

A Typical Day at Chaverim

So what happens at Chaverim, anyway?

Students are called and texted on Sunday, to make sure they are not going to miss a great session of Chaverim. As the class begins, a “not-too-busy-to-help-out” parent drops off a dinner to serve a class of tired, hungry, often stressed out teens.

One by one, the “not-to-busy-to-come” teens begin to arrive at the synagogue. Some, carrying school backpacks, some in soccer uniforms, and others in jams, T-shirts and slippers, greet each other as if they are at a summer camp reunion. Smart phone screens are flashing away, set aside for a moment to make way for a hello, a shout or a hug. Dinner follows a *Motzie* and a pleasant tapestry of conversation ensues. As the appetites wane and the plates empty, Rick’s familiar chant of “Okay, let’s make a circle, time to meet” rings out. Students crowd into a circle of chairs ceremoniously tossing phones in the middle of the circle, sometimes arranged into a fantastic “sculpture” by an energetic student. The chatter slowly dies down, followed by yet another traditional act, the passing around of a bag of tangerines, or cookies.

Then, the moment arrives, “The Topic”. The topic could arise from a riveting current event, the approach of yet another Jewish holiday or just a compelling question. The discussion, most often coming through what we call a “*Jewish lens*” manifests in a collage of agreements, disagreements, interruptions understandings, and always the usual cacophony of infinite Jewish opinions. We weave our way through values, ethics, “what-if’s” and “why’s” in an arena of 15-25 Jewish students. We tackle topics as lofty as *gratitude, integrity, faith, belief, the purpose of life and even death*. For example, “how did the world come to be?” and “what is the purpose of life?” There is the rare but occasional time when we find ourselves being sad together, or even mourning together.

Whether our roots are Orthodox, Conservative, Reform or Secular we hold a space that is “Jewish” or “Jew-ish” as the kids say and essentially “*Hamish*”. We investigate so many of the decisions we have made, are making, and will make. We talk about what our Jewish future may look like, how we as Jews can build a better, safer and happier world, and how we can all find a way to get along, share and coexist.

There is the sense of humor that permeates the class, something to conveniently fall back on during an awkward moment or extended quiet. A commonality and tribal sense between the kids is celebrated and enjoyed. Then the last comments are made; we dive for our phones, check for messages, visit in the courtyard and parking lot, head home, and some of us are driving ourselves. Sometimes we have a word or two with our parents about “what was discussed” and much of the time it is just too hard to explain, albeit a lot to ponder.

A program of the **Jewish Community Center**, and supported by our synagogues, our Rabbis and of course our parents, the students of *Chaverim* have stayed connected to the continuum of Jewish life and time, making a permanent place for it in their busy lives. We thank you for your participation.

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