



Pirke Avot (2:5) says, “Do not separate yourself from the community.” Accordingly, we must prevent anyone from being separated or cut off involuntarily. At Temple, we pride ourselves on being warm and welcoming to everyone. But we need to do more than just have open arms. It is our obligation to ensure equal access for all who want to participate in our community.

Inclusion means recognizing that we are all created in the image of God. Every person has something to share, even when it may not be obvious.

Inclusion means trying to get along while recognizing our differences, our faults, our quirks and our gifts.

Inclusion means a commitment to common decency, a recognition of the rich diversity of our community, and a promise to continue to work at removing barriers.

Removing barriers is not something that happens overnight. As an institution, we are committed to doing what we can to permit every person’s full participation. Some of the work we have done this year includes simply raising the consciousness of our Temple Board, many congregants and the professional staff about what “inclusion” means. We hosted a successful Lunch and Learn on a Saturday in February that introduced our All Abilities Inclusion Project to the congregation. Rachel Desjourdy, our Inclusion Specialist, has worked with me to ensure that our special needs students can participate in every Torah School activity. Rachel has also helped us consider Universal Design and Inclusion when we are planning Temple events, especially ones geared for families.

Much work remains to be done, and we need your assistance. Sometimes, we don’t even know that a barrier exists. We need your help to identify the barriers to involvement and participation. Reach out to Rabbi Grushcow, to one of the members of the Special Needs Committee or to me.

Let me conclude with a few words about this week’s Torah portion. The portion is called Korach. Korach is a member of the tribe of Levi who challenges the leadership of Moses. Korach asks “How come you are in charge? What makes you better than the rest of us?” He successfully gathers a band of 250 people to oppose the leadership of Moses and Aaron. Some see Korach as a symbol of *chutzpah*; he has some nerve questioning the roles of Moses and Aaron. But others argue that Korach is a symbol of a democratic society. Jews don’t believe in dictatorships; we believe in shared responsibility, in acting together for the benefit of the community. Korach’s rebellion is not successful; with the support of God, Moses and Aaron successfully defend their positions as leaders of the Israelite community. But, nonetheless, you might say that Korach was the first to argue for Inclusion. He argues that Moses and Aaron



place themselves on a pedestal above the rest of the people. In fact, there are many examples in the Torah of Moses enlisting the help of others.

Just like Moses, as we work towards creating a more inclusive environment at Temple, we will inevitably face obstacles, real and perceived – obstacles that include unmet expectations, former slights, individual needs, inflexible attitudes. Last week, Rabbi Latz said it perfectly: Let us face these obstacles with humor, trust, affection and forgiveness. We already have the reputation of being a warm and welcoming community. Let us join hands and together do the holy work of making Temple Emanu-El-Beth Sholom the most inclusive synagogue in town.

Temple Emanu-El-Beth Sholom
Montreal, QC