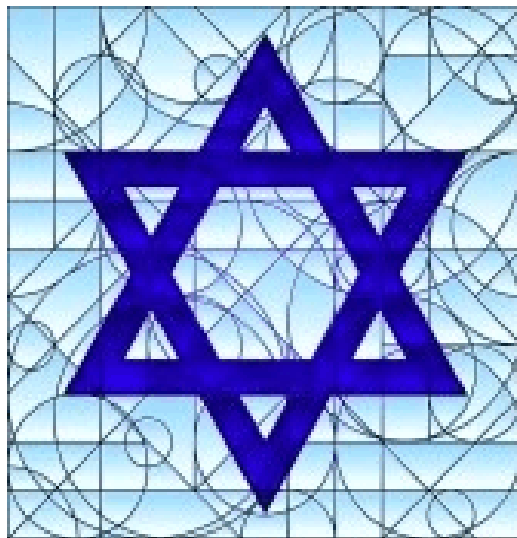


Confirmation Reflections

May 26, 2012 5 Sivan 5772



Embrace The Possibilities

Temple Ahavat Shalom

Rabbi Barry M. Lutz

Rabbi Shawna Brynjegard-Bialik

Rabbi Dalia Samansky

Cantor Jen Roher

Eliana Miriam Alban ☆

“If I didn't have my camera to remind me constantly, I am here to do this, I would eventually have slipped away. I think I would have forgotten my reason to exist.” This was said by the famous photographer, Annie Leibovitz.

I remember the exact moment that I discovered my joy for taking pictures. My eyes were enlightened the summer before 9th grade when my family took a trip to Massachusetts. I remember, one night in Gloucester so distinctively. My family had just had dinner and walked out to the wooden wharf overlooking the Atlantic. It had just rained, the cobble stone was sparkling, and there was fog in the air with a shade of navy blue. The moon was just starting to come up through the clouds and the boats wobbled with every breeze. We lingered there for a while, not wanting to leave. The beauty around me became apparent and all I wanted to do was cherish it. I had my tiny silver point and shoot and the rest was history.

Within the last couple years, my Judaism has given me a place to set my photography free. Whether at a NFTY or TASTY event, or a casual get together with some of my Jewish friends, I almost always have my beautiful camera and companion, around my neck, lens wide open, embracing all that is around.

There are so many parts to a camera, each of which serves an important aspect of my life. The body, in all its glory holds the parts together and protects the delicate internal parts of the camera. I would argue and say that it is the most important aspect of a camera, just like the Torah is the body of Judaism. The Torah holds the prayers, lessons, and stories of Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, and Leah, the strong women who have instilled within me my morals and ideas, and especially the “Golden Rule”; “Do onto others as you would want them to do onto you.” This is the way I have tried to live my life and I hope it makes a positive difference in the lives of others.

The lens is the eye of a camera, observing and watching as the world goes by. I think of myself as the lens of a camera. I am the eyes, and Temple, and NFTY, is what I take in and experience.

The viewfinder is the window through which you look to frame your picture. It brings clarity to the pictures just like my Judaism helps bring clarity to my life. There are so many times when I have been worried, depressed, or stressed, and all I can think about is my next NFTY event, where I reconnect with friends, and celebrate Shabbat, draped in a whisper of the Shema Yisrael and the warmth of the Havdallah candle after sunset on Saturday night. It's a feeling I cannot explain, which I know many of you understand. Like a viewfinder, weekends like this give me a

good look at what's important, and what I can cut out of my life. They help me understand myself and what I am doing. It's my filter for everything I see and experience.

The flash gives light to all around and illuminates the beautiful. This is the warmth of the flame that envelopes so many parts of Judaism. Whether at home celebrating Shabbat as a family, surrounded by my community at Temple, or camp, cradled by the smiles of close friends there is a light that never goes away, even after it has burned out. On Havdallah, I curl my fingers around the light of the braided candle and quickly stick it in my pocket hoping to keep the feeling of true euphoria for just a little while longer.

Finally my picture came to life this past summer when I traveled to Eastern Europe and Israel through NFTY with other Jewish teens from around the country. We were strangers but connected while further exploring our Jewish identities. We traveled to the Czech Republic, Poland, and finally Israel where we learned about the Jewish people before, during, and after the Holocaust. We visited the old Jewish quarters and saw the concentration camps in the pouring rain. In Israel, we explored everything from the Negev to the Golan. Past. Present. Future. My personal Jewish frame was starting to come together.

Thank you, mom, dad, and Liora for giving me the tools to create the pictures that encompass my Judaism. Throughout the years I have put together both a tangible album of all my photos, but also a vivid mental album of it all. I'll cherish it forever and allow it to grow.

Samuel Aronson ☆

This day may mark the end of my formal Jewish education, but in no way does it signal the end of my religious or cultural experiences. I have a Jewish life to look forward to, a life that will be made richer by the knowledge I have gleaned from my studies. As I use what I have learned to enrich my future, I will constantly recall lessons learned from my education. My time spent in religious school has allowed me to understand my faith and culture with increased clarity. It has enabled me to make beneficial decisions rooted in my beliefs, understand the meanings behind many Jewish customs, and compare the challenges of my ancestors to those I face today. My Jewish education has influenced and supported my evolution as a Jew. Without this education, my faith and pride would not have grown to where they are today.

I haven't always believed in God. There have been times in my life when I have felt unable to accept God's existence logically, unable to connect with God on an emotional level, unable to comprehend why God seemed so distant from me. My relationship with God has been a constant

struggle. God is one of the main reasons I decided to continue my Jewish education after my Bar Mitzvah. I was still sorting out my complex relationship with God. And to a certain extent, I still am. My years of religious school have guided me on this journey, exposing me to different theologies while giving me the knowledge to shape my own. Without this guidance, I would be lost, still searching for a clear understanding of my personal relationship with God.

