

Kislev

Tapestry #3: Hoda's v's Mazon

by Rabbi Amy R. Perlin & Temple B'nai Shalom--

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Each one of our tapestries is, first and foremost, a statement of our congregational values. Our beautification committee sat and contemplated all of the values that we cherish as a congregation. This tapestry celebrates the values of Hoda's (Thanksgiving) and Mazon (Feeding the Hungry), which are so much a part of who we are at Temple B'nai Shalom.

Enter our lobby any day of the year and there is a food collection container and a sign up list to bring food and serve at a local shelter. We are faithful donors to Lorton Community Action's food pantry. I am so proud of our commitment to make sure that our neighbors just down the road have food on their tables. Currently, we have two collections & our collection, as always, to replenish the shelves of the food bank, for which our Yom Kippur collection was their largest single donation in their history, thanks to our amazing youth group and our devoted members, and the special collection that is organized by our wonderful Sisterhood to make Thanksgiving baskets for those in the most need.

I received an e-mail from Arielle Johnson this week urging our members to sign up to give food and to serve at Mondloch shelter, our new shelter for homeless families with children. We are serving this week and still are in need of food. Mazon, we must feed the hungry, and at this new shelter, the servers also play with the children and bring games and activities to lift their life's burdens for the short time we are there. Please sign up tonight to bring food on Sunday.

We know that there is enough food on our planet to feed every hungry child, every hungry person. We have failed to make sharing and distribution a priority as a human community. We know that our state alone produces and our supermarkets throw away enough food to feed every hungry child in our schools and their families, but as a religious community we have to step up because we have yet to figure out how to do it well as a society.

Although the Hebrew month on our third tapestry is Kislev, I am speaking about this tapestry in the month of Cheshvan, because the holidays are all "late" this year. Thanksgiving normally comes in the month of Kislev, and so does Chanukah. Chanukah straddles two Jewish months so we chose to place that tapestry in Tevet, so that we could have one tapestry that focuses on our American Jewish heritage on each wall.

We are so proud to be Americans and to celebrate Thanksgiving as a festival of religious freedom. And as we do so, we remain vigilant in our efforts to preserve religious freedom for all in every town and city of this great commonwealth. Directly opposite this tapestry is the tapestry that celebrates our American patriotism as a congregation, which I will talk about in June as we approach the fourth of July. Each wall needed to have our love of country, as we also embrace our love of the land of Israel and our rich Jewish history.

This tapestry reflects the farm heritage of Virginia and the fall harvest, which follows the celebration of Sukkot and Israel's harvest on our calendars. Although our artists say this could be any farm here or in Israel, the corn and pumpkins and turkey are clearly American tradition.

And the musical notes at the top of the tapestry are there to celebrate what Thanksgiving has come to symbolize for our congregation, a time to get together with our friends at Abiding Presence Lutheran Church, to celebrate the God we share in prayer, and most wonderfully in song, as our children and adult choirs sing together. Both of our choirs started years ago specifically to sing at this event. This will be our nineteenth service together.

We met at Abiding Presence for our first nine years and then Pastor Bailey and I agreed to alternate when we built B'nai Shalom's building. This summer, when we were under construction, they gave us a home again, and we will be so thrilled to welcome them into our newly renovated sanctuary in two weeks for the service the Wednesday night before Thanksgiving. Pastor Bailey will preach this year and we will thank God for the blessings both congregations share in this year of hurricanes, earthquakes, and tornados. Both communities have embraced and offered financial and emotional support to the victims of these natural disasters, and pledge to continue to do so. We share so much as we have built faith for families of our community together.

This is the easiest tapestry to interpret. We give thanks for what we have and we pledge to ourselves, and to God, to use our blessings as an imperative to help and feed others. From Hoda'ah (Thanksgiving) to Mazon

(Feeding the Hungry) we live these values in our homes and in our synagogue lives. At this time of year and at Passover, I especially donate funds from the Rabbi's Discretionary fund to food banks and organizations that feed the hungry here and abroad.

