

A Friendly Phone Call Makes A World of Difference

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One thing I notice about my kids is that they don't really know how to talk on the phone. If you have grandchildren that age, I'm sure you've seen it.

It's their generation; it's just not intuitive to them.

Texting they get. FaceTime they can do. But talking on the phone? Not so much.

But here's one thing I know as the rabbi of a congregation with an average age of 72: You know how to use the phone.

We remember the days when the phone was mounted on the wall, and we used to fidget with that curly cord for hours and get all tangled up in it.

We know how to use the phone!

And that's good. You know why?

Because tonight I am going to ask you to put that skill to use.

Let me ask you something: How is membership in a temple different from, say, membership in a gym?

Well, a gym exists to help you get fit.

If you meet people at the gym, great. But if no other gym members ever call you at home, you're probably okay with that, too.

A temple is different.

Sure, we offer services, classes, and programs of all kinds. But that's not the main reason people join a temple. Not anymore.

In 2013, the Jewish sociologist Sid Schwarz came up with two categories to describe American Jews.

The first kind he calls "tribal Jews."

They join synagogues because, well, "that's what Jews do." They are happy to belong to the temple whether they ever participate in it or not.

But the second category, which Schwarz calls "covenantal Jews," see it differently.

Their question is: Can synagogue membership offer me meaning, purpose, and connection? If yes, they're happy to join; if no, they're not interested.

And why does Schwarz call them covenantal Jews?

Because a covenant is about relationship.

When I sign a contract, I'm expecting something to be delivered to me; but when I make a covenant, I'm looking for a mutually enriching human connection.

Schwarz finds that covenantal Jews are seeking "places where [they] can find support in times of need, communal celebration in times of joy, and friendships to make life fulfilling."¹

These are the most important ways we can add value to our members' lives.

But here's the thing: For it to be truly meaningful, he says, congregants shouldn't rely on clergy and professional staff to do it for them.

Instead, congregants themselves need to take responsibility for each other "because they thrive when they are provided with avenues to give back."²

One of the shining examples of this at TBE is our Chesed Committee.

"Chesed" means kindness, and the Chesed Committee is here to support our members with kindness and caring.

But what really makes us a community is when our fellow members let us know they care about us all the time, not just on happy or sad occasions.

That's where you come in, with your lifetime of telephone skills.

Our Chesed Committee wants to reach out to every TBE member at least a few times a year to say hello—for no other reason than just because.

We already have some wonderful volunteers who call congregants on their birthdays, but to make this bigger vision possible we need more.

We're not talking about a big commitment.

We're talking five calls, three times a year.

It will take you somewhere between 10-30 minutes each cycle.

Less than two hours a year.

This is low-effort/high-impact.

A friendly phone call makes a world of difference.

In less than two hours a year, you can help give people that feeling of belonging we talk about each week in our Vivid Vision.

If you're willing to make some friendly phone calls, please talk to any of our three Chesed Committee co-chairs—Debbie Bernstein, Terri Levin, or Randi Weiler—or Yanira in the temple office.

In this week's haftarah, the prophet Isaiah envisions a day when the Jewish people's "gates will always stay open"³ and no one will wall themselves off from each other.⁴

We're not a gym. We're here to make each other part of our lives.

So, don't outsource it to others.

Be a friend! Do chesed! Show you care!

All you have to do is just pick up the phone.

1 Rabbi Sidney Schwarz, Jewish Megatrends, 27.

2 Ibid.

3 Isaiah 60:11.

4 See Malbim to Isaiah 60:11.