

The Little Things Matter: Disposable vs. Reusable

Rabbi Gary Oren

It has been such a joy to watch as the Temple Aliyah community steps forward again and again to reach out towards each other during moments of transition, loss, and sadness. Through both the Community of Caring and individual efforts, our community has embraced the mitzvah of caring for the sick, comforting the mourner, and sharing in the celebration of new life. As you know, during times of transition, the smallest gesture can make a huge difference. The performance of these mitzvot, go along way in creating and maintaining community and in bringing light, comfort, love, and God into someone's life.

The question I have been thinking about lately is how we stay connected with those in our community who are going through transition after the initial intense period of change. How do we check in on the new mother, the person in mourning, the person recovering from illness in the weeks that follow? One of the things that we all can do is offer to provide a family with a meal. The meals that arrived at our home after the birth of our son Nadav were life savers. I also know first hand how similar gestures have provided assistance and comfort to other members of our community.

I noticed something as people delivered the meals to our home. Most of them were delivered in disposable containers – recyclable aluminum casserole tins, bowls for salad, and plastic bags. I too have delivered food this way many times. It always seemed easier. I felt like it would be easier to clean up, easier to cook (no transfer from one pan to another), less worried about Kashrut (making sure the dishes are Kosher) and I didn't have to worry about retrieving my favorite Pyrex baking dish.

It is this last point that I think needs to be reconsidered. I learned that those people who delivered meals in a reusable pan rather than recyclable aluminum automatically guaranteed themselves at least one other encounter with the person or family in need. They did not need to worry about an awkward phone call or not knowing how to re-invite themselves a week or so later. They had a built in excuse to visit again and to offer their help and support a second time. They simply called and asked if it was a good time to stop by because they needed to pick up their dishes. Another chance to offer our love, our comfort, and support – another chance to perform a mitzvah – another chance to do a small thing that can make a big difference.