

Rabbi Joshua Samuels
Congregation Beth Israel
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Teacher Appreciation

A young man once came to visit a famous rabbi. He said, "I read almost all of the books of the great rabbis, follow their advice, and try to incorporate into my life-style all of the good practices they speak of. I see no need to have a teacher or to go to religious school."

The rabbi said to him, "Let me explain your situation with a story. A man once fell ill. Rather than visiting a doctor, he decided to go to a pharmacy on his own. 'I'll buy all the medicines and take them, and that way I'll be cured of all diseases. There is no need for a doctor.'

"Of course, this is utter foolishness. One who uses medicine without proper supervision places himself in serious danger. Medicine that is helpful in treating one sickness may be harmful in treating others. Only a doctor, with his/her medical expertise and knowledge of the patient's history, can properly diagnose the sickness and prescribe the appropriate medicine.

"Similarly, all that you learn in the books of the great rabbis is like medicine. If the wrong doses are incorrectly prescribed, such medicines can be harmful to your spiritual welfare. You should follow the wisdom of the sages that one should select a teacher for himself, who can serve as the doctor for your soul, diagnose your needs and prescribe the proper spiritual medicine."

This story is clear. Judaism values teachers immensely. A teacher is invaluable to the growth of an individual and to the growth of a community.

Congregation Beth Israel serves many functions, but more than anything, it is a place of learning. It is a place where people of all ages discover and re-discover what is so special and unique about their/our Jewish heritage. And so we want to ensure that we have qualified, competent, passionate and excited teachers. And we do. Each one of them has imparted Jewish wisdom and values into the minds and hearts of their students. We should certainly thank Sagit Hall, our Religious and Hebrew school Director, for assembling such a fantastic group of teachers. Our children are in wonderful hands. Thank you Sagit.

But as we all know, learning about Judaism: our history, background, faith, and culture is not supposed to be relegated to a mere 2 hours each week. Like studying languages or an instrument, we need constant reinforcement. Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Kotzk, wrote, "If you truly wish your children to study Torah, study it yourself in their presence. They will follow your example. Otherwise, they will not themselves study Torah but will simply instruct their children to do so." Torah here can be synonymous with all Jewish learning.

So, as we gather this evening in support and in honor of our teachers, let this Shabbat also serve as a charge to each of us that it is also our duty to be transmitters of Torah as well. We

need not be certified teachers or ordained rabbis, but people committed to passing on traditions that hearken back thousands of years. It is a sacred duty and obligation.

From the bottom of my heart, thank you all for keeping Judaism alive and thriving in our community.