August 21, 2017

Dear Friends,

I hope you and your entire family had a wonderful summer! Summers always make me miss my childhood and teenage years. Those sweet summers when there was no school or work, just memorable times building new friendships in Jewish summer camps, some of which lasted a lifetime. What exactly is the secret of a summer camp that creates such strong and long-lasting friendships, and can we replicate it within the confines of our shul? I’m a big believer that the key to the success, growth and sustainability of our community is rooted in and is very much dependent on strong interpersonal connections and friendships between our members.

In 1950, psychologists Leon Festinger, Stanley Schachler and Kurt Back of MIT theorized that simple regular exposure to the same individuals highly increased one’s chances of developing a friendship. They called this the “Propinquity Effect.” Of course, one does not need an MIT degree to understand that simply coming to shul on a regular basis and sharing our holy space with others will greatly increase your chances of creating and maintaining close friendships with other members. But is propinquity alone enough? Psychologists Jeffery Parker and John Seal of University of Michigan published a study in 1996 where they tracked 216 kids ages 8-15 in summer camps in order to find out what factors contributed to various friendship groups that formed throughout the summer. Research showed that people were naturally drawn to other people who resembled themselves. Again, the idea that people with similar values, beliefs, attitudes, culture and traditions tend to form closer friendships seems self-explanatory, and of course, Beth Jacob is a perfect breeding ground for finding and retaining close friends simply through this “Similarity Effect.”
But here is the most important study! In 2017, computer programmer Allen Berezovsky, via this letter, published his personal study based on a 17-year membership at Beth Jacob of Irvine which concludes, with 100% certainty, that a community that laughs together, cries together, eats together, dances together, learns together, prays together, volunteers together and deeply cares for one another the way Beth Jacob members do, is a place where life-long friendships are formed and maintained, and for that reason alone, the membership that you are about to renew or enter into is absolutely priceless!

In chapter 1:6 of Pirkei Avot, Joshua ben Perahya taught:

עֲשֵׂה לְךָ רַב, וּקְנֵׂה לְךָ חָבֵׂר, וֶהוֵּי דָן אֶת כָּל הָאָדָם לְכַף זְכוּת

(Select for yourself a rabbi/teacher, acquire for yourself a friend/study partner, and judge everyone favorably). On all three fronts, Beth Jacob of Irvine has got you covered! Our Rabbi Ciner is one of the world’s best teachers and study partners. Our members make the world’s best friends and companions. And we always look for the good in one another.

I’m so excited to have you join us for another year of friendship, personal and spiritual growth, and of course delicious cholent (available most Shabbos mornings for no additional fee!). From myself, my wife Susan and our boys, Roni and Jordan, we wish you a happy, healthy and blessed new year!

L’Shana Tova!
Allen Berezovsky