There was a time a few years ago when I wasn't interested in Judaism. I saw the religion as irrelevant to my daily life, something that I had been raised on that simply had no significance or benefit to me anymore. I wanted to turn away from religion and lead a life without any faith. Of course, I returned to Judaism, and my connection now is stronger than it has ever been. I do not know what made me return. I think I realized that I had lost something, some basic part of me that was not supposed to be missing. I felt a connection to Judaism deeper than any religious philosophy or cultural pride. Judaism was, and still is, my identity. When someone asks me to identify myself as a person, the first thing I think of is my religion. It's who I have been not since I was born, but since I chose to accept Judaism as the guiding moral and cultural force in my life. I have made myself who I am today, and beyond any external pressures, turn time and time again to my religion and heritage to shape the major and minor decisions I make each day. I could not imagine how different my life would be today without the guidance of Judaism.

Elliott Blatt ☆

When I started Hebrew school in 4th grade, I was worried that I wouldn't be able to make any friends, seeing that many of the kids were already there since pre-school. But I soon realized I was completely incorrect because the second I stepped foot into the classroom on my first day I was welcomed with opened arms. That's when I met the world's sweetest and kind hearted teacher, Mrs. Liberman. Not only did I get this warm embracing feeling from my teacher but also from all the kids who I never met before.

As the years progressed so did the relationship between my fellow students and I, eventually forming a bond which I can say today to be unbreakable. I am fortunate to have this rare relationship with these people because I couldn't have asked for better friends. Each person I have met here is unique, exciting and extremely enjoyable to be around. That's why I made the decision to go through Confirmation, with no uncertainty, and that's what makes my Tuesdays one of the better days in the week.

My life is forever changed because of the guidance from some of my mentors. Cantor Linsky and Rabbi Lutz both made my Bar Mitzvah so special and unforgettable. Rabbi Lutz and Debbie Lutz gave me the experience of my life by taking our class to Washington D.C. and showing us that our voices do matter and are heard. Mrs. Liberman was and forever will be my favorite teacher because she inspired me to be a sensitive and kind man. And of course the infamous Ilyssa, I have known her my whole life who is by far the coolest TASTY advisor in the Temple. She has been there, making sure I had my after school snack to making sure I attend all the TASTY events and she definitely has a permanent place in my heart.

These years at Temple Ahavat Shalom have prepared me to be a better man who is proud of his heritage and on the way has gifted me with friends for life.

Katherine Dallis Bucher ☆

My family raised me in a perfect household where I am free to express my opinions openly and receive complete acceptance. My mom and dad give me all the love they have to give and even my brother, who has trouble expressing his feelings towards me sometimes, is always there for me in his own way. It is hard to explain the love that is shared between my family and me because there is such a strong bond, we help each other grow and have so many good memories to look back on. My mom and dad's support helped me to become the person I am today and taught me that I can achieve anything if I only try. I have brought their life teachings with me everywhere I have gone. Their love has shaped me to be the person I am today and I am eternally grateful.

Along with my family, my friends have also been a huge part of my life. My amazing friends have taught me to be a better person and have showed me that no matter what happens in life there are people you can depend on for anything. When I started TAS in pre-school I did not know what to expect, but I definitely did not expect to make such great friends. I made lifelong friends and have kept them till this day. I met three of my best friends here; we have transformed from little kids to young adults together and have made such strong bonds that nothing could destroy them. We have been through so much, and no matter what has happened in my life I know I can count on them for anything. They taught me that life has so much to offer, and taught me to be a better person. We have made memories that can never be forgotten. Even after Aleph and Bet classes we would go out and eat lunch because two hours was not long enough for us to

hang out. Being confirmed today with all of my friends means so much to me because they have been with me my entire life and once a week for as long as I can remember we have sat together and became not only friends, but also family. This speech may be cliché but every word is true. I am so blessed to have the family I do and friends who show me the love and compassion that I needed to become the person that I am today. Being confirmed means an end to the Tuesday night classes and probably the last time some of us will hang out all together in one group. We have grown so much since we all met and I cannot believe it is all coming to an end. The memories we made can never be forgotten, and the good times will be missed, but each of us has matured thanks to our TAS family. Temple has been a place for all of us to come and leave the stresses of school and focus on our friends and the sharing in our Jewish beliefs. I am sad to see it go, but I had the best time with all of you and I am so thankful to each of you for making my life amazing and making this a wonderful place to come, have fun, and be myself.

Kevin R. Card ☆

My mother, Mindy, is the single most important thing in my universe. She is the center of my world and is unlike anybody on the Earth. I love her more than I could ever love anybody or anything. The love and compassion and respect and pride and appreciation I have for my mother cannot be bound by life or death and cannot be described by a concept as small as infinity. My emotions towards my mother prove to me that there is an otherworldly connection throughout the universe, a soul or G-d or something big and cool. The comfort I feel when I rest in her arms or the courage I gain in her presence have shaped me into the man I am today.

Mom has always supported me with anything I do and I have supported her. She has been my teacher, my advisor and my inspiration since the day I was born. I have narrowed my college choices based on distance from home, because I would not be able to bear living too far from her. She is my best friend and I can talk to her about anything without an ounce of judgment. She and I exchange laughs as well as proverbs and we have changed each other into who we are and we will continue to change each other for as long as we have our divine connection.

I strive to become a trauma surgeon. My purpose in life is to save people. I want to save people because saving a person means I have saved a connection such as the one between my mother and me. If the life saved could continue a relationship or friendship with a similar magnitude to the relationship between my mother and me, then it is as if an entire universe has

been saved. I want to protect the heavenly bonds between people and their loved ones, and I can do this by aiding those in need of my help. My mom is the sole reason that I want to spend my life doing this. She is my meaning of life. She makes my seconds and my years enjoyable.

I owe to her everything I own and all of my experiences. She has been there for me in times of need and in times of sorrow, but we have also danced in the light and laughed with joy. She is smart and beautiful and she is the most dynamic person I know. I want her to be a part of my life for the rest of my life and I want most of all for her to be completely involved with my children. I want her to do to them what she has done to me, to teach them how to live and love limitlessly. I want her to be with me when we cook them meals and plan their birthday parties and take them to the beach. I love my mother more than actions or words or thoughts could describe, but I tried. Thank you for this life that I adore and explore, and this love that expands past the known and unknown. Thank you for taking me and shaping me into who I am with all the effort you had. Thank you for being my mother unconditionally and loving me every step of the way. I love you, mom.

