

## Monthly Musings From Rabbi Rene

### The Ties That Connect Us

Hebrew gives us a beautiful vocabulary for community, each word revealing something different about how we connect. Kehillah, our most familiar term, comes from a root meaning "to gather with purpose". Chavurah speaks to the friendships we choose. Edah suggests testimony – a community that bears shared witness to life's sacred moments and eternal truths. And finally, Klal Yisrael reminds us we're part of something vast and eternal, connected to all Jews across time and space.

These aren't just ancient words. They point to something profound: community has always been central to Jewish life, but its meaning has evolved dramatically. We no longer have to belong to a Jewish community. We do so by choice.

We live now at the intersection

of countless identities. We are Jews, but also citizens of Britain and other countries, professionals, parents, members of online communities, supporters of causes. Our loyalties are plural, our belonging fluid. So, what holds a progressive Jewish community together when we could easily choose to belong elsewhere?

The Hebrew concept of brit (covenant) captures what we're really doing here. A covenant isn't just a contract; it's a relationship that transforms both parties. We agree to show up for one another through joy and sorrow. We commit to challenge each other to grow. We take responsibility for preserving and transmitting what we've received while adapting it for our time.

The invisible threads connecting us are woven from multiple strands. We share the same

rhythms of life as marked by the Jewish calendar and lifecycle events. We share and carry forward both the trauma and triumphs of Jewish history, and we inscribe ourselves in narratives thousands of years old. We share and live by the same set of values, repairing the world, contributing to a better society, the dignity of all life. And we try to explore universal, ageless questions through the particular lens of Jewish tradition.

We remain beautifully, necessarily tribal. But our tribe is chosen, rather than imposed, voluntary rather than coercive, open and inclusive rather than closed. This is both the challenge and the gift of a progressive Jewish community such as ours in 2025.

The cement holding us together isn't visible, because it's not made of rules or requirements. It's made of relationships, stories, songs, sorrows shared and joys multiplied. It's the recognition that while we could live meaningful lives in isolation, we live more

meaningful lives in connection.

We need each other. Not just for comfort, but for the sacred work of becoming our best selves and helping heal our broken world.

As we approach the High Holy Days, consider your own invisible threads. What brought you to this community? What keeps you coming back? How has belonging here changed and transformed you? Whether you are a regular or an occasional, your presence with the community is essential. Each of you contribute to the presence and nurturing of a Jewish presence in the Thames Valley, and God knows how Jews need a place like Maidenhead these days.

In a world where community is chosen rather than given, every member's story matters. May we give thanks for the invisible threads that bind us, and may we strengthen them through our continued commitment to one another and to the sacred work we share.

*Rabbi Rene*