

Temple Membership: Myths and Realities **By Rabbi Michael Lotker**

It's that season again. Your Temple Board is preparing budgets as we expand our programming and staff to meet our growing community's needs. Sometime soon you will receive in the mail the annual membership renewal package. The Board struggled mightily to hold the line on dues but there will probably be a slight increase in all membership categories (the final Board meeting on the subject has not yet taken place as of this writing).

As we struggled with setting dues levels, many of the Board members noted that our dues were substantially less expensive (in fact some 25-40% less) than other area synagogues. The same can be said for our Torah School tuition levels. The point was made again and again that our members get far more value for the "Temple Dollar" than they would receive at other synagogues. While I don't dispute this – in fact I'm proud of this – there is something about this kind of thinking that bothers me.

Supporting Temple Ner Ami, your Temple, is more than a wise consumer decision. In fact I know that for many of you, it's not an especially "efficient" use of your money. And I know very well that, for many of us, money is especially tight this year. Some of our most generous supporters don't have children in the Torah School, have built and supported Temples across the country in times past and could probably get better "value" by joining a country club, buying selected investments, or even joining a church. But that's not the point – supporting the Temple is a *mitzvah*, that is fulfillment of the commandment to keep Judaism and its houses of worship and learning alive.

Each of us is an heir to a chain of tradition going back to Mount Sinai 3200 years ago. Each of us has an obligation to pass on this tradition to the next generation. We each come to our Judaism through very different paths but each of these paths had one thing in common. The generations before us sacrificed their funds, and in many cases even their safety and their lives so that we, their biological and spiritual children, could live as Jews. Thank God that, in our time, we are free to practice our traditions and teach them to our children in a nation and community that is almost free of fear. Indeed the major danger to the survival of Judaism today is assimilation and apathy rather than hatred and antisemitism.

At each High Holy Days and at the many Jewish groups that meet regularly at the Temple, I see many of our community's Jews who are not members. Yes, I am glad that they buy High Holy Days' tickets, yes I am glad that they support their Jewish groups but they and we should understand that if all of us acted this way, there would be no Temple, no facility, no rabbi, not Torah school to ensure that Camarillo's Jews are represented and educated.

So I beg you. Please continue to support your Temple by continuing your membership and by contributing something extra if you can. And don't be shy about encouraging your Jewish friends and neighbors to join, either our Temple or their own. Temple Ner

Ami, your rabbi, your new educator and your professional staff are here to serve all the Jews of our community. We can only continue to do so with your continued support.