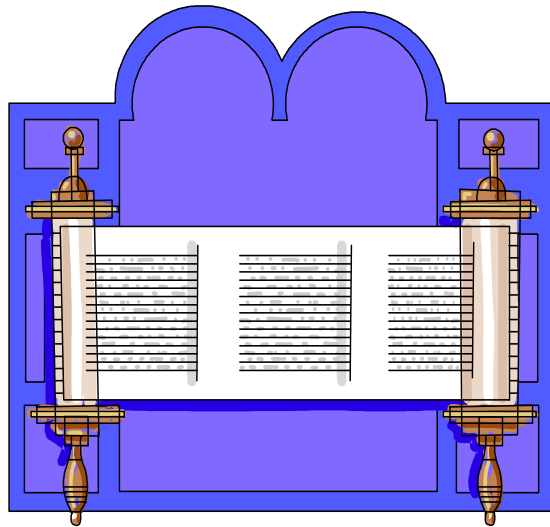


# Confirmation Reflections 2013

May 18, 2013      9 Sivan 5773

*“The Torah Is A Tree Of Life For  
Those Who Hold Fast To It, And  
Those Who Uphold It Are Happy” ....Book Of Proverbs*



## Temple Ahavat Shalom

Barry M. Lutz, Senior Rabbi  
Jennifer Roher, Cantor  
Shawna Brynjegard-Bialik, Rabbi  
Lisa Kantor, President



## Elisa Rose Bernstein

On a Friday night I sit in my Shabbat whites and watch the waves come in, crashing against the rocks. I sit with my arms around my best friends and finally feel at home. I have waited the entire year to return and the time has finally arrived. And as we sing, I think to myself, why is it here I feel at home? I am always Jewish, but why is it at camp where I feel most connected?

From my teachings here at Temple, I was taught the story of Jacob and how he wrestled with an angel. Jacob struggled with a representation of God, showing that we are taught to question our faith and be skeptical.

I was never one to enjoy coming to Temple, but I could never wait to return to my home away from home, every summer to once again reunite with my family. Going to camp helped me reinforce what was already there to begin with, an appreciation for being Jewish. It came with this promise that I would discover who I am as a person and who I wanted to become as a Jew through questioning my beliefs.

Camp is spiritual, but so is Temple. Yet there is a unique power that comes with camp, that makes people return year after year. An obsession some would say. What makes camp special is not about the activities or the location. It is the community. At camp we are no longer purely individuals. We come together to create a puzzle. Each of us brings our own self in order to create something bigger, creating a community that supports and cares for one another.

The Jewish community comes together when babies are born, when a Bat Mitzvah is called up to the bimah and when loved ones die. Being a community is such an important aspect of Jewish life, we gather and praise God as one and even if I do not believe in God, we are still gathered as a community sharing beliefs. That is the lesson I can take from camp. When we gather as a camp, we have a purpose. Together we create a holy community. After questioning my Jewish beliefs since I stood at this bimah a few years ago, I have realized that for me being Jewish is not about praising God or praying to a higher power, rather for me being Jewish is being a part of a community.

Although I am not quite sure where my spiritual beliefs lay, I know that being Jewish is who I am. It can be about the community it unites, whether it be at camp, NFTY, or on a Tuesday night at Confirmation.

Camp ultimately made me who I am today and the friendships I formed those many summers ago, have remained with me to this day. Camp has made me proud to be Jewish and proud of the heritage of which I am from. I am grateful to my parents for providing me with this camp experience and to Rabbi Lutz and Rabbi Shawna.



## Madison Erin Braverman

Life is full of new experiences; some are happy and some are extremely painful. If you have people around you that you love and that love you in return, life becomes a beautiful bonding experience, no matter what the emotion. I have learned a great deal here at TAS. I started with Mommy and Me Class and now I stand here before you as a 16 year old teenage girl, preparing for the rest of my life. Being a teenager is quite complicated, because we are treated like children, but expected to act like adults. Additionally, we live in a society where we judge people for judging others when we are taught that judging is wrong and our society is never satisfied nor content. I stand here reflecting on how much I have grown, not only physically, but emotionally and mentally, on this crazy place we call earth.

