

# T H E Menorah

N E W S L E T T E R

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## A MESSAGE FROM OUR RABBI

### UPPING THE ANTE

Here we are, about a quarter of the way through the year already! It seems like it was just Rosh Hashanah and then I blinked my eyes, only to spy the secular New Year looming on the horizon.

How are you doing with the spiritual commitments and intentions you set for yourself over Rosh Hashanah? I would be delighted to hear your update. Please catch me in the hallways or at the oneg or, better yet, call to make an appointment, and we can get together for a more leisurely and focused talk.

In the meantime, I am happy to share my update. In some ways, I am running behind. There is a book I have committed to edit which has barely been opened. I don't have as many "takers" as I would wish to join Craig, me, and our children for Shabbat at our home. (Hint, hint: it's not too late. You will find another invitation in this issue of the Menorah). I am improving, though not yet where I want to be, in the daily disciplines of rest, exercise, and meditation.

In one key respect, I am ahead of where I thought I would be. You may recall that I spoke about freeing slaves on the High Holidays. As a consequence of that sermon, I took it as a personal goal this year to free 18 slaves. I was talking with my daughter,



Hannah Mathilda, about *tikkun olam* (repairing the world) and setting goals to help make the world better. In the course of the conversation, I shared my goal of freeing 18 slaves this year. Hannah Mathilda, who is never one to think small, immediately asked, "But why 18? Why not 100?" And so a new, bigger goal was born.

I now co-own this goal with my daughter. We haven't achieved it. So far, not even one slave has been freed because of our efforts. But, with her help, I have upped my game, upped the ante. And, paradoxically, because the number is so big, and my daughter's desire to do good is so expansive, I feel *more* confident of success.

To get behind the doable and get it done is more rare than we would wish. It is good. It is even laudable. But, ultimately, it's ... doable.

To be a proponent for what is almost beyond reach galvanizes you. It inspires

you. It forces you to be creative and to find partners. I don't know *how* yet, but my daughter and I intend to free 100 slaves this year. And if we fail by half and free 50, that will still be more than double my original (pre-H.M.) goal.

A few weeks ago at a coffee shop, I ran into a congregant who was looking svelte and gorgeous. It turns out, she had lost 50 pounds. The first 30 came off quickly in a rather radical diet, because, as she explained, "I need to see results. I can't stay motivated with only small successes."

Sometimes, small but steady is the way. Commit to a modest plan and time table, stay faithful, and you *will* see results. But sometimes, you need a BIG change to make any change at all. You need to up the ante. Risk more. For example, you could write in a public column about an insanely ambitious goal.

The ancient Rabbis instructed that we should all say 100 blessings each day. It's a radical number. I have given this assignment to prospective converts literally hundreds of times. Generally, to the shock and awe of most Jews, they do it. Generally, it changes their lives in a radical way. Radical in... radical out. 100% committed... 100 blessings, or 100 pounds lost, or 100 slaves freed.

Go for it.

*Rabbi Debra Orenstein*