

Rabbi Lewis' Message for Summer, 2010

I used to be more of a purist about observing holidays on the correct day. I still prefer going to Megillah reading on the actual day of Purim. And I like going to Shavuot services on the actual day of Shavuot. But when we tried observing those holidays on the actual day in our congregation, we got a very small turnout. And when we moved the holidays to the nearest Sunday, we got a large turnout.

Turnout isn't everything. After all, a minyan of ten is enough for a full worship service. In many congregations, the Shavuot service is attended only by the confirmands and their families. That just didn't work for us. So we made a conscious choice to broaden our Confirmation congregation by moving the service to Sunday morning, by including all the younger classes in the service and by finishing the school year together.

Some of the benefits have been predictable. The sanctuary is full and all the children get a chance to go up on the bimah. Parents feel proud and wonder where the years have gone. But there have been other benefits I would not have predicted.

As I looked out from the bimah during the Confirmation service, I noticed the faces of the younger children as they watched the older children. We don't have to tell our younger children why they should continue their Jewish education through Confirmation; they can see it for themselves. They hear the older students talk about how much fun they have in Confirmation. They hear them thank their teachers, the very teachers in whose classrooms they sit now. And the Confirmation students look out at these younger students and see how far they have come and how much they themselves have grown. For just a moment, they remember their younger selves. And the teachers sit with glistening eyes, taking it all in, enjoying the appreciation and feeling the importance of what they do.

We are a people who believe in blessing the moment. Confirmation reminds us as a congregation to pause and enjoy that moment. It allows us to make a shehechianu together in gratitude for all that we have.

May your summer be filled with shehechianu moments.

Rabbi Ellen Lewis