As a result of living in this complicated world, I've learned some things...

\*I have learned that our backgrounds and circumstances may influence our lives, but we are responsible for who we become and what we make of our lives.

\*That it's not what you have in life, but who you have that counts and that I will only be as good as the people with whom I surround myself.

\*To never regret something that once made me smile and to never dwell on what is no more, but just be happy for what once was.

\*I have realized to never judge others, because everyone has their own story and his or her own struggles.

\*I have learned to be confident from within and remind myself I am a great individual; for if I don't believe in myself, it will be difficult for anyone else to believe in me.

\*And the best and only way to escape a problem is to solve it and mistakes and failures are stepping stones to success.

\*Plus, I now only look at the glass as half full and look at life with not only an open mind, but an open heart.

\*And I am able to find beauty within everyone and know there is always something to be happy about, even through life's challenges and with that, I have come to realize everything in life is temporary, the good and the bad and forever is just an empty promise, so never take anything or anyone for granted.

\*Today, I live every day to the fullest and realize there is no such thing as a perfect day, because if today was perfect, there would be no need for tomorrow.

\*Lastly, I have learned to believe in Judaism as more of a culture than a religion, in a Temple as more of a community than a Synagogue and in my Confirmation Class as more than a class, but a family.

I stand here and just want to say thank you. Thank you to my parents, my siblings, my 2nd family my Confirmation Class, my aunt Eileen, my grandparents, my boyfriend Jay, the TAS clergy and staff and every other person who has been a part of my life up until this moment. It is each and every one of you, who have impacted and shaped me into the person I am today. You have given me countless treasured memories and most importantly, helped me learn all these life lessons, which now let me know I am confirming this journey of my life way stronger than when I began.



## Caroline Rose Card

When I arrived at Temple Ahavat Shalom in the 2<sup>nd</sup> grade, it was not just a new Sunday School to me with new people and faces. It was a far more extreme change. You see I had a big move when I was seven years old; I moved from my home thousands of miles away to an entirely new lifestyle, home environment, school and lastly Temple. Many 7 year olds don't exactly face the social pressures of society and make friends much more naturally, than let's say the kids in their teenage years. It was still a terrifying transition for a little girl, who had to start over with people who knew each other from Pre-School. But these worries of going to a brand new school had soon vanished. I did not have to fret for more than a few minutes, before I had made new friends. I had not fully understood the capacity to which these friendships would grow. These friends that had welcomed me with open arms years ago, had stuck around for so many years of my life, because of this amazing Temple. This means so much in a world where true friends are ever so rare.

Coming from Hawaii with a small population in general, let alone Jewish population, you could understand why my Jewish identity wasn't exactly clear to me. Hardly any of my friends were familiar with the concept of Hannukah. I guess you could blame that on my age, but, in fact, I felt a closer connection to what I thought Judaism meant when I arrived at TAS. A concept that I still see the same way today. To me, Judaism encompassed a community feeling, one that is so original and irreplaceable. One I would not give up for the world.

The way the Temple teaches allows for tolerance and acceptance, two very important values to possess in this world. We understand that different opinions help us grow as individuals. The fact that the class is taught through open discussion, frees me from the everyday pressures of school each Tuesday. This allows me to critically think about pressing topics that are important for us young thinkers. We are allowed to display our own beliefs with no judgment, but rather opportunity for growth.

Each and every week I look forward to arriving at Temple and seeing my comrades, who I do not see on a regular basis. I enjoy hearing about their quick paced and always changing lives, because well, we are teenagers, evolving all too fast. We have ultimately become a family, becoming ever so closer this year, especially on our L'Taken trip. When you are on a trip for 4 days with 20 other teenagers, it is hard not to have an amazing time and become closer as a whole. I feel I had made life-long friends, just as I had felt when entering this brand new congregation years ago.

My appreciation for this experience, along with each connection and each memory made here, is indescribable. This will always be my home away from home, Temple Ahavat Shalom.

P.S. Rabbi Lutz you rock.



