

Shanah Tovah everyone! It is official. Sixteen days ago, my son Daniel has officially lived more of his life in Seattle than in Los Angeles. In that same span, life has happened for all of us. Many of you have celebrated weddings, welcomed babies, and celebrated B'nai Mitzvah. All of these moments shared together as a Jewish community are formative. For me, my first truly formative moment with this community came when my family and I first visited Seattle before moving here. It was April 2022—still “Covid time.” We came to Rock Shabbat services, and there were maybe a dozen people in the Sanctuary, each masked and social distancing.

Daniel was three and... let's say very three. He needed...space to blow off some steam. I was mortified. Even though nobody knew that I was the new rabbi and Daniel was the new rabbi's kid, I walked over after services to apologize for the disturbance. Before I could get through my apology, one of our highly dedicated long time congregants and all around mensch Mike Warren took my hand and said, “It is just so wonderful that you're here—your son, your wife. We would much rather have children a little upset or running around—even misbehaving—than not have them here at all.”

In that moment I knew: this is a special community and I want to raise my son here. This is a community that understands Judaism is a living inheritance, not a museum exhibit. A community that wants kids in the room—not because it's convenient, but because it is covenantal.

In the way a potter shapes clay, these experiences and interactions shape us and our sense of Jewish self. But this sense of Jewish self isn't built only in the sanctuary, it comes from living Jewishly, day in and day out. Truth be told, I am concerned for our children and our children's children. They are not growing up in the post-war utopia we thought America would become. We are raising children, grandchildren and great grandchildren in a world that is largely indifferent or even opposed to our existence. I believe there are four pillars which fortify and support the growth of a strong sense of Jewish self for Jews of all ages, they are: the home, the

synagogue, Jewish summer camp and Jewish Education. If we continue to find fresh, creative ways to make these spaces accessible, enjoyable and meaningful for our children and for us, the future of Judaism will have been built on a sturdy foundation.

There is a concept we discussed at length while I was achieving my Masters in Jewish education at the Hebrew Union College in Los Angeles—an idea that sociologists Alex Pomson and Randal Schnoor call “Jewish Capital”. Pomson and Schnoor describe *Jewish capital* as the accumulated strength a family and community builds when Judaism becomes both what we know and who we know.

On one side, there is **cultural capital**: the habits, the stories, the melodies, Hebrew words, the traditions and rituals that mark our daily lives. On the other side, there is **social capital**: the web of relationships—friends, cousins, grandparents, fellow congregants, day school classmates, bunk mates from camp—that make Jewish living natural, expected, and joyous. Jewish capital, like financial capital, is deposited into the bank of Jewish self in small increments.

The home is our savings account. Small, steady deposits—candles on Friday night, bedtime Shema, the story your grandparents told you for the hundredth time—add up over the years into a treasure trove of Jewish memory. Each act may feel ordinary, but together they become an inheritance strong enough to carry our children through the indifference or hostility of the world. When our homes nurture ritual, when our synagogues knit us into community, when our schools and camps thicken our networks, we are depositing Jewish capital daily, and that balance is what allows the Jewish self to grow steadily and resilient.

We are so fortunate to have a synagogue that is vibrant and growing, **bucking trends** across the nation. From numerous new family units to the dozens upon dozens of teens showing up for the various amazing programs our religious education department offers. This participation, like a mutual fund, is the product of our shared investment. Alone, our deposits are small; together, we pool them and create returns that no

household could yield alone. This immense success is a testament to the various aspects of our synagogue life. I would ask you to consider for a moment...why do you show up? Why are you here tonight or observing these holidays from home this evening? What intentions did you set for yourself, how do you hope to grow from this experience tonight and over the course of this new year? If I can give one piece of unsolicited advice, find a few new reasons to show up. Make shabbat a priority and feel free to come as you are. Make Torah study a priority, make social justice a priority, make this community a priority—if not for yourself, for your children and your grandchildren. Investment in Jewish capital pays when we **gather** intentionally.

