

RABBI'S MESSAGE

What about the Grownups?

This time of year, with Purim right around the corner and Passover not far behind, my mind contemplates our annual celebrations. So much of Jewish holiday celebration is focused on children. How do we keep young people engaged, interested and having fun? How do we make Judaism enjoyable enough that our children will want to remain Jewish? In today's world, of course, there is plenty of competition. We do our best to make sure our celebrations include something for the kids. Purim has costumes, games and joyous festivities. Passover has the children participate in the Four Questions early in the evening and then the hunt for the *afikomen* towards the end. We do whatever we can to make sure the children won't get bored. Can we say the same thing for adults?

In my message last month, I focused on the many adult learning opportunities we have at Temple Beth Torah and throughout Houston. Learning is an important part of engagement, but not the *only* part. Having a social group whose company we enjoy is important. All our worship and our learning is enhanced by the friendships we form. I'm reminded of the Jewish man who claimed he was an atheist. As he walked with his young son to the synagogue, his son asked him, "If you don't believe in God, why do you go to the synagogue? Don't people go to services to talk to God?" The man replied, "You're right. I'm not so sure about God. But you know my friend, Mr. Schwartz? He's a REAL believer. Yes, Schwartz, he goes to talk to God. Me? I go to talk to Schwartz!"

Personally, my favorite activities are those multi-generational events where children of all ages and adults of all ages enjoy being together. Like when 50 some TBT-ers got together for a Tu B'Shevat Nature Day in January. Many of our young people have the ability to rise to the occasion when they're included in adult activities. In the presence of youth, many elders feel rejuvenated. Other times, it's nice for adults to have their own time together, like when over 100 enjoyed Joe Buchanan's concert in February.

Showing up is just part of the equation. Engaging with others, making friends and learning about each other is what creates community. It's what inspires us to be present for each other in times of need, and to celebrate with each other for *simchas* (joyous occasions). Many of our life-long members see each other more often outside of the temple than inside, sometimes volunteering for the community and sometimes just for a game of Mahjonn or golf or tennis. That is wonderful! They've developed friendships within the community that develop into deep friendships.

Whatever age or stage, friendship is what makes for a strong community. That is something we all can celebrate.

L'shalom,

Rabbi Dan Gordon