Elijah Harrison Chesler ☆

Hello, my name is Elijah Chesler. My family and I moved to this Temple eight years ago after my mother, Debi Chesler, took the job as the Temple Preschool Director in 2000. When I finally made the move to the TAS Religious School I was in 3rd grade. My first teacher was Mr. Udelf. Coming from a Temple where I felt mistreated and overall disconnected from Judaism, Mr. Udelf's class was like a weekly trip to Disneyland. I looked forward to my Sunday mornings and Wednesday afternoons at TAS. Temple Ahavat Shalom changed the way I looked at myself and my religion. No longer was Judaism something I despised and dreaded, even when High Holidays came around I didn't mind the services; I would even dare to say I enjoyed them. The following year I had Mrs. Liberman and this year was no different. I can remember the first day I walked into Mrs. Liberman's class. Anyone who has ever met Mrs. Liberman or has been in her class (which is safe to say almost everyone in this Synagogue has) probably has had a similar experience to mine. Walking into her classroom embellished with Hebrew letters and posters and other imagery pertaining to the Jewish experience, and life cycle, and a warm, friendly "hello" that only Mrs. Liberman (who I towered over at age 10) could deliver, in her cute accent.

Since I came to the Temple every day after school I spent the majority of my childhood on the Temple Ahavat Shalom premises, running errands for my mom, and playing in the yard with the other kids. I knew from a very young age that I was very fortunate to have such great and loving

teachers and to have found my own niche, a Jewish home and community for my family, and myself.

For any of you who know my mother or have met her on occasion probably know about her strong enthusiasm for Judaism. Well, I have to live with her. The running joke in the family is that Debi has a superpower, the ability to correlate any scenario, situation, or entity to something Jewish, the Torah, or anything relating to TAS. Through this, my mom always made me think and question my Judaism. Whether it is about a story in the Torah, or a Kosher law, my mom peaked my curiosity about my religion and the world. She made me wonder why, and ask questions. My mother taught me how to think critically and logically and to aspire to become a more knowledgeable person. I will forever respect that quality in my mom and be grateful to have it ingrained in me from such a young age, thank you Mom.

I also would like to thank all the teachers who made my time at TAS enjoyable and educational. Thank you.

Kinsey Anne Cohen ☆

“Never say goodbye because goodbye means going away and going away means forgetting.” For as long as I can remember Peter Pan has always been my favorite story. I love the fact that all the children can fly, go on adventures, and have fun all the time. But the part I like best is that when you go to Neverland, you can never grow up and never worry about grown up things. This is me in a nutshell. I, like Peter, always want to be a child and always want to be able to be myself and have lots of adventurous fun.

I have been a part of this Temple since I was in Preschool, however many years ago. Here I gained some of my closest friends that I know I will have forever. As a kid growing up at TAS I always wanted to play on the playgrounds and pretend to be Disney characters with my friends. I never wanted to sit through services or go to Religious School or Hebrew School, and guess what? I still don't. I would still much rather pretend to be Princess Ariel and have Elias be Prince Eric just like we used to when we were three. I still don't want to grow up and have to deal with things like taxes or insurance or bills or jobs. I want always to be a girl and have fun.

Now here I'm at a point where I'm going to have to say goodbye to part of my childhood and hello to the next chapter in my life, which brings me back to this lovely quote by Sir James Matthew Barrie in his play Peter Pan, “Never say goodbye because goodbye means going away

and going away means forgetting.” I don’t want to have to say goodbye to all these years at TAS and I don’t want to have to go away, and I most certainly don’t want to forget. This is the beauty of being an adult though, because I’m just going to be a slightly more mature child. I won’t really be saying goodbye, which means I won’t be going away, and I will definitely not forget the wonderful times I’ve had here at TAS with my wonderful lifelong friends.

Aaron F. Crasnick ☆

For almost 14 years, I have been attending Sierra Canyon School. From early Kindergarten to, soon to be, Senior year, I will become what is known as a “lifer.” Needless to say, I like my school, and since I have been at Sierra Canyon for so long, I have seen countless changes to the school, including the construction of the new High School, while also encountering many different people who have come to school or left from school. Although, the lack of changing schools has restricted me to one type of learning environment my whole life, one that is highly stressful. For this reason, Temple Ahavat Shalom has played an integral role in my life.

At Sierra Canyon, the majority of the student’s lives are focused around education and the competition of perfection. While I too strive to be the absolute best I can possibly be, one of my true wishes is to be disconnected from the high pressure environment encompassing school (at least for a while, as I am very competitive too). However, the worst trait of Sierra Canyon, I believe, is the constant need for gratification amongst almost all students, including myself. I wish I could be able to not be so anxious over how I perform on something; however, I see that in most students at school too. What I see in everyone is a direct need for being the perfect student, being the perfect athlete, being the perfect leader; and while we all would like to be perfect in something, or all things, the ones who are engulfed by this desire only set themselves up for failure or disappointment. On top of this, the students, by seeking perfection, miss out on the number one rule in life: have fun.

By contrast, my friends at Temple Ahavat Shalom have helped me fill those missing voids that I could not have filled during my time at Sierra Canyon. I have been attending Hebrew School at TAS since third grade which, after five years at Sierra Canyon, became the first educational institution I attended outside of Sierra. I discovered on numerous occasions, such as the Hebrew High retreats, where I had some of my most memorable experiences with my classmates, that their attitudes toward life are much different than my classmates at Sierra Canyon’s outlook on life are. This revelation came to me during L’Taken. There, along with having the best time in

my life, I saw a different side of my friends while lobbying to our congressmen, a very classy and meaningful side to them while they lobbied. After this, I soon realized that they are some of the most important people in my life because around them, I am able to live my life differently than I can at Sierra Canyon. The differences are at TAS, I do not have to discuss school since I do not go to the same school as the majority of my classmates and, generally, life is not taken as seriously at TAS. My friends at TAS have, inadvertently, created a more relaxing environment for me, which explains why most of my best experiences have been shared with them.

