Hi Everyone,

I hope you’ve had a great week! Most scientists now agree that there are 27 emotions that humans can experience. I’m sure that at some point in our lives we have all experienced amusement, anger, nostalgia, sadness, or boredom. I might be pushing your limits on that last one right now. But today I want to speak about one emotion, probably my favorite, the emotion of joy.

Jewish holidays, and indeed Jewish history, typically finds joy with an asterisk. Yes, we celebrate the joy of the exodus from Egypt on Passover, but that joy is tempered by the fact that it came escaping slavery. We are joyous on Purim that Queen Esther found the courage, which led to the defeat of Haman’s plans. Even on Hanukkah, we celebrate the miracle of the oil lasting for eight nights, but that miracle came only after the Temple was ransacked. It seems that as a Jewish people, our joy always comes with a caveat.

Which is why the holiday we celebrated earlier this week is so special. Simchat Torah is only about joy. It’s a holiday that grew from the grassroots of Judaism and has only grown over time. The joy comes from many places. As the late Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks remarks, when Simchat Torah was first celebrated, the only thing the Jewish people had left was Torah, and today it’s the constant that connects you and me to those who came before and those who will come after.

Whatever the reasons for joy, Simchat Torah has become a symbol for joy throughout the Diaspora. In the Cold War Soviet Union, where being Jewish was often kept secret, it was the one time per year where the Jews would dance in the streets to celebrate their Judaism in Moscow.

While we as a people have lost so much, we have never lost our capacity to be joyful. Today the world can feel like a scary place, can make us feel so many emotions, and at times, we can feel far from joy. Together, let’s find more opportunities to be joyful this year. Let’s create some of those opportunities together. I hope you’ll consider joining the Alliance for our upcoming 2023 Annual Campaign Thank You event featuring Juju Chang, Emmy-award winning co-anchor of ABC News’ Nightline. In this highly personal talk, Juju will share her journey to Judaism and Jewish identity. The event takes place on Sunday, November 20 at 7:30pm at the Dwares JCC. There is no cost to attend the event, aside from a gift of any amount to the Annual Community Campaign. A link to the event can be found in the body of this email.

It’s a phrase that is quickly becoming cliché, but in 5783, let’s find more joy and less oy—and let’s do it together. Until next time, I wish you a safe, peaceful, and joyous Shabbat.

Shabbat Shalom!

Adam Greenman
President & CEO