

Dear Friends,

Proverbs 22:6 claims: “Teach a child in the way to go, and even when they are old, they will not depart from it.”

It has a nice ring to it. Surely, I would not be the man I am today had I not been influenced by the environment of learning and kindness my parents created for me. And I like to think that the kind-heartedness of my own children has at least something to do with the home in which they grew up, as well.

All the same, knowledge and values are much like our muscles, which tend to lose their strength over time unless exercised. Unfortunately, as I look at the general world of American Jewish education, I fear that while childhood education has grown only better and better over the years, the average Jewish adult has not fared quite so well.

Unfortunately, even though most Jewish adults I know have indeed maintained their ongoing relationship with, and commitment to, core Jewish values like kindness, generosity, caring, respect, etc., for too many of us (in my opinion), this is all that Judaism is to them: a noble set of universalistic values, with scant attention paid to the modes of Jewish thought and expression that lead us to those values, nor to the larger Jewish community that have kept those values alive throughout the ages. And because of this, I am concerned that richness that is Judaism may well run the risk of stagnating in adulthood at the most basic of pediatric levels.

Now, speaking of pediatric Judaism, I am proud to know that our JCNWJ children have been thriving in so many ways as students of the Mike Wiener School of Jewish Learning. So what is it that makes their experience so successful? Certainly not our numbers. Most synagogues I know educate far more children than we do, which makes sense, because given the reality of demographics, most synagogues I know have far more children than we do. Still, though, I am tremendously proud of what Shira and Debbie (“Ms. Apsel”) and Student Cantor Shayna and I have created, because our children appreciate how lucky they are to be Jewish. Yes, we care about teaching Jewish information and practice. Yes, it is important to us that they learn Hebrew. And yes, it is paramount that they become intimately familiar and comfortable with the Jewish prayer book. Of course, every time we celebrate another JCNWJ youngster being called to Torah as a b’nei mitzvah, it’s easy to see just how thoroughly they have mastered the information we expect them to know. But if their entire Jewish education were simply about “performing” the prayers, chanting the Torah & Haftarah, and delivering a beautifully crafted speech on the one day we celebrate their becoming an adult in our Jewish community, clearly that would have been an abject failure, because the goal of Jewish learning can never be about a single day. Rather, at its best, Jewish education ought to excite and inspire students to exude pride in their heritage, an intimate connection with the Jewish People, and a keen interest in continuing to learn over time. With modesty, I believe we do that. How? By making sure the learning is fun. Which leads me to the actual point of what I am writing here...

I am excited to announce that the JCNWJ will be experimenting this year with a new program, called Community b’Yachad, which is Hebrish for “Community Together.” In a nutshell, the question that our Hebrew School team began to discuss in the spring of 2022 is: How can we share the fun and community building that our children enjoy so much with the rest of our JCNWJ family? And how can we make use of the experience to build an even more connected community than we already have? After much discussion, we arrived at a terribly exciting answer:

There will be three different kinds of Hebrew School days this year: Some Sundays will be as they already are, with our children as the only students present. On other Sundays we will welcome JCNWJ adults as our only students. These days will become known as Community b'Yachad. And on still other Sundays, we will have multigenerational learning. These days will be called Dor l'Dor, which is Hebrew for "Generation to Generation." While all three of our Sunday School models will be educational in spirit, if we do our jobs correctly, our students (which we hope will include you!) will be having so much fun that they won't even realize how much they're learning (until after the fact, that is, when they look back on the experience)!

Each Community b'Yachad Sunday (unless otherwise instructed, which will be rare) will begin with a morning time schmooze at 9:30 (coffee provided) and adult level Jewish art projects. From there, we will move into a spirited song session with Debbie and Student Cantor Shayna (on the weekends that Student Cantor Shayna is scheduled to be with us), during which we will learn some of the newer songs that have been introduced into our Shabbat worship over the past few years, sing some of our classic favorites, and even enjoy some of the standard folk songs out of the American songbook. Most importantly, we will have fun and enjoy each other's company.

After Music, we will then learn Hebrew and other Jewish studies with me and with Student Cantor Shayna when she is with us.

Dor l'Dor Sundays are open this year to students ranging from newborn to 101 (once we get a better handle on what we're doing, we'll expand that to include 102-year-olds next year). The schedule of activities will be similar to Community b'Yachad Sundays, but the activities will be intentionally intergenerational in order to continue strengthening the tight-knit community that we are. Please see Pg. 10 for a tentative schedule of activities we have planned for both Community b'Yachad and Dor l'Dor.

There is no need for Jewish education to cease in childhood. Nor is there any need for Jewish education to be anything other than fun and fascinating. We hope you will join us in this new endeavor of the Mike Weiner School of Jewish Learning.

Looking forward to seeing you all during Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur,  
Rabbi Dubin