## Joel Michael Cutler

“Always bear in mind that your own resolution to succeed is more important than any one thing”, said Abraham Lincoln. Progressing through life, my goal has been to do the best I can do and accomplish all my goals I set for myself. Well, my classmates and I have reached the goal of being confirmed. I have learned a lot throughout my life at TAS and have had many life changing experiences, with some of the best friends I could ask for. Our most recent experience was the L'Taken trip to Washington D.C. This trip brought every one closer together as friends and was a truly great experience for all of us. We created memories that will last us a lifetime.

While traveling through life I tend to ask myself, “What haven't I done that I want to do?” Well, I have come up with a few answers that I would like to share. In my life I would like to make a difference and be acknowledged for something great that changes our world. I would also like to explore our world and experience different life styles. I want to do these things because I do not want to live the easy life and always be laid back. I want to get a real experience of different places in this world, that I may only have a chance to walk through once. I would hope that others have this same feeling and ask themselves this same question. Who would want to go through life as a boring man, who doesn't have any goals to accomplish in life. Because I was raised Jewish and was enrolled in Sunday School, Hebrew School and TAS High, I was given the opportunity to learn a lot of life lessons. These life lessons were presented by all of the teachers, which got me interested in staying each year. My time at TAS has been great. I am sure that my parents will be sad to not have a kid attending Confirmation Class every Tuesday night. Although we are finished with Confirmation and are at the end of the road, I know that we will all stay friends and have many more experiences together. I would also like to mention my truly best friends. I do not know what I would do without Blake, Josh, Ryan and Noah. These are my “ride or die brothers” and we have experienced many years of amazing memories. It is so bizarre to realize that we will be Seniors next fall and in a year, about to graduate and be off to college. Time has flown by so fast and I hope I will be able to see everyone many more times and create more memories.

I would like to thank Rabbi Lutz for putting up with our misbehavior and our obsession with our phones. I'd also like to thank Rabbi Shawna for giving us such good lessons this year and such great information about our lives and God. This made me think about my lifestyle even more. Next I would like to thank my parents, because they are the reason I started here at TAS in the first place. I am glad that they chose for me to grow up here rather than anywhere else. I am so glad that I have been able to share many moments of my childhood with these friends. I hope everyone else feels the same way. Thank you everyone who came to this service and supported our Confirmation Class of 2013.



## Gabrielle Lindsey Dulys

With college on the horizon, I have heard more than enough of the question: “What are your extracurricular activities?” It drives me crazy; to master the school system and get into the college of your dreams, you have to be some robotic super hero. You have to somehow be able to get outstanding grades and test scores, while juggling endless extracurricular activities: president of the student body, founder of a local non-profit organization, curer of cancer, etc., etc.

But when I actually get around to relaying my list of extracurricular activities, I always seem to forget Confirmation. I’ve been going to Hebrew School at Temple Ahavat Shalom since fourth grade, so how could I forget something that I have dedicated eight years of my life to? What I’ve come to realize is that Confirmation isn’t really an “extracurricular.” It’s more than going to Speech and Debate Practice or singing in the Teen Choir. Those are just things that I do. However, Confirmation is not something that I do; it is something that I am. I don’t have to tell someone that I’m Jewish, I show them.

I show them through how I act. To me, to be a Jew is to be respectful, to be helpful, to be considerate. To be a Jew is to realize that even the smallest of mitzvot can brighten the world. To be a Jew is to give kindness to other people without expecting kindness in return. To be a Jew is to overcome adversity and stand strong before even the darkest of evils. I see the world through a Jewish lens, a mirror to the values that Judaism has instilled within me. Innately, I have committed myself to become a protector of goodness, an ally to the oppressed and a voice for my own freedom. Tikkun Olam and mitzvot are codes by which I live.

So, what makes Confirmation so special? Confirmation is not just some class I have to attend on Tuesday nights. Confirmation is a community, a community of individuals all coming together from different places, but also a community of Jews. It is in this environment that I have nourished my Jewish identity, giving me the opportunity to blossom into a Jew who loves her faith, who loves her culture, who loves herself.