While I have attended Hebrew school, I have learned that God created people to be imperfect. I do admire the students at Sierra Canyon for their drive and determination to be perfect, but since no one can be perfect, they cannot fully attain their goal. On the other hand, my friends in this Confirmation class have embraced their imperfect nature, which allows for a greater appreciation and satisfaction of life; maybe someday I can learn from them how to accept that imperfection is perfection. Thank you to all of my friends here for giving me all of the memorable experiences that I will remember and cherish the rest of my life.

Kevin Eells ☆

Good morning! As some of you may know, I have been a member of this congregation for almost all of my life. This Temple is like my second home. My 14 year journey at TAS has taught me not only about Judaism, but about life in general. At this Temple, I have had countless memories, made many friends, and learned traditions that I will continue to carry on throughout my life.

It all started in 1998, when I became a TAS Preschooler. I made many new friends, most who have continued their Jewish education along with me up to this day. It is awesome to think that many of my closest friends when I was three, are still right by my side here as I am being confirmed. The community at Temple Ahavat Shalom has enabled me to become a part of this close knit group of people, and I am forever grateful for that. Unfortunately, not all of my Preschool colleagues continued their education with me up to this day. But like my mother says, when one door closes, another one opens, and thankfully many more have walked through that door and into my life. Through my Hebrew School years we made tons of memories. A lot of these memories are thanks to Club 45, TASTY, the weekend retreats and two summer trips to Camp Newman. I can go into detail of all of the crazy, fun, and mischievous times that my friends and I have had, but I have a strict 5 minute presentation time limit.

During Confirmation this year, I learned all about social action and social justice, two very important issues in the world today. I had the time of my life joining Rabbi and Debbie Lutz, as well as my 21 classmates, on our trip to D.C. Out of all of the weekend retreats and trips to Camp Newman, L'Taken was my favorite and most memorable. I met so many new people from around the country, toured Washington D.C. including the White House, Capitol Building, National Holocaust Museum, and the Smithsonian. I learned a lot about social problems, and even got to lobby my speech to congress. It was truly the life changing experience people had told me it would be.

As I graduate from this stage of my Jewish education I would like to thank all of my teachers from pre-school to today, Rabbi Lutz and Rabbi Shawna, my mom for taking me to the Temple for 14 years, my grandparents for joining this wonderful congregation over 40 years ago, and all of my classmates who have made this journey so incredible.

Jamie Michelle Field ☆

Imagine yourself in a world without color. There is no weather, no sun or rain or snow. Your parents are matched by charts and graphs based on intelligence and personality. Each family has two children: a boy and a girl. Your job is chosen for you, and there are no options to change. This is the world of Jonas in Lois Lowry's novel The Giver. In the novel, Jonas is one of the few people who has the capacity to see beyond. Unlike others in his world, he can see colors, and his job is chosen as the Receiver of Memory. The giver gives him memories that are passed down from generation to generation. There are good memories, like playing in the snow and music, and there are terrible memories, like those of war. Only Jonas and his mentor, the Giver, have these memories, everyone else in his world is clueless to the existence of these memories. When I read this novel, it really made me think. What would I choose between two opposites, either knowing all the good and the bad in the world and being unable to share with everybody, or being blind to the changes in the world, living a life of "sameness". In life, I know that I've had times when I've looked and wished that there was sameness. That we lived in a world where we wouldn't have to learn about the Holocaust in class, because it never happened. That I lived in a world that when I turned on the news, I didn't hear about teens that have committed suicide because they were bullied. But I've also had times when I was glad that the world was different. When I went to Israel in 10th grade, I spent three months in the most amazing country in the world. I toured all over, lived life as an Israeli, and ate a lot of pita and falafel. Even though there were negatives- there were multiple bombs that hit 15 minutes away from where I was- the positives outweighed the bad points. Another time I felt this way was in March, when 20 of my best friends and I flew to Washington D.C. to lobby for social justice. During this trip,

called L'Taken, we realized how many injustices were in the world. However, we were given the opportunity to fight for what's right when we lobbied. At school, I am president and founder of a club called Stop the Hate, which is dedicated to the awareness of bullying. I love my club and its mission, but as a teen, I often feel like I'm not doing enough. During L'Taken, I lobbied for the rights of LGBT teens, and this trip made me feel like I can actually make a difference in the world.

So, through all of these decisions, I realized something. There is both good and bad in the world, but living with the positives has definitely made the negatives worth living through.

In Kindergarten, I walked into my first day of Sunday School at TAS. I was nervous and scared, I didn't know anybody, but my parents forced me to walk in. That day, I met friends that I know will be there for the rest of my life. That's why I'm so proud to be a part of the Confirmation Class of 2012. Although we've gotten into countless debates and arguments throughout the past year, I can honestly say that I love each and every one of you, and I want to thank all of you, as well as Rabbi Samansky, Rabbi Shawna, and Rabbi Lutz, for making this past year incredible.

David Mark Glicher ☆

Hello Fellow Congregants,

I would just like to take the time to thank everyone who has helped me get through the process of getting confirmed. It has been a great opportunity to learn about my roots and heritage as a Jewish person. I have learned different ideologies of the way people view God and how that affects them. I have also learned the different ways people interpret God. I found this to be extremely interesting because I thought there was only one way to observe God, but man was I wrong. I believe that there is a God out there, but I do not believe he is the direct cause to everything positive in life. Some things just happen for a reason and there isn't any way to explain it. Many scientists have tried to prove certain ideology and methodology but haven't been able to show any precise or accurate information. Another thing that has been rewarding was being able to meet new friends and gain a whole new social life. For many years my family was part of a conservative congregation and I felt that I was a bit lost. Now that I am part of the TAS community, I really feel like I understand more and the services have a lot more meaning to me. It is easier for me to relate to what's going on. At TASTY I have been able to visit the elderly at Brighton Gardens and I would not have thought about doing such a mitzvah on my own. It was satisfying knowing that the elderly appreciated my efforts for them. That would have not come up had it not been for TASTY. There have been a lot of cherishable moments and fond memories

and I hope it will continue. I think TASTY has done a great job of leading me down the right path in life as an individual and as a Jewish member of society.

