

Robert Weintraub, Lev La'am, Spring, 2018

In September of 2016, I devoted my first *Lev La'am* article to young families. I asserted that, “as a group within our broad demographic, you are talented, thoughtful, caring and passionate. While you have your own new and creative ideas, you represent what Bet Am Shalom is at its core, a community that takes its Judaism seriously – that is, you seek to have Judaism play an important role in your families’ lives. And, in fact, you want to do that in a very Reconstructionist way, keeping tradition in mind as you help our congregation adapt to a rapidly changing world.”

Recently, a longtime member emphatically reminded me of your importance to our future. She recalled and depicted for me the cohort with which she joined Bet Am. That depiction struck an ironic chord. While conditions have changed – in our community, in our movement, in our people, in our nation, in our world – I was struck by the *commonalities* between her cohort and yours.

Upon entering our community, both had their mix of Jewish backgrounds and practices. Both had their mix of synagogue involvement and anticipated involvement. Both had their mix of nagging gaps in their lives which they found could not be filled elsewhere. Both had their mix of challenges in becoming established at BAS.

Then...both developed – or, at least, are developing – strong bonds within their respective *chevres*; and, then...to their surprise, bonds across the broader Bet Am community.

This is not the case for everyone, in any of our cohorts. Some people still struggle with their relationship to the Jewish community. Some are still struggling to find the right pathways into – or, for that matter, *back* into – the heart of our community. Some people feel that our congregation has departed from what brought them into its fold. Others feel we’re not changing fast enough.

However, as I hear it from so many of you, the *commonality* returns with declarations of our singularity – not, I must say, with any sense of superiority. There are other, just as wonderful, Jewish communal institutions out there. But, if you buy into Bet Am Shalom, I mean really buy in, you buy in for life, or at least a good chunk of it.

You *get* that it’s worth it to belong to a community that rests on the unrelenting participation of its membership. You *get* that problems and differences are chances to grow and tighten our bonds. You *get* that evolving our Jewish lives, communally, takes continuous, often maddingly frustrating, struggle. You *get* that our community fills a place in your and your family’s life that’s just not available elsewhere, no matter how wonderful those “elsewheres” may be. You *get* that concern about Bet Am Shalom’s future is part of who you are.

For some of us, it’s what keeps us up at night. But it’s also what causes us to act, continually (if only to sleep a little better). That’s what our ongoing initiatives to “attract and engage young families” and to “put us on stronger financial footing” are all about.

For those of you in the older cohorts who have not had the opportunity to experience the fruits of our labors, please *participate* in a *Family Programming* meeting, *participate* in the enlivened *Shorashim*, *ask* Abby Reiken about how the *Torah La'am* parents are sharing and exploring spiritual concerns, *participate* in a Friday evening “*Shabbat Kulanu*,” with a multitude of children experiencing the service in their own fashions, as well as playing in the hallways. *Participate* in “*See You at Synagogue*,” when young families gather in our sanctuary and, again, in the hallways, on a *Shabbos* morning; and talk with our *Rabbinic Intern*, Lily, about her engagement and education of them.

There is so much to do to maintain the vibrancy of Bet Am Shalom. But, there has *a/ways* been. And, each cohort, in its own way, has come to the fore to take on that work, together with all the others.