Tonight, I formally confirm my Jewish faith, yet it seems that I confirmed my faith a long time ago and every time I forget to include Confirmation on my list of extracurricular activities, I continue to confirm my faith.



## Ryan Mitchell Gluck

In a world where we are flooded daily with news about national tragedies, global conflicts and economic problems, it's important to be reminded about the simple joys in life. Simple joys, like wearing socks just out of the dryer, receiving a comforting bear hug, eating warm homemade cookies or getting in a line just before it gets really long. The appreciation for these simple joys help to guarantee that you have a great attitude, you remain aware of the world around you and you remain true to yourself.

Having a great attitude is about how you react to a challenge, problem or tragedy, when it may present itself to you. It's important not to sulk about whatever it may be and let that one thing, whatever it may be, take over your life; but rather to grieve and then face the future with a new perspective. No matter what the pain is that hits you, it's important to choose to move on from it. I like to think that I have a positive outlook on life, because it allows me to see the best in situations.

Awareness is also an important quality to possess. I'm sure that everyone's heard the classic quote, "Life moves pretty fast. If you don't stop and look around once in a while, you could miss it". This quote perfectly embodies the awareness needed to appreciate the small wonders in the world. Like for example, the first squeeze from a new tube of toothpaste or coming home to smell dinner cooking or saying the same thing as a sports announcer just before they say it. All of these small things are vital to your overall happiness and it's important to be aware of their significance.

Authenticity is all about being you and being cool with that. When you're authentic you follow your heart. You end up putting yourself in places, situations and conversations, that you love and that you enjoy. You'll meet people that you like talking to and go to places that you have dreamt about. You'll end up following your heart and feeling very fulfilled. There is absolutely no reason as to why you should pretend to be anyone other than your true self. In a time as vital as High School for self-discovery, it is beyond important to be who you are.

It's important to remember that you will never be as young as you are right now. I believe that if you live your life with a great attitude, you will choose to move forward and move on whenever life deals you a blow. You will live with a sense of awareness of the world around you and see the tiny joys that make life so sweet. Be authentic to yourself, be you and be cool with that. Let your heart lead you and put yourself in experiences that satisfy you. Then I think you'll live a life that is rich and satisfying.



## Emily Rebecca Hart

By being confirmed, I am now a full member of the Jewish religion. But what does that mean? At first I thought that being confirmed meant attending Shabbat Service and enlightening others about my journey. Although this is true, in my Confirmation Class, I learned that I must play an active role in the society I am growing up in by performing Social Justice.

The act of Social Justice is to speak out for topics I am passionate about, with the hopes of making a change for the good of my community. To practice Social Justice, my class and I went to Congress in Washington D.C. We lobbied for issues that we felt were important and needed to be dealt with. My group in particular lobbied on Embryonic Stem Cell Research. I found interest in this, because of the miracles it could create for people like my father, who has diabetes. Lobbying was an experience that changed the way I feel my decisions affect the community I am in.

Before Confirmation, I was mainly of the mindset that I was too young to actually make a difference in society. However, Confirmation has taught me that small tasks, such as volunteering or standing up for what you believe in, do make changes. They make others more educated on a topic, which creates a chain reaction of getting the word out. Lobbying was a great example of this for me. I was able to advocate for a cause that I am passionate about and inform others about that cause hoping that it will make a difference.

Another topic that I am passionate about is volunteering with animal rescues. As Jews we have a responsibility to help all living creatures. I love going to fundraisers because not only do we raise money for our cause, but we spread the word out to others. We spread the word about the cruelties and hardships many animals experience and how we as humans can put an end to it. This in itself is a form of Social Justice, because I am standing up for something I believe in and spreading the word out to others. Although many of you may not be as passionate for animal safety as I am, that doesn't mean you can't perform Social Justice. Social Justice is found everywhere. Whenever you speak your opinion, you are creating that chain reaction I spoke of earlier. You are getting the word out and forming the basis of Social Justice. Everyone has a different passion, but what is important, is to pursue your passion in order to reach that goal of accomplishment.

