

Temple Israel Center Sisterhood Shabbat

Saturday, February 13, 2010

Shabbat Shalom,

My name is Minda Feinberg and I talk to you today representing Temple Israel Center Sisterhood as its current President. I am often asked what is Sisterhood and what does it do. Let me start with some basics. Sisterhood...according to the Merriam Webster dictionary is defined as: "a community or society of sisters especially a society of women in a religious order or the solidarity of women based on shared conditions, experiences and concerns." Here at Temple Israel Center, Sisterhood is a blend, a mixture of these two components and more.

Sisterhood has meant Community, women working for a common goal in a group providing for not only our internal Temple, but the greater community as well. Throughout the first century of this congregation, Sisterhood provided support, funds and representation to numerous projects. Some are quite visible today, for instances the dedication of one of these beautiful stained glass windows, the Torah covers and mantels that we see in the ark, the table cloths we eat on in the social hall, the furniture our young ones use in the Nursery School, the candle sticks provided to every B'nai Mitzvot. Others have not been so visible but have played a big role in endearing members to worship here. For many years Sisterhood's partnership with Lighthouse provided Amblyopic eye screening for every nursery school child. Members recorded books for the blind, we provided meals and support to My Sister's Place the refuge for battered women and today we continue to provide a comforting meal to all those in the community experiencing a bereavement. This year we have combined events to help ourselves and women around the world. We had a successful Women's Health breakfast led by a panel of Temple Israel Center medical professionals and raised funds to help the Jewish World Watch project, the Solar cooker project for the women of Darfur. And lastly one of our very important community projects is the support of Torah Fund at the Jewish Theological Seminary.

Sisterhood means Religious Skills and Education. Today is a perfect example of this. Women who have never had the opportunity to chant Torah before or perform any of the other honors successfully were able to do this as a group enriching their worship experience for the future. By now, you should all have seen the Save the Date postcard of the upcoming Miriam's Seder on March 14th honoring Gloria Bieler, Nancy Parkes, Rabbi Shargel and Laura Platt Weinstock. This is another opportunity to enhance our biblical heritage from our foremother's perspective and learn about our most famous Sister, Miriam. If you like to read, Sisterhood holds monthly book club meetings featuring novels of

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Jewish content. Members are able to discuss the books in an informal setting and learn from each other.

Sisterhood is Leadership Skills: Sisterhood has provided members with opportunities to utilize inherent skills and learn new ones. Events and programs need organization, creativity, and financial planning skills. They need open communications, friendliness and most of all the ability to laugh and have fun. Either working in our own congregation or pursuing opportunities through Women's League, women have the opportunity to expand their own capabilities into new areas.

Sisterhood is Camaraderie: Above all, Sisterhood is the opportunity to form bonds of friendship across the generations. We provide a warm environment for new members of our community to meet the congregation on smaller scale and get to know the many faceted women of Temple Israel Center. We are career women, we are retired women, we are educated women, we are devoted mothers taking a break to be home with our young ones and we are women who want to perpetuate Conservative/Masorti Judaism through the observance of mitzvot.

On a personal level, I can answer that Sisterhood is all of the above and more. I joined Sisterhood as a young working mother, who had very little free time, but wanted to be a part of the Temple Israel Center community and from my upbringing; this was a natural thing to do. You see Sisterhood membership runs through my veins. I am named for my Great Grandmother Minnie Lieberman who as a friend of Matilda Schechter, was inspired to help found the Sisterhood at Kahelleth Israel in the Bronx. She passed this love and devotion on to her daughter Ethel who devoted years to her local chapter as treasurer and eventually became the President of the Metropolitan Region of Women's League. In keeping with L'dor V'dor, this inspiration was passed on to my Aunt who took on numerous roles and programs in her congregation and to my mother as well who established many Sisterhood chapters on several Military Bases and leadership roles within her congregations. I am blessed with both their presence here today. And if that wasn't enough influence, my paternal grandmother was a founding member of the Sisterhood at Kingsbridge Center of Israel. So it is with pride and pleasure that I see my own daughter here, Dedee Cygler's daughter here and Carol Gingold's daughter here and I hope they will be inspired to follow suit when their individual congregational memberships happen.

You see, for me I can't imagine a congregation without Sisterhood, yet that almost happened here. We had a lull, a respite and a void. We went from hundreds of members down to zero. For years, this congregation relied on a few who served to always be there to serve, never thinking that they needed relief.

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As pockets of this vibrant community expanded the homogeneous groups within it, our Sisterhood began to perish. There was no broadcast for help, there was no outrage, there was no public announcement to the community to gather together for a solution. I was heartsick that this happened as well as others and with the great partnership of Michele Silber we were able to rise again slowly, from zero to 40 to 70. So one could ask, is Sisterhood **necessary**? Maybe we don't need it! Well I am here to say today that Sisterhood **is** necessary and still provides a key role. We bridge all of those homogeneous groups together. We provide the foundation for women in every stage of their life to connect and learn from one another. As I said earlier, I was a young working mother with very little time, however in partaking in a few things I made friends that I have had for years. I met women thirty years my senior and shared fun while working on events with them and prayed with them in this sanctuary or unfortunately mourned with their families upon their passing. I now meet the young couples of this congregation and am thrilled with some of the younger women now joining our group. This past November the TIC RockNRoll night sponsored by Brotherhood and Sisterhood brought all these generations together for a wonderful evening of dancing, light food and just getting to know new faces.

So now I hope that when you're asked the question **What is Sisterhood?**, you can share the answer with others. As the haftorah taught us today, we are all equal in what we should give and leaders come at all ages without experience. If we all just do **one** thing, become involved in **one** event, volunteer to take on **something**, it is amazing what we can accomplish. This year's programming has been a great example of that. There are so many great ideas of things we can do, I hope you now will be inspired to join and help us as we go forward. Even if you lack the time, please join with us to help sustain our work. For all of you who supported us in the past, give us another try and rejoin. My wish is that the next Temple generation will see what they have been missing, and feel the connections that Sisterhood members have.

I am pleased to announce today that on May 2nd at our annual Sisterhood Torah Fund Luncheon we are honoring 3 wonderful women of Sisterhood, June Lewis, Winnie Price and Marlene Schectman for their true devotion to this organization. I hope that you will all put this on your calendar and join us in celebrating their achievements.

In closing, I want to thank Dedee Cygler and Marge Moline for putting together this beautiful program today. To Rabbi Tamar, thank you for all of your support and many thanks to Rabbi Dena Shargel for her guidance and Cantor Zemel's who both led us in davening this morning. I wish all those who participated, Yasher Koach and hope you are inspired for continued ritual growth. And Yasher Koach to Beth Grafman for her words of wisdom on the D'var Torah and

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for Judy Gilberg's chanting of the Haftorah. I could not close this without extending my gratitude to Michele Silber who has provided support, guidance and pure friendship as we have navigated together to gain momentum of our rebirth. I thank the many women who have provided support to me this year leading programs and whose ideas are helping to enrich this community.

On behalf of Arlene Hartman, my fellow Sisterhood Board member on the bima with me today, I wish you all a Shabbat Shalom.