DVAR TORAH: TIME IS NOT ON OUR SIDE
5776 TEMPLE SHOLOM BOARD RETREAT
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January 15, 2016

This Monday the United States will commemorate the birthday of Martin Luther King Jr. I know its not a holiday that we celebrate here in Canada, but I also know that his message of the **'urgency of now'**, which fueled the American Civil Rights movement and Anti-Vietnam War movement of the 1960s is one that has universal resonance. Even north, south, east or west of the US border his soaring rhetoric inspires people of good will to move from inaction to action to right the wrongs and inadequacies of societies around the globe.

In his 1965 commencement address at Oberlin College, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., confronted his listeners with these words of warning:

"Let nobody give you the impression that the problem of racial injustice will work itself out. Let nobody give

you the impression that only time will solve the problem. That is a myth."

"Time," he implored the young graduates to remember, "is neutral." It is neither better nor worse than the uses to which we put it. Like any other resource, time can be constructive or destructive; it is not inherently positive or negative.

While I can think of a few inanimate objects that improve with time, wine and cheese chief among them. Conditions do not improved with time. When and where progress has been made it isn't simply attributable to the passage of time but to hard work.

It's true that time is required to make things better, but things don't just get better with time. King said these words to college students on the precipice of beginning their adult lives. One might think that he should have been more encouraging, but in a manner reminiscent of

the teachings of his friend, Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, he sought to remind them that we are called to make time meaningful and to acknowledge the sacred potential of every moment.

The time is long overdue to correct the delusion that time is on our side. In *Parashat Bo*, this week's Torah portion, through, next week's portion, *Parashat B'shallach*, the mindset of Pharaoh, right up until the final plague, suffers from just such a delusion. The tyrant refuses to see the consequences of tyranny. To him, the plagues are a nuisance, a disruption, and an inconvenience. He refuses to recognize them for what they are: God's condemnation of an evil, immoral, and brutal system of slavery that is eroding a once great society.

Temple Sholom is a vibrant and healthy congregation but time is not on our side. Indeed if we rest on our

laurels and our recent successes time, even in its neutrality time will work against us.

This weekend and in the time we have we must embody the vision of the prophets of our tradition, and see over the horizon to shape the financial future of our congregation before time catches up with us.

As I shared at the Extraordinary General Meeting in June when you voted to extend my contract there is a crisis looming south of the border in the non-orthodox Jewish community. It is not fully here yet but it is coming and we must be more ready for it than our southern neighbours.

Synagogues throughout the United States are suffering the effects of:

- Growing secularization

- Declining volunteerism coupled with increasing costs of professionalization that membership dues alone cannot cover
- A dispersal of Jewish philanthropy, where more and more Jewish and non-Jewish organizations appeal for our Tzedakkah.
- An end to the era in which membership in a congregation was seen as a social obligation.

Time will not solve these looming problems – passivity will only make them worse when they arrive in Vancouver. Our response must be urgent, it must be a relational, rather than transactional and it must be visionary and prophetic.

That begins this weekend as Lou leads us to find harmony between our synagogue's mission and its agenda. Temple Sholom cannot just be in the business of being in business. This weekend we need to lay the groundwork to move from a system of membership

dues and occasional fundraising to a culture of philanthropy that will provide the financial security that can weather the coming storm.

I don't want you to panic, our membership is increasing, our worship services are compelling and comforting, our schools and youth programs are reaching capacity and our outreach to members and potential members via social and support efforts are building relationships every day.

I don't want you to panic – but I do want you to feel a sense of urgency, the urgency of now. To plan for our future, because the future is coming, time marches on and we are not ready.