Jake Harrington ☆

Being here for a few years at this Temple has truly impacted my Jewish experience. Arriving here in 7th grade left me with few people to be with and talk to. However, over the years I have made new friends and met many people. I have gone to various Temple events and had many memorable experiences. I even had my very own Bar Mitzvah on this stage, less than a year after joining. It may have been slow at first, but integrating myself into this close group of friends has eventually happened. Mainly over the events I attended through the years. L'Taken for example, was a true bonding experience. Whether it was joining in prayer or calling out the Jews from Miami at a sports bar, Washington D.C. was a spectacular experience, despite the few hours of sleep I managed to squeeze in. For five days straight I went sight-seeing and toured most of the city. I also managed to write a speech that would be presented to our very own Congressman Brad Sherman. Another big part of my Jewish experience was TASTY. This group has also allowed me to meet new people and have great experiences. Retreats, parties and everything else were truly fun, even if I couldn't go to everything because of the huge load of work I have gotten in my past few years in school. Actually going to Hebrew School is crazy difficult with all the work us students have been getting. However, we all still manage to find a little bit of time to influence our Jewish experiences as teenagers, which, I believe, is the very sign of dedication. And when people are dedicated to something, and have challenges they face together, it brings them closer together. My experiences in Hebrew School and other events have truly impacted my Jewish experience both socially and spiritually: the prayers, lessons, songs, and events all are put together in perfect harmony here, to enhance everyone's experience in Judaism, which makes it easier to both understand and enjoy. Especially mine. Which is why I am thankful to stand here, reading this speech at my very own Confirmation, at the Temple I call my own.

Jahmie Hilecher ☆

Being a Jew can mean many different things to many different people. To some it can mean observing Shabbat or keeping Kosher, to others it can mean dedicating their lives to God and praying three times a day, but to me it means something entirely different. To me, Judaism provides a sense of community. Although coming to Confirmation every week is not my favorite activity, I still come. Mainly because I love candy, and Ilysa and Halli have A LOT, but also because it makes my parents happy. Just like others here, my parents forced me to come. But as

much as it pains me to say, I'm kind of happy they did. It's crazy, I know. But if they didn't force me to come all of these years, I would not have met all of these absolutely amazing people. Family is the most important thing in my life and I would do anything for them.

Not only do I have an amazing family at home, but I also have a great family here at Temple. When I went to L'Taken in Washington D.C., I became close to people I never thought I could be so close with. I snuggled with Nikki every place we went, wrestled with Natalee after an endless night of speech writing, and even referred to our Rabbi as "Lutzyboo." Though we are a great and loving family, we're kind of dysfunctional too. Natalee falls down stairs, I drop mugs, and Kevin's only friend is his puppet, but nonetheless, we're a family. Regardless of whether or not I see these people ever again, I can leave this service today knowing that they have changed my life for the better. Obviously I WANT to see them again, but if I don't, I will be able to look back and remember the incredible impact they have made on my life, and be so grateful for their love and friendship.

Noah Benjamin Hirsch ☆

A new religion has emerged. It takes on many names, but my favorite is technology. Everyone practices technology; that is, unless you live in a cave. We pray through Facebook and Twitter, we read the holy Wikipedia, and we go to Google for all of our answers. You may never think about it, but our whole lives revolve around technology, and traditions are being eliminated because of it. Why would people go to services where they have to drive all the way to Temple and sit for an hour and a half when they could tune to the Jewish channel and switch back and forth between that and the football game? We as a Jewish people need to encourage our community to become active members of a congregation, and to believe in religion again.

My life used to rely on technology, and in many ways, it still does. But unlike many people today, I actively practice Judaism and have been doing so my entire life. I grew up at TAS with many of the people on this stage. I have gone to services every year, passed all of my prayers, and have had tons of fun. This Temple has made me love Judaism and I cannot believe that after today, I will be done with the long process of Hebrew school that started way back in Kindergarten.

Although I love TAS, I believe that my Jewish home is the state of Israel. I have been blessed to have gone to Israel twice and have spent over 6 weeks there over the course of my life. I went

there back in '08 with Rabbi Lutz and my family and had my Bar Mitzvah in the old city. But the best time of my life was when I was there last summer with NFTY. I met kids from all over the US and spent 5 weeks with them, exploring the state of Israel from top to bottom. On this trip, I reestablished my belief in God and fell in love with Judaism all over again. In fact, over the course of five weeks, I probably went on Facebook 4 times and watched less than an hour of television. All I focused on was friends, fun, and religion.

This year, I was unable to attend Confirmation classes all year because I have another commitment to music. I have been involved with music my entire life and I currently play 5 completely different instruments. I have an undying love for music and if you have noticed, I have been up here playing clarinet throughout the service. I love combining awesome things and the fact that I can share my love of music with all of you is pretty great.

Every day I am thankful that I was raised in a Jewish household where we uphold nearly every tradition. My mother's word is law for all things Jewish and non-Jewish and I must say that she has raised me well. My dad is very supportive of my pursuit of Jewishness and sheds some cash every time I need to go to a NFTY event. They both love Judaism and they even taught here back in the day when Rabbi Lutz still had a moustache. I would not be the man I am today without the love and support of my parents.

Marni Kulberg ☆

To me Temple Ahavat Shalom is more than just a Reform Temple, in which many families frequently attend. It is more than just a place to pray. Although Temple Ahavat Shalom is all of those, it has also been an enormous part of my childhood that can never be replaced.

As I stand here about to be confirmed and end my Hebrew School journey that started in pre-school, I've realized all the amazing friendships I have made. Not only has Temple Ahavat Shalom been a place of learning, praying, and studying, but also it has allowed me to make life-long friendships that I would never want to replace as we have watched each other grow from being little kids to young adults.

