

“Shver tsu zayn a Yid,” meaning, “It’s hard to be a Jew,” was such a common Yiddish expression that Sholem Aleichem (Solomon Rabinovich) used it as the title for one of his plays in 1914. Sholem Aleichem wrote widely about the struggles of Jewish life in many of his works, including the more well known *Tevye the Dairyman*, which was later adapted to *Fiddler on the Roof*, which many of us saw at the Shedd in December.

Sholem Aleichem was also deeply grounded in the joys of being Jewish: his love of the Yiddish language, his circle of Jewish literary friends that supported him in times of illness and poverty, his appreciation and understanding of even the Jewish traditions that he chose not to maintain.

I’ve been thinking about Sholem Aleichem, not only because of seeing *Fiddler* with TBI members, and the subsequent singalong at TBI. It’s still hard to be a Jew. In the past few months, I’ve had so many conversations about rising antisemitism and about the situation in Israel that it sometimes has felt that those issues have eclipsed the day-to-day work of serving this community. I have no doubt that for many of you, fears of antisemitism and anguish about what is happening in Israel and Gaza are also overshadowing other aspects of your Jewish life.

1Like Sholem Aleichem modeled, the joys of being Jewish can help us face difficult times. What Israel means to us, which forms of antisemitism are most threatening and how to respond to them are necessary topics worthy of passionate argument and activism. If we primarily focus on them, however, we risk living a Judaism that is reactive rather than proactive. And we risk neglecting the common threads that bind us into one Jewish community: showing up for each other, the commitment to taking care of others, the spiritual practice of learning, gathering to create sacred space. If we can remember communal commitments that unite us, we will ultimately find it easier to navigate our disagreements without rejecting each other.

So as the year turns towards springtime, I want to offer a provocation: What would your Judaism be if you weren’t worrying about antisemitism? If you didn’t feel like you needed to defend – or reject – the state of Israel? What are your regular sources of proactive Jewish connection? What is your Jewish joy?