

President's Perception . . . Making Things Work

I have always been fascinated by government and politics. From my high school days debating government policy in tournaments and participating in Model United Nations, helping out with various political campaigns in my native Nashville and then taking as many political science courses as I could in college, the theory of how we govern ourselves has been a compulsion for me. I'm a self-admitted political wonk; and boy, am I glad the 2014 elections are over. There is certainly a difference between being interested in the science of governance and putting up with the mean-spirited (albeit sometimes entertaining) ads and countless repetitive talking heads during this political season.

Closer to home, Anshai Torah is a pretty good microcosm of how governance should work. Many of you may be familiar with the saying that politics is the "art of the possible." That is just what we try to do here – the possible. We do whatever we can to "say yes." We have to take into consideration all sorts of constituencies – older and younger members, children, families, single adults, donors and volunteers, staff, rabbis and others. Sometimes it takes a while to say yes. Sometimes we can say yes with qualification and compromise. Sometimes it takes what seems to be forever to make a decision or take action. And sometimes we have to say no. That's the price of a democratic organization with so many interests to consider.

We have a 40-page constitution, a 28-member board of directors, a 9-member executive committee, dozens of

other working committees and volunteers, and a staff that scrambles to keep up with the demands of a growing congregation.

Our community exceeds 1,500 people. It's a wonder that we get done, but we do. When a budgetary, fundraising, policy or major programming issue comes up, we try to refer the matter to the executive committee first for discussion; and then it goes to a specialized committee for further development or to the board of directors for action. And there are lots and lots of debates, discussions and questions, inside and outside the board and among our constituencies. Sometimes, like with our efforts to improve security at the shul, a reasonable plan may take several months to develop. But it works! Our process usually creates the best possible result. That is what democracy in a community like ours is all about.

"Shul politics" is simply the attempt at good government. It's the best kind of politics. It's the art – not the science – of the possible. I sincerely hope that many of you will volunteer to be on one of our committees and eventually become a board member and officer. Service to a shul is a rewarding experience if you keep in mind that good governance takes patience and perseverance.

Have a joyous Hanukkah with your family and friends, a wonderful winter break and a happy beginning to 2015.

Howard Rubin