As much as synagogue life demonstrates this principle, how much more so does Jewish summer camp. **There are so many benefits derived from the opportunity to go to Jewish summer camp and while many had the chance to attend camp as children, there are now so many opportunities for adults to experience the magic of camp, too. Opportunities like camp keshet, family camp, men's camp, women's retreats, and tribal gatherings. Camp is awesome.** Vice President for URJ Camps and Immersives, Reuben Arquilevich famously says “Camp is the shabbat of the year.” What is shabbat? A sacred opportunity of rest and renewal, a moment of metamorphosis, Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel called shabbat a “Cathedral in time” sacred architecture, not in physical space, but in sacred time. So it is with camp. I have been privileged enough to have grown up going to camp, I worked as a unit head at camp Newman in Santa Rosa, California, I get to go and visit Camp Kalsman each summer and represent temple and our kids as faculty. I know what camp does for kids. It pushes them out of their comfort zones, gives them space to find themselves Jewishly, and camp is a respite from the mundane and the profane of the rest of the year. At camp, kids learn how to be their best Jewish selves.

Going to Jewish summer camp is like winning the lottery when it comes to Jewish capital. There are some investments, however, that pay in dividends in the short term and create immense wealth of Jewish capital in the long term.

Recently, I had the very special opportunity to be in conversation with Paul Bernstein, CEO of Prizmah, the primary network for North American Jewish Day Schools. This conversation, hosted by Hillel, The Ben Gurion Society, Temple De Hirsch Sinai, and the SAMIS foundation, which is an incredible organization that provides access for Jewish youth in Washington State to high-quality intensive and immersive Jewish educational experiences and that is exactly what this particular event was designed to do—to engage young people from pluralistic and multid denominational backgrounds, to encourage thinking about what the education of their hypothetical future children might look like. Judaism is not a tradition that should only respond to the current moment, it is about a deep investment in each generation until the thousandth.

In my conversation with Paul, we discussed the compelling data that demonstrates the impact that Jewish day schools have regarding the sense of Jewish self these institutions develop and the elevated likelihood that Jewish Day school alumni will become leaders in the Jewish world. Why does this happen? These schools educate the whole child. They don't just teach about Judaism; they apprentice students into Jewish life—through Hebrew language, through Jewish text, holiday cycles, and a moral vocabulary, that links *tzedakah*, righteous giving, for example, with *tzedek*, the equity and justice we are called to pursue. Paul asserts that day school education is one of the most strategic investments a community can make if we want a knowledgeable, confident next generation.

He's right and Stacey Delcau, the Education Director of our immensely successful synagogue Religious school agrees. I was speaking with Stacey recently about this sermon and she reminded me that, even though we have a remarkable program that provides top tier religious education to our youth, there are ultimately limitations to supplementary synagogue religious instruction. The limited amount of time we have with our learners doesn't diminish the importance of what we do, and yet we must set honest expectations about the scale of investment supplementary schools can make. Our religious school is excellent at planting seeds, nurturing community,

and giving children meaningful Jewish touchpoints. Yet, if parents value fluency, immersion, and the steady apprenticeship into Jewish life that truly shapes leaders, we must recognize the statistical fact that the scale of investment and time in day school is unmatched.

The fact is, the world needs more Jewish leaders. More people who are steeped in this tradition, asking the questions that will pave the way for the Judaism of tomorrow, from generation to generation. This matter is really quite simple. Jewish identity is built through affirming, positive, diverse Jewish experiences with Jewish people in Jewish spaces. The more of these experiences we share, the more we come together and invest in each other's sense of Jewish self, the stronger the Jewish world will be.

That's not theory; it's lived sociology. And it is how we resist a world that is ultimately indifferent or hostile. So keep doing the things that build your sense of Jewish self: keep saying shema each morning and each evening. Keep blessing your meals, keep eating those knishes! But also, do something new, step out of your comfort zone, make an investment in your Jewish self, an investment in this community, make an investment in the next generation. **ONLY** if we can be thoughtfully encouraging each other to be intentional in our own lives and in the raising of Jewish children, the Jewish people of tomorrow will have a sense of self that is capable of transcending the moment, to envision an eternal Judaism. Stay Jewish, ok?

Shanah tovah