Until high school I attended public school with some of my closest friends that are here right beside me in this synagogue. But as high school was coming around the corner I parted from all those people whom I was so comfortable with and started a private Jewish school. I wasn't sure

what was going to happen to all the friends I had made because I was not going to be able to see them as often as I'd liked, but Temple Ahavat Shalom gave me the opportunity and time to see them when I thought I wouldn't be able to.

Although most people would argue that there is no reason for me to continue attending Hebrew School while I am attending a Jewish day school, I would strongly disagree. The friends that I have made at Temple Ahavat Shalom are different from any friendships I have ever made from attending my school. I know that these friends are always there for me and I can tell them everything. I have had these friendships for as long as I can remember and they have been there through things with me that no other friends would ever understand. Temple Ahavat Shalom has been a stable place for each one of us to attend, every Tuesday and reconnect with each other. Even though I do not get to see my friend's every day, once we are reunited it's like we were never even separated to begin with.

Having something be so constant and consistent in my life has allowed me to not lose who I am as a Jew and a person. This Temple has had a huge impact on my life and has forever changed it.

Nicholas Alexander Meyers ☆

I remember when my parents asked me if I wanted to attend Hebrew School. I really didn't know what it was or what to think of it. I was only in third grade. They said I get to learn Hebrew and then have a Bar Mitzvah. I had no clue as to what any of this was. But I was still all for it! However, I was a busy little boy. I was a very dedicated baseball player for a while, ya know...in Double A and all. It was a pretty big deal. So I had to go to the make-up days of Hebrew School, which happened to be an all-girl class. My parents didn't tell me this part. Now me just being a little boy, I didn't care about girls yet. I was just living my little third grade life. I liked having guy friends to hang out with. So I wasn't too thrilled about any of this. I still went though.

Now most of these people had gone to Temple a lot longer than I had and were already all friends. So I was just that little outcast kid for a little while. It all changed though because everyone was so friendly here. I made friends quick. Most of them I'm still really good friends with today and still go to this Hebrew School with them. I eventually got to move up to the class

with some guys in it and made more friends. These guys have been my best friends ever since then. This group of guys that became my friends are Kevin Eells, Jay Spiegel, Elliott Blatt, Kevin Card, and the most recently added David Glicher. I have made so many more friends along my Jewish journey and couldn't be any happier with these friends. We became such a great group of friends that we had to give our group a name. This group name is the Jew Crew. We have done so many things together and every moment is fun. It makes my Jewish experience here all the better.

Fast-forward a few years from when I started Hebrew School to my Bar Mitzvah. This was an amazing and interesting experience that I will never forget. I remember receiving my Torah portion and not having a clue as to what to do with it. So I asked my parents what to do. Then of course, we had to sit down for hours and read it. My Bar Mitzvah was still a year away at that time, it wasn't something I wanted to concentrate on! But I'm glad they made me because it made it that much easier as it got closer to the big day. I loved having my Bar Mitzvah. I got to have it in this wonderful Temple that I grew up in, have wonderful Rabbi Lutz stand right there over my shoulder to help me if I needed it, the amazing Cantor Linsky and her beautiful voice singing to the congregation and I, and have all my amazing friends and family there to watch me. It was an experience of a lifetime and I got to share it with the people I love. Not to mention the big and awesome party after with all my friends...thanks to my parents!

I decided to continue onto Confirmation after my Bar Mitzvah because I didn't want to leave this Temple yet, and because all my friends were still going on. I wanted to be with them and I'm glad we all continued together. Confirmation has been amazing with all the retreats we have gone on that have been so much fun and the awesome Washington D.C. trip that was just amazing. It was awesome to see that side of the country and really look at things I don't get to see every day. I got to do things that I never would have done on my own. Like lobby in front of a congressman about Reproductive Rights. A group of four guys lobbying about Reproductive Rights. It was another experience that I will never forget with all my close friends.

To be honest, everything at this Temple has been a wonderful experience. I made so many close relationships with so many wonderful people and our relationships cannot be broken. These experiences will go on with me forever.

Natalee Moinester ☆

Pablo Picasso once said, “Everything you can imagine is real.” If I could live in a world where everything I could imagine was possible, life would be like a Disney movie. Every poem would rhyme and all stories would have a happy ending. Every king would find his queen and every princess her prince charming. If life was all I could imagine every hardship thrown our way would be resolvable and there would always be second chances. Everything you imagine can only be real if you are willing to imagine everything. The universe has no rules, it only has the laws that we’ve made to live by. Anything is possible when we accept the unexpected is a part of life.

In Judaism one is considered an adult after your Bar or Bat Mitzvah at the age of 13. Now I’m standing here four years after my Bat Mitzvah, almost a real adult in the real world. To my surprise after my Bat Mitzvah nothing really changed. Even though in Judaism I was now an adult, in the eyes of everyone else, I was still just a child. At the time I didn’t understand why this was, I didn’t see how much I was changing and didn’t realize how much I was learning.

I am now a year away from being 18 and about to be confirmed. When people look at me they don’t see a kid anymore but a girl approaching young adulthood. And when I look at the world I see it through different eyes than I did four years ago. Life is not as simple as it used to be. Not every question I ask has an answer and not everything that happens has a clear reason. I have realized recently that everything we imagine can be real when we accept that life won’t just be what we want it to be. Things will only change if we push ourselves to make them different.

To me being confirmed means progress, it is an accomplishment. I have been coming to Hebrew school with all my friends since I was three and if it wasn’t for this Temple I wouldn’t be the person I am now. Most of this Confirmation Class has been attending TAS since preschool and I consider myself incredibly lucky to be able to have some of the same great friends all this time and have been able to make some amazing new ones. A certain path was made for me when I first came here because of the people I have met that have helped shape the person I am now. I have made friends here that I know I will always remember and hope to always keep.

