

Building Bridges

From the time that I joined this community, two and half years ago, I have heard all sorts of people discuss how they wish they knew or interacted with people in different “silos” within the community. Older adults have expressed that they would like to know more young families with children, just as parents of small children wish they had more interaction with older adults. People who regularly attend services would like to engage more with people who attend cultural programming, and vice versa.

Especially during times of increasing polarization in public discourse, this instinct is commendable, and I want to encourage it. Our theme for the year is Hachnasat Hager, welcoming the stranger, and we would do well to remember that the stranger is not just someone who is foreign, but can also be anyone within the community who is a stranger to us.

Yet, as well meaning as our intentions are to break out of our silos, it can be challenging. It can be intimidating to attend a service or an event that seems clearly geared toward people of a different demographic, and so we often don’t, and the silos remain intact. I noticed, for example, at the Friends and Family Shabbat service and dinner in December, designed with the hopes of “mixing silos,” only a few households who were not Talmud Torah families attended.

So, I want to encourage two things in the new year: if you would like to get to know people in different demographics here at TBI, please consider stepping out of your comfort zone to attend a service or event that you might otherwise have skipped. Even more important, if you have an idea for the kind of event that would accomplish cross-demographic interaction, please be in touch and let me know your idea. As the prophet Malachi writes, let us “turn the hearts of the parents to the hearts of the children, and the hearts of the children to the hearts of the parents,” in this new year.

– RABBI RUHI SOPHIA MOTZKIN RUBENSTEIN