

Challenging “Unbelonging”

I hear it all the time; from households that have two Jewish grown-ups, from inter-married households, from single-parent households, and from childless folks; from people who show-up multiple times a week, and from those who show up a few times a year: “We don’t fully fit in with this community.” “Our family doesn’t quite belong.”

It seems that one thing that transcends differences across this community is this almost universal insecurity about belonging, this question, “Is this space really for me?”

When Rabbi Hillel taught back in the first century, “Do not separate yourself from the community,” he wasn’t saying this because it was easy to belong. He was acknowledging the universal tendency of each individual to feel separate and out of the loop. Who hasn’t wondered whether we ourselves fully belong as part of the Jewish collective?

But then, when swastikas appear downtown, there is no doubt about who we are and how we are identified. In the face of an external threat, we know where we stand, and our internal differences seem less significant, as we reach out to each other to stand together.

Of course, it does sometimes take an external threat to help us feel united. But my hope for us is that we can work to transcend our differences proactively rather than as a reaction to a threat. When fear is the only motivating factor for community, it wears a little thin.

So, I invite you to challenge whatever narrative you might be holding of “unbelonging.” You do not have to be a certain kind of Jew or household to sign up to host or be a guest at a “Shabbat@Home,” to welcome new members as a WelcoMensch, or to attend one of the many programs and events happening at TBI.