

L E T T E R S

Free High Holy Day Tickets?

While I understand Steve Friedman’s theory that “our services should be free and open to all” (“Debatable,” Fall 2009), I wonder why anyone would bother to make the effort or spend the money to join a congregation if High Holiday tickets were available at no charge. As Maxine Sukenik said, “Free holiday tickets [just] encourage two-days-a-year Jews.”

Without members to support a congregation, what will people do when they want to be married by a rabbi in a temple sanctuary? Who will perform the *b’rit milah* for their newborn son or a baby naming for their daughter? Who will teach their children Hebrew and Jewish history or officiate at a bar or bat mitzvah? Who will organize youth groups to keep our children involved in the Reform Movement? Finally, who will bury them or their loved ones?

There are many ways we can be more inclusive to all Jews. What if we offered newcomers free tickets and membership for one year in the hope that they would join the following year? What about graduated membership levels, to make it easier for young singles and couples to join, or for seniors on fixed incomes to still be involved?

That said, we still need a sanctuary which requires upkeep, rabbis, cantors, classrooms, teachers—and, sadly, in today’s world—security. All these things cost money. Unless a very large endowed gift covers these expenses year after year, a congregation needs paying members. And that is the bottom line.

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I think a compromise is in order: Let’s offer Jews free High Holy Day tickets for one or two years, and reach out to them. When they come to services, engage them in conversation; later, invite them to the Chanukah party, a class, a social action initiative, or whatever you believe would be of most interest to them.

The best way to encourage people to join a temple is to make sure they develop personal relationships with members.

*Lillian Swickle
Bridgewater, New Jersey*

Editor’s Note: According to our website poll, 73% of respondents believe that High Holy Day tickets should be free and 27% disagree. To add your vote, visit http://reformjudaismmag.org/fall_2009. To read additional perspectives and contribute your own, go to <http://blogs.rj.org/reform/2009/08/debatable-should-we-offer-free.html#comments>.

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