

RABBI'S RESPONSA

Shalom L'Kulam (Peace Everyone),

During high school back in Michigan, I was a pretty decent competitive swimmer. I was better than average but was never great. I'm pretty sure that's because I was lazy; I always just wanted the practices to end. I remember, on the really long swims, I would dream that I could magically jump ahead to where the fastest swimmers already were – bringing me that much closer to my goal. I envied them being way ahead of me. I passed the long hours thinking about how there would always be someone up ahead of me. What if it were possible to use their position to jump ahead? I could leap-frog to my goal (of getting practice over with) faster than I would on my own.

The same understanding returned to me years later but in a much more productive form when I was serving as a hospice chaplain in New Jersey during my time as a rabbinical student at the Hebrew Union College. In listening to people who were close to their own death, I occasionally encountered real wisdom. I almost felt like I was cheating - if I listened really carefully to their hard-earned life lessons, I might be able to make their knowledge my own. I could take what I'd learned on my own and assimilate what they could teach me and I'd be way ahead of where I'd otherwise be on my own!

It's why we choose teachers for piano and painting – they're better pianists and painters than we are and they can guide us. It's why we choose coaches for basketball, golf pros to analyze our swing, and tutors and rabbis to teach us what we cannot learn as well on our own. In each relationship, we identify the resources who can help us rise higher than we could on our own.

I've striven to live using that principle and it has led me to surround myself with people who have a lot to teach me. I learn from professionals in the congregation who have leadership, business and technical skills that they don't teach in rabbinical school. I learn valuable tips from congregants who are better parents than I. I learn from my Temple Sinai co-workers what knowledge (and it's plentiful) they have to teach me in each of their areas of expertise. And from none have I learned more than from my rabbinic mentors. They have made the same mistakes and struggled with the same challenges as I. And sometimes, they have realized the same goals I hope to achieve. Mishnah says, “עשה לך רב, וקנה לך חבר” – Make someone into your teacher and acquire for yourself a friend.” I think we all identify and make teachers for ourselves.

It was in this spirit that I was so excited to welcome our friends from a terrific congregation “down the road a bit” a few weeks back. Rabbi Billy Dreskin is a little bit of a legend in the rabbinic world. Sometimes my friends talk about a rabbi's rabbi and I've approached him on many occasions to ask his advice and to listen to his recommendations. It was all the more exciting, then, to respond affirmatively to Paul Storfer's suggestion that Temple Sinai and Woodlands Community Temple in Westchester spend some time learning and praying together.

Paul is one of our Ruach coordinators, and a friend of both congregations. In October, Temple Sinai hosted the musical ensemble from Woodlands called, “A Joyful Noise” and their whole clergy team

(an impressive force!). They delivered “their service” in our home and we were their congregation. And now, on **December 21 at 8:00pm**, Woodlands will host Sinai and Ruach as we deliver our beloved worship experience in their spiritual home, so they can be a part of what we do so very well. It is a wonderful chance for two congregations, who take a similar approach to our Judaism, to collaborate, enjoy and learn from each other. We’ll be arranging group travel for all who wish to join us (contact the office for info) and I certainly hope that you’ll all decide to travel to White Plains with us for the upcoming service at Woodlands in a few weeks!

L’Shalom – In Peace,
Rabbi Jay TelRav