This is what stuck out to me the most in my journey for being confirmed. I have realized that I can speak out on topics I am passionate about, in the hopes of making a difference. Even the simple act of telling someone, can start the larger picture of performing Social Justice in your community.





## Liza Rose Hoffman

Lady Gaga, a famous pop singer, once said, “I think tolerance and acceptance and love is something that feeds every community.” The Jewish community I have been surrounded with my entire life, which overflows with love and tolerance, not only shaped the person I am today, but is helping me form the future I strive to have. Temple Ahavat Shalom is the birthplace of my Jewish identity. If it were not for Temple, I would have never branched out into programs like TASTY, NFTY, the Jewish Student Union at school and one of the places I like to call my second home, camp. I recently came to realize that it is not about how well I can recite the Hebrew alphabet or how often I attend services, but how the significance of Judaism is the bonds and relationships that form within this sacred community. After all, the Israelites would have never made it through Egypt if they did not have each other. Whether we look back at our ancestors or observe the people that surround us, we must recognize that we continue to succeed because of our Jewish community.

The Jewish community has not only comforted me, but has challenged me to go beyond my comfort zone. This past summer I spent 8 weeks at Camp Newman. I was eagerly looking forward to reconnecting with friends, learning new things about myself and others, and most importantly have fun. One of the first things I was told when I arrived at camp was that I would be living on a Kibbutz in tepees, with no toilets, sinks, mirrors, air conditioning or privacy for two whole weeks. I automatically let these words sink in so deep, that I was almost positive my summer was going to be ruined. How could they let something so terrible like this happen to us? I was not willing to spend my summer picking weeds out of the ground, shoveling goat poop and sleeping in tepees, where I was vulnerable to mosquito bites. My first instinct was to complain or call my parents and tell them to fly me home immediately. The attitude I had towards this environment ultimately affected my experience there, because I ended up hating every second of it.

Unfortunately, it was not over. I had to spend a second week doing these torturous activities. However, this time around, I told myself to be open-minded and give this new experience a second chance. My experience was automatically changed due to the attitude I adopted. As cliché as it sounds, I gained a whole new understanding and respect for nature. I harvested vegetables from the garden and made my own salads, giving me a new appreciation for the food I ate. I didn't mind being covered in mud or sleeping on the hard floor of the tepees. I enjoyed grooming goats and chasing after chickens. Whenever I needed help, my friends and counselors were automatically by my side to support me. This became a wake up call for me; the people I have met through Judaism will always support me and push me past my limits, because it benefits my personal growth. From camp and my life here at Temple, I have learned to have a positive outlook, go outside my boundaries and try new things no matter how awful I perceive them to be. Because, at the end of the day, I know that my friends and family in this Jewish community will always be there for me. This learning experience at camp is something that I don't go a day without thinking about. It has encouraged me to appreciate the simple things in life that I would normally disregard. So I leave you with this question. What is something you can do today, tomorrow or in a few weeks, that will lead to personal development, but also make you realize that you are not alone and never will be in this journey.



## Jacob Arthur Kaplan

Hello, my name is Jacob Kaplan. I began my journey here at TAS in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade with Mr. Udelf, knowing nearly no one and a bit nervous about joining a new Temple. Within my first few weeks, I had made friends and came to know most of the people in my class. I have progressed through the years here at TAS and have enjoyed my experiences with the students and teachers I have met here.

Throughout my Jewish growth, my views and ideas on God and the world have changed with me. I used to not have a clear idea of what I thought God was, except for some powerful being that made the world. As a small impressionable child, I basically believed anything I was told and thus did not have my own opinion about God. Since that time, I have matured and changed and my perception of God has changed as well. My new ideas about God, the world and morals, have helped shape me as a person and a member of the Jewish community. I still see God as an all-powerful being, but I do not believe God intervenes in our lives. I believe God created the world and its creatures, but then simply let the world operate as it would. For this reason, I think it is our responsibility to keep the world moral and try to set an example for others. I have attempted to apply this philosophy to my own life, although at times it can be very difficult. I try to show through my own actions the good in myself and the good that others can achieve. As my sister is younger than me, I especially feel a duty to act positively in the world and give her a good example to follow. Just as this hope and desire for my sister to live a good life motivates me, many other things in my life provide me with motivation as well.