There are two Hebrew phrases in our tapestry that each carries important lessons for our congregation and our Jewish history. The first phrase, "urmech vbrc vgnsc ohgruzv" - "Hazorim birinah yiktzoru" - Psalm 126:5 -- "They that sow in tears shall reap in joy," comes directly from our Birkat Hamazon, the Grace After Meals. It is called the Song of Ascent by some, and the Pilgrim's Song in the traditional siddur (prayerbook). Psalm 126, Shir HaMaalot (which Robyn will sing tonight), is a psalm that begins with the redemption from Babylonian Exile and continues with the wonder of the restoration of the Temple on Zion for Jews and non-Jews. The words on our tapestry offer consolation to a generation that is once again in exile. We, Jews, have known and will continue to know tears, historically, and God promises us redemption to be reaped in joy.

I love this phrase hanging in our sanctuary because it is also a personal message to our members. You will know tears in this place, you will come in sadness and in mourning, but it is our constant prayer that you will also reap the joys of life to sustain you through the darkest of your days. We are thankful for the blessing of community that stands by us in sorrows and in joy.

The other phrase in our tapestry, "Modim anachu lach" - "lk ubjbt ohsun" -- We thank You - which thanks God comes from our prayerbook. This prayer of thanksgiving is often sung by our choir with Abiding Presence. It is also in every traditional service. In the traditional service, the cantor sings one version and the congregation bows and recites silently an alternative version at the same time. I didn't realize until I looked in our blue Gates of Prayer in preparation for this sermon that we preserve both traditional versions in our prayerbook. The primary version can be found on p. 138,

"We gratefully acknowledge that You are the Lord our God and God of our people, the God of all generations. You are the Rock of our life, the Power that shields us in every age. We thank You and sing your praises (hence our musical notes right below the verse!): for our lives which are in Your hand; for our souls which are in Your keeping; for the sings of Your presence we encounter every day; and for Your wondrous gifts at all times, morning, noon, and night. You are Goodness: Your mercies never end; You are Compassion: Your love will never fail. You have always been our hope. For all these things, O Sovereign God, let Your name be forever exalted and blessed. O God our Redeemer and Helper, let all who live affirm You and praise Your name in truth. Lord, whose nature is Goodness, we give you thanks and praise."

The traditional silent Modim prayer is the one we read tonight in Service VII of our blue Gates of Prayer on page 232:

“O

God of Israel’s past, O God of this day, God of all flesh, Creator of all life: We praise You, the Most High, for the gift of life; we give thanks, O Source of good, that life endures. Eternal and Infinite One, help us to use our life for blessing: to live by Your law, to do Your will, to walk in Your way with a whole heart. We thank You, Eternal God, for the blessing of life.”

In our prayerbook, the thank You is to God, for our lives. The thanksgiving is not as much about food as it is about our sustenance in this life by God’s goodness.

Even this sacred prayer in our Reform prayerbook carries our Reform heritage and legacy. The traditional prayerbook has an additional phrase asking God to deliver us from our exile in foreign lands and return us to Zion. Our Reform prayer eliminates that version. We do not pray to leave this land that we love, as we believe that Israel is a spiritual rather than physical homeland for us. Our ultimate redemption is not dependent on our living in Israel, just loving and supporting her. Even in prayer, as Reform Jews, we keep our platform and agenda consistent with our values and our vision.

Our Grace after Meals always ends with Oseh Shalom, one of our most important prayers for peace. As we thank God for our blessings and the bounty of the earth, as we praise God for our lives and for all that nourishes us, we know that a lasting peace can only come in every corner of our world when all those who are hungry in mind, body, and spirit feel nourished and sustained. Economic well-being is the bedrock of peace.

May this beautiful tapestry remind us of our personal and collective obligation to give thanks for what we have, and to transform our gratitude into action, by feeding and nourishing those who are in need. Shabbat Shalom.