There is often a discussion as to whether the Jewish People really had a choice in choosing the Torah and becoming the People of the Book. That is, were the Jews coerced into assuming all of the commandments and obligations, risking death with a declaration, or did the Jews accept our beautiful heritage from G-d with open arms and enlightened minds? What are the implications and lessons learned by grappling with this question?

At this time of the year, right around Shavuot, I often wonder about choices. The choices we make and the choices we avoid making. I also wonder about responsibilities and about obligations which, in my mind, are not the same. Perhaps it’s semantics, but feeling obligated to do something versus owning a responsibility to do something are two different things. In the first case, we might feel as though something has been foisted upon us, where in the second case we might make a conscious decision to care for or protect something because we feel it is important to do so.

Our amazing Jewish Calgary was built for us by previous generations and involved many choices along the way. Leadership choices, funding choices, timing choices, and choices of priorities. Many of those choices were driven by feelings of obligation – the feeling that Jewish Calgary must have its own educational facilities, must have a mikveh, must have its own central gathering place like the JCC, must have diverse synagogue offerings, and so on. As choices were made and plans were executed, the obligations turned to responsibilities.

Many of us now feel compelled to maintain and enhance the level of programs and services provided in our community. We feel responsible for stewarding our community’s rich palate of opportunities while protecting its assets. It is my sense, though, that we do so with a bold future and it would be a shame to let it disappear. Our commitment is more focused and more inspirational than that.

To link our assumption of collective responsibility with the concept of choice as it relates to Shavuot: We should not only live our Jewish lives and maintain the agencies, services, and programs that are personally important to us out of a sense of obligation, but rather, we should actively embrace the opportunities ahead of us in the years to come, through a sense of responsibility and commitment to what might be – to a dream we might form. If we are aspirational and intentional in our efforts, we will not only be ensuring our Jewish future, but doing so by honouring our past.

Choices are everywhere, even if it seems as though a choice is not really a choice. Much like our ancestors, sometimes making what seems like a forced choice is actually the beginning of a transformational journey. Pirkei Avot, Ethics of our Fathers, notes: “We are not obligated to complete the work, nor are we free to desist from it.” I am hopeful that many in our community will work together in choosing to embrace the collective responsibility required to ensure future generations can live rich, meaningful, Jewish lives. Our past is a solid foundation and our future can be even better. Wishing each and all of you a safe and enjoyable summer!

Adam Silver, CEO, Calgary Jewish Federation
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Judy & Ron Bing
Rachel & Jerrad Blanchard
Amy Bondar
Charboneau Family
Gertrude Cohos
Kim & Peter Cohos
Steve Eichler & Tracey Rumig
Joy Feldman
Max Feldman
Milt & Maxine Fischbein
Peta Glezerson
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Tamar Zenith & Blair Laven

LOI received
Anonymous (5) 3
Ben Zion Be’eri 11
Marnie Besser 11
Judy & Ron Bing 14
Rachel & Jerrad Blanchard 10
Amy Bondar 4
Charboneau Family 11
Gertrude Cohos 10
Kim & Peter Cohos 6
Steve Eichler & Tracey Rumig 12
Joy Feldman 5
Max Feldman
Milt & Maxine Fischbein
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*Legacy gifts can be left to any community organization even if they are not listed above.