



**Question: Why is a synagogue like your local Public Broadcasting Station (or National Public Radio Station)?**

Hopefully, you answered that both provide meaningful, relevant, interesting programs and services. However, I would not have been surprised if you said – that both require you to put up with incessant pleading for money.

There is an element of truth in that. The shul is supported *financially* by its dues paying members, all of whom have a stake in the shul's well being. But – as you have heard before - dues only cover about 40 – 45% of the cost to run the synagogue. National statistics show that it costs a lot more to run a synagogue than could ever be raised through dues. Beth Israel is typical of the national statistical profile. Income from dues only provides about 40 something percent of the operating funds needed. And – besides tuitions, Bar / Bat Mitzvah fees, room rentals, and fund contributions, the most reliable way to make up the difference is – to ask someone for it.

But who might that “someone” be? Truth is, other than our members, there are few people or places to go to make up the difference. There are some generous people out there, and we have benefited from their largesse. And – of late, we have applied for, and received, a number of grants, from foundations and others that are providing funds for some specialized needs. But these resources are earmarked by the donors for specific projects and interests, and are not available for general use.

Although many of the programs and services of the Congregation are provided free of charge, it is easy to forget that it still costs money to offer them. Salaries, utilities, debt service, maintenance, snow removal, insurance - the synagogue has to have, and pay for, all of these things, and more. In some industries, what was once offered for free is either no longer offered, or what was free may actually now be covered by what is often called a convenience, delivery, service or sur charge.

What makes the synagogue different is that the financial realities of the Congregation cannot always dictate whether or how we provide or pay for the spiritual / programmatic needs of the congregants. Clearly – there are spiritual “bottom-lines” – everyone who seeks must be allowed to find, regardless. But we live in a material world. We have conflicting messages. (1) The spiritual message: We are building a synagogue community, a place where we can come together to share our Jewish travels together – available for one and all, regardless of ability to provide financial support. (2) The material message: We need everyone's financial support in order to establish and maintain our synagogue community. Should we try to keep these messages clear and distinct?

The Rabbis saw the two as intertwined – “*If there is no sustenance* (literally: kemach – flour for bread), *there is no Torah. If there is no Torah, there is no sustenance.*” (Pirkei Avot 3:21) The affirmation of one value is linked to its complementary value. Without the material necessities (in this case – money), how can we satisfy the spiritual needs of the Congregation? And if we are not able to provide for the spiritual needs of our members, we will certainly not get the material necessities, in the form of financial support. It is, in effect, two sides of the same coin.

Perhaps that is why our Torah writing project – *V'Zot HaTorah: A Mitzvah for Generations* is so special and unique. It has a spiritual objective – the once-in-a-lifetime chance to participate in the writing of a new Sefer Torah, and a material objective – the creation of a \$1 million endowment for lifelong learning at Beth Israel. Striving for one objective will bring us to the other. Our Congregation has both material and spiritual assets that will be enhanced by your support of this project.

We need the Torah, and we need the *kemach*. I hope you plan to personally help us reach *both* of these goals, to ensure a bright present and future for Beth Israel Congregation.