Sarah Petrak ☆

Since I was 4 years old, my family and I have been members of Temple Ahavat Shalom. My mom believes that being part of a Temple meant being part of a family. She had always been

part of a Temple and felt it was the best way to join the Jewish community. Well, she was right. TAS has been my second home for the past 12 years and I am grateful that I had this amazing opportunity to be part of an extraordinary group of individuals.

I went to CHIME Charter Elementary School which had 20 graduates when I finished my time there. I had grown up at that school and was heartbroken to leave. When I started 6th grade at Nobel Middle School, I was the only one from CHIME. Now that school was huge to me. I was really overwhelmed, but when it came time for lunch, one of my friends from TAS asked me to have lunch with her and her friends. She is still my best friend today. The only way I made it through the haunting halls of middle school was by having friends from TAS. This place has impacted my life without really realizing it or expecting it. After Nobel, I went to Granada. At Granada, there are so many kids from TAS. It's nice to see a familiar face and have someone smile at you in the hallway. It can really help on a bad day.

Likewise, my best friends are ones from TAS. We have remained in contact through years of school, soccer and piano practice because we would always see each other Wednesdays and Sundays. I know it sounds corny, but I'm not afraid to speak my mind in the class discussions because I know that I won't be judged for what I say. As my parents and close friends know, I like to debate politics or anything people will debate me about. In the real world, I cannot voice my opinions freely because I might offend someone. But here, I am able to say what is on my mind because I know that everyone here knows that I don't mean it in a negative way. It's a comforting feeling to know that I have connected myself to the Jewish world honoring the past and preserving for the future.

I am so glad that I made it to this point. Being confirmed is a big deal since it means the end of an era. Being a junior means the stress of SAT's and AP's, but you don't expect to be leaving something behind. At this point in the year, it's the seniors who are saying goodbye; not the juniors. I'm ecstatic to be able to say that I've been confirmed, but I'm going to miss seeing everyone. After today, I'm not going to see everyone again in the same place. We will wave to each other across the halls of Granada, but it will never be the same. It is said that time flies, but I never really understood that until the other day. We were sitting in Confirmation class writing our speeches and I had a flashback of growing up. It was basically a law that after Hebrew school on Wednesdays and Sundays, Natalee, Katie, and I would go to Souplantation. Those are

memories that I will hold onto forever. Traditions like that do not come very often, so because of TAS, I have memories for the rest of my life.

In the future, I want to be in politics. I get a lot of criticism for it, but I know that I will be okay because I have morals taught to me by Rabbi Lutz and the teachers here. I plan to continue my presence in the Jewish community forever.

Elias Samuel Rubin ☆

As I sit in the holding tank, I wait without a single thought in my mind. I am numb, mindlessly talking to my opponent for the position that we both want so badly. We're with our youth group advisors, waiting for the few words that will change both of our lives. In a positive or negative fashion, we don't know. The ballots are being counted; the decision is set. All I can do is sit. Sit and garble on about pink shoes. Finally, after what felt like an eternity, the person in charge of the next step of our journey walks in.

“Your 2012-2013 Programming Vice President is Elias Rubin.”

I sit. I look. I'm dreaming. I must be dreaming. This is a dream, right? This isn't real life. I look at my opponent. She's smiling at me, saying congratulations, probably pondering on what she should do now. I can't smile. I won't smile. Not with someone linking arms with me who has just lost something so near and dear to her heart. But I must smile. We're about to walk into a room filled with people eagerly awaiting to hear who will be in charge of Programming for the upcoming year. As we walk in, the news is announced again. The room erupts in cheers and claps, and all I can do is smile. I break away from my opponent, as one of my friends comes to hug me. Then I become serious. Not externally. Externally, I'm still smiling. Internally, however, all the thoughts that I didn't dare to think floods my mind at once. What have you gotten yourself into? Do you know how much work is expected for this? What if people don't like you? What if people despise you? No. Don't think that. Focus on the moment. Focus on the here and now.

The here and now. The here and now with all of these people, people that I've grown up with, and people who I've met along the way. There is no past, or future, only the here and now. Sure, there are memories, but nothing will compare to what is happening in this moment. We are 23 teenagers being confirmed. 23 teenagers closing a chapter on their lives, and starting a new one.

23 teenagers who have all grown closer through time and experiences. 23 teenagers who spent five days together, meshing into one. We're all feeling different emotions: happiness, joy, sadness, excitement. However, there is one constant, we are all saying goodbye. We are all finally walking out of the maze that is preschool, and Kindergarten, and Sunday school, and Hebrew school, and TAS High, and now, finally, Confirmation. What will follow this day, we can't say. We're in the here and now.

The here and now. I leave the room to go call my mom to tell her the news. Her response is repeating "OHMYGod" over and over again, until finally I hang up, ready to vote on who will join me on Regional Board. This is much like Confirmation, the beginning of a new journey.

We, as human beings, are always on a journey. There's nothing we can do to stop them. Whether they're good or bad, we don't know. But we always have to say hello to one thing, but before that, saying goodbye to something else. So, that's what I'm going to do. I'm saying goodbye. Goodbye to 15 of the best years of my life. But I'm also saying hello. Hello to my senior year of High School, and hello to Regional Board. In my heart, I know that these times will always stay with me. Nothing can change that. But, the here and now is all that matters. Shabbat Shalom.

Jessica Taylor Sklar ☆

Friends shape your world to help you become the person you want to be. I believe friends are the most important people to have in your life aside from family. They are like the heroes in the background. They make my life as colorful as the rainbow by showering me with their different personalities. They are the ones to cheer me on and catch me when fall. They are my unsung heroes.

I believe it's important to never forget the friends you have been blessed with because they will be the ones to catch you, heal your wounds, and stay with you every step of the way. At the darkest of times they are still there and will stay there forever. I have had some dark times and my number one support system besides my parents were my friends. They are like my human shield; they defend any rumor or allegation put upon me. Besides defending me they can somehow tell when I'm sad even when I don't know it. It just goes to show how much my friends know me more than I know myself.

Don't you just love those friends that can just look at you and know what you're thinking or feeling? I have friends like that and I couldn't be happier to have them in my life. They are the

people that will drop whatever they're doing to be by my side when I need them the most. They will sit next to me for hours just listening to me talk. Now I don't know about you but that is some sort of will power to just sit there and listen, but not only listen but also understand and give advice too.

