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Nissan 5782

United Synagogue

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Message from the President of the United Synagogue

A United Synagogue Rebbetzen shared a wonderful anecdote with me recently. She was learning with a member of her community, a mother of three children. One of her children went to Tribe camp last summer and had such a wonderful time that the child came home and told his parents that he wanted to go to a Jewish school.

The child said that he had really enjoyed the davening on camp and the special atmosphere Tribe creates, and so he wanted to go to a school where he would get that feeling every day. In January, he – and his two siblings! – moved to a Jewish school. As a result, the family feel much more connected to the Jewish community than they did beforehand.

There are many reasons for choosing a school of course, and we know that our younger Jewish generation thrives in many different educational settings. But my point here as we approach Pesach is how special our tradition is. How unique our festivals are. How powerful the touchstones are that keep our children connected to their faith and make them want to be part of our people's 4000-year-old story.

Pesach – and Seder nights in particular – is perhaps the quintessential opportunity to connect with our past and forge indelible positive Jewish experiences. With its distinctive rituals, songs and foods, Pesach creates memories of special Seder nights from years ago which seem as fresh as if they'd happened yesterday. Not by chance is Seder night the most observed Jewish ritual, even by those who wouldn't consider themselves to be that observant during the rest of the year.

But my message this Pesach, isn't specifically about Pesach, strange as that might seem. It's about what we do after Pesach. It's about how you can help us keep the younger generation of our community connected to their tradition and keep that spark alive for them to pass on – please God – to others.

We are role models in everything we do. If people see us take our Judaism seriously, they are more likely to do the same. If they see us coming to shul regularly, enjoying our warm, welcoming services and programming for all ages or volunteering to help the community, they are more likely to continue going themselves.

So as we move to the summer months and hopefully better weather, please join us back in shul. We need you. And if you've already come back, please invite your friends and family to join you. If there is a service or event at your shul that you have not attended before or for a while, why not give it a go? And if you'd like to make something new happen, please let us know: now is the time not just to do what we always have but to refresh what our communities offer.

Earlier this year we launched Project Welcome, an initiative which does exactly what it says on the tin. We want to – and we must – welcome back people we've not seen for some time. In partnership with the Office of the Chief Rabbi, Project Welcome aims to boost community participation and enable every United Synagogue community to build an ambitious long-term strategy.

As the Chief Rabbi said when he addressed our lay leaders recently: "Let's never take shul for granted. Let's never take community for granted."

With your help, we will ensure that's not the case. Wishing you all a chag kasher v'sameach.

Michael Goldstein
President, United Synagogue

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