

Each one of us has a name

This week, at our Jewish Federation Women's Philanthropy Annual Meeting, we celebrated the achievements of our Women's Philanthropy in creating leadership, community, and caring here in Greater MetroWest, in Israel, and around the world.

It was a time to celebrate and a time to recognize the awe-inspiring work that our Women's leadership takes on, under the presidency of Rebecca Gold. In a terrific event chaired by Becca Fisher and Robin Plattman, we heard the wisdom of Rabbi Shira Stutman, and saw the power of what these amazing women have achieved.

In honor of my colleague, Sarabeth Wizen, who is ending her role as Women's Philanthropy Director, I was grateful to say the following...

My dear friends,

This Shabbat we read the portion of *Bamidbar*, in the desert. In English we call this part of the Torah reading "Numbers." It refers to the census that takes place this week. Count the people – "take the sum of all the congregation of the children of Israel, by families."

You may think, sure, numbers are important, but they're not the essence of who we are.

But this census, this way of counting the People, is critically important. It's about the transition of the Children of Israel from a band of nomadic slaves into a military nation.

But at the same time, there's a new emphasis on names.

God doesn't ask to count the number of people. He asks for מְסַפֵּר (the number of names).

And what you have here, in many respects, is the beginning of Jewish Peoplehood.

The first time we start to think of ourselves as a collective Jewish People, and at the same time as unique individuals.

The Israeli poet Zelda Mishkovsky wrote a beautiful poem לכל איש יש שם, which opened with “each of us has a name given by God and given by our parents.”

First by God – we belong to something bigger than ourselves, and then from our parents – we’re unique, we deserve recognition as individuals for what we do and who we are. Our names define us as rare, irreplaceable, and distinctive, and – at the same time – we’re part of something bigger, more meaningful, greater.

There is a counter-cultural element to this grappling with individual and collective identity.

We see it every day in our work in the Jewish community.

We see it in Federation.

We see it in Women’s Philanthropy.

In the face of greed, selfishness, atomization and alienation, there are people – you, here today – who stand up for something else. Something better.

Community, caring, reaching out.

Just recently, Sarabeth Wizen, our fearless, dedicated director of Women’s Philanthropy, came into my office and told me that it was time for her to move on and resign.

Picking myself up off the floor, I immediately rejected her resignation, and I'm pleased to tell you that she is staying at Federation with a Campaign portfolio.

But she is moving on, and this summer we will begin a transition to a new Women's Philanthropy professional leadership.

I have schlepped across the world with Sarabeth. Israel, Florida, Belarus, New Jersey.

Like many of you here, I have seen her perseverance and her nurturing spirit. I have seen her generosity and her thoughtfulness.

I have seen her unique ability to connect, to make others feel welcomed and respected, to build community.

Just the other day, she and I sat, as we have done on many occasions these past few years, with a leader of our community and I saw,

once again, what so many of you here this morning know: Sarabeth radiates a love for the Jewish People.

She deeply cares.



For some, the work we do is an abstraction.
It is, essentially, a ‘nice thing.’
It’s *tzedekah*, in a benign, charitable sense of the word.

But for others – for many of you here in this room, women who inspire, women who build, women who create lasting structures to change the world – what we do is not *tzedekah*.
It is *tzedek*. Justice.

My colleague, Bob Lichtman, our Federation’s Chief Jewish Learning Officer, shared with me an insight that I want to share with you.
We all hear about celebrities “giving back,” and we all want to “give back,” and that is very nice.

But I have news for you. Jews don’t give back.

Jews Give. Period.

Jewish law tells us that even the poorest of the poor, the one who ostensibly has nothing to give back, even that person must give.

Giving isn’t an option; it is an unconditional requirement, a prerequisite to entry into the community of humankind.

It’s also a “value” that is uniquely Jewish, and one to which we continually aspire.

Sarabeth embodies these values.

So I am proud, privileged, and grateful to tell you that the senior management team at Federation, meeting last week, decided unanimously to create the **Sarabeth Margolis Wizen Women’s Professional Development Fund** – a fund that will exist in perpetuity at Federation to create and fund development opportunities for professional women at Federation.

And I invite you to join me, right now, in two important actions: first, to consider [clicking here to make a separate pledge](#) to the Sarabeth Margolis Wizen Women's Professional Development Fund, to honor her legacy and her commitment to Jewish communal service; and second, to join with me in giving her the standing ovation that she deserves so much.

Thank you.

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