

Telling Our Story

Last week at our sederim, we participated in one of our oldest rituals, the Pesach seder, commemorating the Jewish people's exodus from Egypt over 3,300 years ago by telling the story of how it happened. Reviewing our history does more than simply connect us to our past. First, it connects us to the global Jewish community through shared experience. Second, by encouraging our children's participation, we transmit our story to the next generation, ensuring the continuity of the Jewish people. Finally, as highlighted by our many commandments that require us to remember that we were strangers in Egypt, our story sensitizes us to the suffering of others, reminding us that we are not completely free if others are oppressed.

The story of these connections – to fellow Jews, to future generations, and to all people – is also the story and mission of our Bayit. Over the past year, we have come together to celebrate hundreds of simchas, from new babies and birthdays

to weddings and anniversaries, and we have been there to support people through tough and sad times, offering words of comfort and taking action to ease the pain of those suffering from illness and loss. Our Bikur Holim Committee calls close to 30 elderly and ill members before every holiday to say hello and check on them; and before Rosh Hashanah, our Board called every member to wish a Shana Tova. And on our behalf, our Rabbinic Team reaches out every week to the many members of our community who are unable to join us here at the Bayit.

The Bayit has worked to perpetuate Jewish life, through daily tefillot, numerous weekly classes, and ongoing programs, like our free services on the high holidays and the free seders we held last week, and the upcoming programming for Yom Ha'Shoah, Yom Ha'Zikaron and Yom Ha' Atzmaut.

When it comes to our future and continuity, let me share the story of one member of our youth groups, a young boy with learning disabilities and social anxiety that limited his ability

to participate in Torah and Tefillah, and made it difficult for him to speak in front of his peers. Over the past year, our youth director, Menachem Menchel, has been running a special program to help children with learning disabilities learn the material from our Shabbat programs ahead of time and in a manner that allows them to learn despite their personal challenges. As a result, on a recent Shabbat morning, instead of being anxious, shy and quiet, this young boy's hand was flying up in the air to answer questions about the parsha. With the assistance of a UJA grant, we are now expanding this program to use music, art and theater to enable full participation and inclusion in our youth groups. As a result, these children will learn in advance songs that the congregation sings on Shabbat, giving all of our children a voice, both literally and figuratively.

Unfortunately, over the past year, we have also had an opportunity to stand up against oppression. In December, we stood up for our people, gathering to respond to a swastika etched into the turf in Seton Park. We lit Chanukah candles at the

spot to tell the world that we will respond to the darkness of hate with light and community. And just this past Sunday, we gathered outside the Russian Mission in North Riverdale to protest against the increasing anti-Semitism in the Ukraine, including the firebombing of the main synagogue in Nikolayev and fliers threatening Jews to identify themselves or risk the loss of their property.

We similarly feel deeply our solidarity with all people. In just the last month, we have reached out and visited the pastor of the Church in Harlem that blew up in the gas main explosion, and we look forward to inviting their community to a meal with us at the Bayit. We are also coordinating and hosting a memorial service for Dr. Shirley Koshi, a veterinarian in Riverdale who tragically took her own life, as Rav Ari discussed in his d'var Torah a few weeks ago. And most recently, we gathered at the monument a week ago to protest hateful graffiti and to stand up for a united and diverse Riverdale. These connections are a part of the fabric of who we are.

Now, as we prepare for Yizkor, it is customary to set aside tzedaka, and on Pesach we ask for funds to facilitate our Bayit's mission. As you remember your loved ones and think about the role they played in your life's story, please consider the role that Bayit plays in this story and how providing your time and financial support can continue and expand this story. Together, we will ensure that the Bayit remains a home that connects us to each other, to the broader Jewish community, to the promise of future generations and the community of humanity. Please keep in mind that as a result of the breadth of our mission and our efforts to keep dues at a level that allow for all to join without requiring modification, our annual dues of roughly \$700 per adult cover less than one-third of our annual per-adult expense.