Beth Tikvah alive and well. In fact, it amazes me how enthusiastically they approach the task week after week. It is now time for the rest of our members to step up to the plate. Your presence and participation at services would serve multiple purposes:

It would enrich the services and make them more enjoyable.

It may provide you with an enlightened moment.

It's an opportunity to socialize with your friends

It would be a thank you to those who work so hard to keep Beth Tikvah going.

It would encourage me and tell me that I made the right decision.

It could set an example for your own children and grand children

Perhaps it could help be the impetus for a new member to join.

It would validate your prayers for yourself and for those for whom you recite yizkor.

I know it can be done. I saw it happen at my summer position in the mountains, and the people there had an average age perhaps just a bit above our own.

Make Shabbat a special day and you may just find that after a few weeks that you not only will come to services, but you will look forward to doing so. I hope to see you there.