

The Importance of Community

“Kol Yisrael Areivim Zeh baZeh...” the song by Rabbi Micah Lapidus, based on a text from Talmud, Shevuot 39a, played non-stop in my head during the first few weeks of my year in Israel in the summer of 2014. “All Israel are responsible for one another.” The phrase implies that all Jews are mixed together to form a single entity known as *“Klal Yisrael”* – “the community of Israel”, and thus share a common destiny. Notice that the translation says, “all Israel are, rather than all Israel is,” elevating the community over the individual. Having arrived in Israel just 3 days before that summer’s war broke out, I saw and felt that communal focus often throughout our year there.

This past Shabbat we read Parashat Yitro in which the Israelites accept God’s covenant and are given the Ten Commandments. As they prepare to approach Mt. Sinai as one collective community, God descends upon the mountain in a cloud of smoke and declares, “You shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” (*Exodus 19:6*) God addresses the people directly for the first time, as one nation. The covenant is accepted and sealed, not by individuals, but by the community. We are then referred to as a collective throughout the rest of Torah as, *“Beit Ya’akov”* “the House of Jacob,” *“B’nai Yisrael”* – “Children of Israel,” and *“Am Yisrael”* – “the people Israel.” No matter the moniker, we are always addressed as a community.

All this is to say that Community is not a four-letter word! Rather, it is the very foundation of who we are as Jews, and membership is fundamental to our survival as a people, a culture, a tradition and yes, as a religion too.

When I came to TBC last July as your Cantor, Educator and Spiritual Leader, I did more than just begin a new job. I became a part of a dynamic, compassionate Jewish community – a part of something wonderful that is greater than any one of its members alone. It is together that we can impact our world, or at least our little corner of it, lift our voices in song and prayer, celebrate our successes and comfort each other in times of hardship or sadness. All our most important ceremonies and celebrations from prayer to lifecycle events occur in community – weddings, baby naming, b’nai mitzvah, even our mourning rituals are structured to involve community in support of those who are grieving.

Kol Yisrael Aravim Zeh Bazeh is fundamental to what it means to be a Jew. Which is what this inaugural issue of TBC Connections is all about! How we connect and support each other as a community is vital to how we exist in the world as Jews, and we want everyone who is a part of Temple B’nai Chaim to know exactly how much connection is happening in our community! We, your leadership team and clergy, are so excited about ALL the amazing initiatives, events, plans and conversations that are taking place in our synagogue community, and we so want YOU to be involved! I urge you to take a few minutes now to scroll through this first edition of our newsletter and learn a little more about what an AMAZING synagogue community we have here at TBC, and when you have finished, pick up the phone and call a TBC friend and encourage

them to do the same. Better yet, call a friend who hasn't yet experienced our community and invite them to participate and see just how fulfilling and wonderful our time together can be!

B'shira uv'racha... In song and blessing,

Cantor Harriet Dunkerley