A large motivation in my life is my family. They always support me in whatever I do and I can honestly say that I would not be here today, if it were not for them. They have taken me where I need to go, helped me make some tough decisions and always given me what I need, whether that is a material object or simply their love and support. Other people have also given me motivation throughout my life. My friends, both from Hebrew School and just my life, have given me so much support, either by cheering me up or by giving me advice. Also, my girlfriend Tova, is always there for me and has helped me cheer up and get through some difficult situations as well. Lastly, my own roots also motivate me and push me to strive to be better. My grandparents and relatives are always there to help me if I need it and I know I can count on them to push me towards my goals.

Specifically pertaining to my roots, I am named after my grandfather, who passed away when I was very young from a heart attack. Although I did not know him that well personally, the stories I have been told about him have inspired me to try to be like him. He always tried to bring joy to those around him and improve the world in any way he could.

Throughout my life I have had many different sources of inspiration and motivation. They have shaped me into the person I am today and given me the beliefs I have. Although sometimes life can be difficult, I am happy with who I am and I look forward to progressing through life and seeing the person I become. I am confident that those who have helped me achieve where I am today, will continue to support me, as well as receiving help and motivation from new sources that will further help create my character.



## Evan Nathaniel Krausz

There have been many experiences throughout my life that have molded me in various ways, in order to be not only a better Jew, but also a better person in general. These experiences have been throughout my life; they have spanned many years and have also been fleeting moments and they all made an impact upon me.

The first and foremost would have to be all the many experiences through the many years I spent attending Temple Ahavat Shalom. Every moment spent on these sacred grounds has been instrumental in shaping who I am. Even just seeing my friends on a weekly basis has been a factor that has made all the difference. What I have been taught and what I have retained, has been lessons about how to be a better Jewish individual and a better human being. Even though I am not a particularly religious person, I find the moments I spend here are some of the best I have ever experienced. From TASTY events to Temple retreats, all the activities have been important in my life.

The second and probably most influential moment was when I traveled to Washington D.C., with my Temple mates to lobby Congress. The reason this moment was so influential was because, as was stated previously, I am not a serious practicing Jew. However, this trip opened my eyes to the fact that just being a part of this religion, gives me such strong ties to people from all over the nation. I met people from one coast to the other and we all shared a common bond through Judaism. While going to lobby Congress was a blast, the people I met while in D.C., were some of the best people I have met in my life. There was an almost instant connection to every single person there, no matter their age, race, gender or social status. Everyone in attendance was an instant part of my extended family.

Finally, while it is not an experience, my Temple and Hebrew School classmates cannot be forgotten. While they may not be the perfect group of people to always be around, they are a part of my Jewish family. We all have our issues and flaws and we truly are a rag-tag bunch of misfits, who have caused many issues and problems throughout the years. Despite all that, despite our differences and own personal egos, we somehow all merge and mesh every week to become this mega machine of Jewish learning. We have stuck it out together through the thick and the thin, even though there weren't many real hardships that we had to face, but we still stuck together for over a decade. I am proud to be associated with this specific group of individuals and I am very happy that I can say they too are being confirmed alongside me as the Temple Ahavat Shalom Confirmation class of 2013.

In summation, I am not perfect by any stretch of the imagination. In fact, this year I missed some of the Confirmation Class on Tuesdays due to my hockey commitment. However, this amazing group of people here at TAS from Rabbi Lutz to Rabbi Shawna and everyone involved, has allowed me to be confirmed even though I missed some of the lessons taught in class. I have been transformed into a better person just by the ability to associate with an organization such as this Temple and at the end of the day the only words I can say to explain how my life has been altered by these experiences, is that I truly am a Jew and will always be a Jew. I can change my name, my religion and my appearance, but a fact is a fact, and that is I am Jewish.

Lastly, I must mention the two people in this world that brought me into this world, as a rough piece of clay and hand shaped me into the person standing before you. I am not perfect and I have made

mistakes, but they have stuck with me and supported me through thick and thin. They have loved me like the amazing parents they are. I love you two with all my might and I hope someday I can repay you for all the good you have done for me.