High School especially work wise was hard for me at times. I had those days where everything was going downhill. Those days I always thought, "I can't wait for Hebrew school." TAS has been a place for me to unplug from High School, and I wouldn't have been able to unplug if it wasn't for my TAS friends who greeted me every Tuesday with nothing but happiness. Not only did they make my day better, they made me laugh and forget about whatever was bothering me. I couldn't ask for better friends than the ones that are confirming with me today.

TAS has brought me closer with friends and clearly has had an impact in my life. My TAS friends are more than just my friends, they are my Jewish school family and that is pretty irreplaceable. I love them and I am so happy to share a part of my life with them and this special day together that we will never forget.

Jay Spiegel ☆

This culminating year of TAS High, I've had the chance to take a step back and review my experience at TAS in its entirety. I've been here my entire life, and it's been a huge part in my development as a human being and as a young adult. I've met some of my lifelong friends here, and some new friends who I'll try to have through the rest of my life. It's been a very good experience and I've learned a lot. I've learned that the people you meet in your adolescence can be there with you for the rest of your life. I've learned that the mistakes you made when you were younger, can help shape you into a confident and hardened individual of today. Everything I've learned here, whether it is from how to handle a problem, make friends, deal with the ever-consuming drama, or have fun, will promote me forward in life. These lessons will allow me to live a successful life with successful people, and maintain a positive and outgoing attitude in the meanwhile, (I'm still working on it, give me a break) but it's what I plan to do. And I know if I keep my mind on it I can achieve it, because that's what TAS has taught me, they taught me how to persevere, and expose myself to situations that I wasn't originally comfortable with, but still allow a good experience. For instance, during our L'Taken trip, we were exposed to new experiences through understanding situations, such as homelessness, women's reproductive rights, LBGT rights, and stem-cell research. I know that I haven't always been accepting of the Jewish religion, but I have come to take it as a part of my life, even if I don't practice it. TAS, I want to thank you for being there for me through thick and thin. Shabbat Shalom.

Shaina Lee Van Stryk ☆

I have been a part of the TAS community since I was about 2 when I started preschool here. I didn't know it yet, but the friends I made there are still a part of my life and most are sitting right behind me today. It's been a crazy journey to get to where I am in regards to coming into adulthood and incorporating the Jewish religion into my life. Growing up I always felt that being Jewish just meant carrying on the traditions of the culture. I followed blindly through prayers and services by just reciting the Hebrew chants that I was taught without any deep connection or true emotional ties to them. But through my Bat Mitzvah experience, being involved with TASTY, and going off to NFTY retreats, I began to formulate my own opinion and truly feel a part of the Jewish community.

Now, when I was thinking about what to write in my Confirmation speech I began to question what being a Jew really meant to me in my life. I still haven't truly been able to answer that question, but I do know that when I meet another person that is Jewish I instantly feel connected to them and they no longer are a stranger, but rather a long lost friend. That connection is the reason I have been able to make lifelong friends here at TAS. Furthermore, the Torah teachings like Tikkun Olam, have taught me that I have the power and ability to make a positive change in my community. After realizing that being a part of the Jewish community has given me the tools to succeed in making a difference, I came to the conclusion that my path of Jewish development does not end here after Confirmation. This experience stems as a starting point for me and my fellow Confirmation Class to truly find how we can fit in and excel in society as young Jewish adults.

Nicki Araña-Zweig ☆

Community. A big word with an even bigger meaning. I have been a member of the TAS community for the last 14 years. And for a girl of 16, that's a long time. There are many other Temples in the area that my family and I could have joined, but when we first visited TAS we felt something that led us to want to become a part of this wonderful community. From preschool, to Junior Choir, to Religious and Hebrew School, and TAS High and everything else that has led up to this moment, my TAS family has been there with me, supporting me every step

of the way. My years at TAS have really given me an honest and accurate understanding of the word “Community.”

Communities, of necessity, have a structure to them. And, without that structure, they would crumble. People like Rabbi Lutz, Cantor Linsky, Rabbi Shawna, Cantor Roher, Rabbi Samansky, Debi Chesler, Halli Steinberg, Oshrat Moyal, and of course Ilysa Cooperman are the foundation that make this structure strong and without them my time and experience as a member of the TAS community would have been much, much less than what it has been. Thank you all so very much for letting me be a part of your community.

The adults in the congregation aren't the only ones who have influenced me and made me part of their family. My Temple friends and I go together like macaroni and cheese. Like peanut butter and jelly. Like cats and dogs...never mind. We smile, laugh, cry, and fall asleep together. At TASTY events, I feel completely comfortable to be as out of the box as I want to be because I know that my friends will be the first ones to jump out of that box with me. We don't care who stares at us because we're making memories together as a community. I honestly don't know where I'd be without people like Elias Rubin, Jessica Sklar, and the rest of the Confirmation class. We have all been great friends since our preschool days when we would run around, play, nap, and cause mischief together. To this day, we still do these things as a family. Whether we are at a TASTY event, playing human foosball, or duck duck goose, we come together as siblings. This crazy bunch of teenagers have taught me the true meaning of being a part of a community. Even my friends' parents are my parents. I call them 'mommy' and 'daddy' because they have taken me under their parental wing. Whenever I need a ride home from an event, a break from my own bed, or a random hug, I know I can ask a Temple parent because they are my family too.

Temple has helped me through my personal journey also. When I'm sad, the only place I'd rather be is TAS. A few years ago, my mom told me I couldn't have a birthday party because we were settling into our new home, so instead we met up with another TAS family and went to services. It was one of the best birthdays ever because I was surrounded by people who love me. I can be myself here and I know nobody will judge me but instead join me in the silliness and laughter. Without my TAS connections, I'd be lost so I'm grateful that I know I'll always have my Temple friends, family, and this wonderful community that I call home.

Temple Ahavat Shalom
Embrace The Possibilities

