

Yom Kippur Speech

I'm the Community Synagogue Dinner at Noon leader. I'm going to talk today about what Dinner at Noon is, what we do and the impact it has on the community and on us.

Dinner at Noon takes place at the The Carver Center in Port Chester. It's a vibrant community center. It also serves a less visible role of addressing food insecurity. In the Carver Center basement is a food pantry. During the school year, from Monday through Friday, the Carver Center chef cooks 600 meals a day for children in childcare and an additional 700 meals a day for children in the Port Chester after school program. On Saturday's responsibility for a community meal, open to all in Port Chester, shifts to an organization called Helping Hands. Helping Hands organizes five churches and our synagogue who rotate preparing the Dinner at Noon meals. We are each responsible for 6 meals during the school year.

Our Community Synagogue team has upgraded the model of what these community meals look like. I'd like to give you a view into our experience.

So let's imagine its Saturday morning and our synagogue is providing the meal. This is what you would see. While called Dinner at Noon, our guests start arriving at 10:00AM. We're

there to greet them. As they come in, many sit at their regular tables with friends and some with family. Also, as many guests are regulars, they recognize us and we in turn recognize and are happy to see them. The vibe is a very friendly, comfortable and relaxed. Our guests range in age from mothers with young children to the elderly. So its early, the coffee is brewing and team members are walking around pouring juice for our guests. Others are carrying huge bowls of fruit, offering bananas, clementines and grapes. And another team member has a large basket of muffins baked by our Hebrew school students. We take pride in telling our guests they were baked especially for them. We also take pride in serving whole, real foods and homemade foods.

Time passes and our second course is served. Bowls overflowing with fresh cut fruit salad. Usually berries, pineapple, maybe melons.

As the room fills up, we serve our third course, a gourmet salad with homemade dressing. Our guests look forward to this. You'd serve this salad to guests in your home.

At noon, the main course is served. Our team serves six meals per year. Three of the six main courses are donated by The Rye Town Hilton or The Renaissance Hotel. The other three main courses are our responsibility.

Last year we stepped up the main course meals we serve. This is what two looked like. We served a dish created by a famous chef, with chicken, several different types of cheeses, salsa, sautéed onions and spices. David and his son in law cooked the meal fresh in the kitchen just before we served it that Saturday morning. This was the reaction, David had to come out and take a bow. There were jokes about the wine list. The whole room was applauding.

Later in the year David decided on another menu. Meatballs with a green verde sauce and a cous cous dish. When I arrived the day before in his kitchen, David was sautéing onions, celery and carrots. Many other ingredients were on the counters. When we served the meal, David came out again, and I'll never forget this, a lady came over to him and said, "I'd marry you for your meat balls."

Course 5 is the dessert – We tell everyone its very special. Baked especially for them by the small children at our synagogue. The 4 year olds in our ECC bake the cookies we serve. They're beautiful and delicious.

As dessert is ending, we walk to each table and give each guest a bag of fresh fruit donated by individuals from our synagogue community and other foods donated by Whole Foods. Whole Foods donates significant amounts of food to Dinner at Noon and the Carver Center weekly.

Over time, we're seeing the relationship between good food and good cheer. Our guests appreciate how nurturing and delicious the meal is. They also appreciate our joy in serving them. We're purposely making this meal abundant and out of the ordinary. This experience is different from a restaurant because of what Rabbi Gropper calls Kavod. Our motivation is the care, dignity and connection we feel for our guests. It's really about community and neighbors reaching out to neighbors. In this case, through a very special meal.

I want to share with you about just a few of our regular guests so you can get to know them.

A. Joe – is an elderly guest who is one of our regulars. I always check up on him. Last year I was asking him how he enjoyed the meal and if he had everything he needed to bring home. He told me he'd taken extra bread because he wanted to share with his elderly neighbors who could not make the trip to the Carver Center. It made me think about how Joe and others are support networks to neighbors in need. Their own Hesed.

B. Another regular is a woman about my age. She's bright articulate, a natural leader and loves to tell stories. If I were hiring someone to speak to our community or any community about food insecurity I'd ask her. The

incredible part is that she is dependent on the food pantry and Dinner at Noon to have enough food for the week. Her mom has cancer and comes when she's up to it. We give whatever we can to give her comfort.

- C. The woman who complimented David on his meatballs is a photographer. She once brought me a present of a picture she took of herself. She's also a regular guest. When I give her food to take home, her eyes meet mine. I can feel the gratitude. That interaction, and feeling, is commonplace at our DAN meals.
- D. Another regular, Ann told me last spring that someone was home sick. She asked if we could pack up her meal to bring to him. She'd skip the main course. We did pack a meal for her to bring home. We also served her the main course. It struck me that giving up a meal for another was natural to her.

Every Dinner at Noon meal is a highly coordinated effort and takes a village to pull together. Our team members are at the heart of the Dinner at Noon experience. Every team member has responsibilities unique to them that must be fulfilled for each meal. Each team member also donates bags of food to each meal and is responsible for picking up food from various sources. Together this is a team of generosity of spirit, kindness, cooperation and going above and beyond. I want to

acknowledge each member individually. We are going into our fourth season together.

Deborah Golub and her daughter Rebecca –

Ruth Harmon

Irene Metz

David Klein

My husband Roy Schaeffer

I want to welcome Shara Kimmel and Tara Schwartzman who will be joining us this fall.

When I first began as leader, I thought it was about the food and genuine connection to our guests. It is. However, what I didn't realize was how Dinner at Noon would change us.

I'd like to share a story with you. Last year I got an email from Deborah Golub telling me they were planning Rebecca's eighth birthday party. Rebecca had decided, she didn't want birthday presents. Rather, she wanted to do something for our Dinner at Noon guests and the Carver Center she's come to feel a connection to. They explored various options. In the end, they decided to put a card in each birthday invitation to Rebecca's friends. The card listed the ten top items the Carver Center

food pantry needed. Her friends brought food for the pantry to the party, and that was the gift.

I'm very proud our ECC and Chavarah students will be baking for us this year. And I believe that growing up in our synagogue village instills a sense of compassion and desire to take action, that makes this world a more peaceful and uplifted place.

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