

In our parasha Aaron's son's Nadav and Avihu bring offerings of "strange fire" not commanded by G-d into the new Mishkan on the eighth day of its inaugural celebration and a fire went out from the Lord and consumed them.

Then Moshe said to Aharon, This is what the Lord said: "I will be sanctified in those that come near to Me (bi-kerovai ekadeish), and before all the people I will be glorified (ekaveid)." And Aharon was silent.

The Netziv (10:1) maintains that the "strange fire" (10:1) represented an excess of love of God in their hearts, an overly bold desire to approach God, but their deaths are considered tragic and they are mourned by the people of Israel. They are not condemned by Moshe or G-d.

We as a community are about to move into our own sort of Mishkan, a Mikdash Ma'at that we built with our contributed time and riches with hired help. We didn't have such a precise plan as the children of Israel had detailed in our last parshiot, but we consulted our elders, Thank you Jack, and our artists have had parts in its decoration, Thank you Judy, Rita, Bruce and many others. And we have had our visionaries and organizers, Thank you Nesim, Brett, Jan and Bruce.

If we are to avoid the fate of Nadav and Avihu in celebrating our new dwelling place we need to learn from the Mesorah of our people dating back to Avraham Avinu and also from the history of our particular community.

I thought that the occasion of the penultimate d'var torah given ever ha yarden, before we enter our promised place would be a good occasion to reflect on our 7 years of wandering in our desert. I took out my Darchei Noam file from the file cabinet and looked at the archeological records of our community.

Paraphrasing our mission statement on our web site,

Our members are committed to lives that integrate Torah study and practice with the best of study, culture and careers in the secular world. We are committed to Halacha and Halachic process.

We intend to be a community of inspiring prayer and stimulating study with a daily minyan. Men, women and teenagers give Divrei Torah after Shabbat and Yom Tov services.

We are committed to the State of Israel whose welfare we pray for every week. Many of our children have continued their studies in Israel and developed strong ties to the State.

We provide regular classes for adults, and are committed to our youth. Children's groups are offered on Shabbat morning and a youth class is taught during tefillot. As part of our education program, Darchei Noam intends to bring in Rabbis and scholars for Shabbatonim.

We are committed to the larger Jewish community.

A member characterized our hashkafa or Philosophy as “A serious committed and undogmatic approach to halachic Judaism”

At our earliest organizational meetings in 2005 we were concerned about Women’s place in the Synagogue both physically and spiritually. We were concerned about recognizing the religious significance of the rebirth of a Jewish State. We considered naming ourselves, Torat Chaim, Ruach Chadash or Shevet Achim before settling on Darchei Noam.

Our bylaws state that Darchei Noam has been established for the purpose of maintaining and conducting a synagogue in accordance with Orthodox Jewish Law and that religious authority shall be vested in the Rabbi of the congregation.

By 2007 we had a series of meetings spearheaded by Hanna Bloomfield to guide our development as a community. Our priorities were up to a vote. Almost 2 to one voted for getting a permanent space over getting a resident Rabbi.

People liked these qualities of Darchei Noam: small, friendly, informal, unity of purpose, non-judgemental, open minded, Modern Orthodox, good davening and divrei Torah.

Priorities included Fiscal responsibility, transparent communications, Educational and Social programming for adults and kids, centrally located permanent space and, of course, better minyan attendance.

What did we want in 5 years (that is, now)? Membership of 60-80 families, part time Rabbi, permanent space, clear definition of our philosophy, good image in the community, full class schedule, open and transparent governance, lots of volunteers, focus on youth.

Some of those goals we have met, others still need work. They are still good goals.

Other things that we have worked on as a community have been gemilut chasadim as exemplified by volunteering at STEP and St. Stephen’s shelter, visiting and providing meals to congregants in mourning and in need. We need to continue and grow these efforts.

As we move to our new building, let us keep in mind what binds us as a community and a people. Let us put our best face forward and be proud of what we have accomplished. But, let us be conscious of the pitfalls of pride and arrogance and welcome every visitor as our ancestors did.

Let us enter our new quarters with joy and celebration, but also with humility and a consciousness of who we are as a kehilla kedosha, an am segula, but also as menschen, b’nei adam. Shabbat Shalom.