## Blake Aaron Lauer

Hi I'm Blake. I've been coming to TAS since fifth grade. When I first started coming here, Judaism was just a thing. It was something I could associate myself with, but that was about it. Judaism meant that I celebrated Shabbat on Fridays and got 7 more days of presents than my Christian friends. I never really questioned Judaism or what it meant to me. I just sort of accepted the ideas and stories into my life. However, the older I got and more I matured, the more I began to question my views and beliefs. Of course most kids question things as they grow and feel rebellious. But my skepticism towards my environment was more than just typical rebellion. I began thinking deeply about not only Judaism, but all aspects of my life. I learned things about myself and have been able to shape myself into a better person, the person that I want to be.

I first started questioning things about myself during Middle School. Prior to this, if I was told I had to fast for Yom Kippur, I just accepted the fact that I had to be miserable for a day. This made no sense to me. Instead of starving ourselves, why not enjoy the food that our ancestors **would have** struggled to attain. We should celebrate our past, rather than mourn for our hardships. My new beliefs were not all good. Some got me into trouble and made me want to abandon religion all together. This was due to my over thinking of everything that I thought that Judaism stood for. I had thought that Judaism was strictly based off the Torah. The Torah was telling me all these crazy stories, from Moses and the Israelites desert journey, to Abraham breaking the idols. I didn't believe a single story in the Torah and I thought that this completely dismantled all that Judaism stood for.

I had this mentality for several years until my Confirmation year. My Confirmation year gave me a new insight and approach towards Judaism. Through discussions with my rabbis, classmates and trip to Washington, D.C., I have learned to accept Judaism into my life in a way that suits me and my lifestyle. I may not keep kosher or go to Temple every Friday. I even sneak bread into my house during Passover. However, I have learned that this does not make me a bad Jew. The only thing that I could do to make myself a bad Jew, is to be ignorant of other's beliefs and not accept different points of view.

In this past year, I have learned more about myself and what I believe than I had in my whole life. Though the person that I have become may not fit the standard of a stereotypically traditional Jewish citizen, I have learned that Judaism will live in me forever, whether I practice my religion or not. It will be present in my traditions, my family and most importantly, the way I view the world that I live in. My Confirmation is a stepping stone into adulthood. It signifies the end to my young years and a transition into a new life. One in which I must become more independent, thoughtful and intuitive. This year has brought me closer to my classmates and rabbis. I am glad that I have been able to experience all that TAS has to offer and provide for me and my future.



## Claire Lily Meyer

It feels like just yesterday, I was pulling in the driveway of TAS for the first time. I was feeling the butterflies in my stomach, for all the new people I would meet on the first day of Hebrew School. Looking back on the many years I have spent looking at myself, as simply a child belonging to my parents, it is funny to think that in only a few more months I will legally be able to call myself an adult. I will go out into the world as my own person. However, I know that calling yourself an adult and actually being one, are two separate things. Becoming a true adult does not happen overnight on your eighteenth birthday. Rather, it is a gradual, complex, painful and beautiful process.

In my case, I look at L'Taken as my first step towards adulthood. On the day we read our political speeches to members of Congress, I had an out of body experience. For the first time in my life, when I looked at myself, I saw a young woman rather than a girl. I knew in that moment that I was on my way to adulthood, not because of the fancy business clothes I was wearing, but because of the significance of the action I was taking. Instead of sitting at home watching some news report about a self-righteous group of protestors, I had become one of them. I was fighting for my own rights and passions, rather than letting some other adult I had never met do it for me. Prior to L'Taken I had felt insignificant and average, just a fish in a sea of other determined, but nevertheless powerless young people. However, I take pride and comfort in what I did in D.C., because it showed me that I have the power to make an enormous impact on the world. This sparked a passion inside me for justice that I did not even know existed. It is in this way that L'Taken gave me a sense of the responsibility, independence and spirit, needed to be your own unique and mature individual.

Now that I have started on my path towards adulthood, I have set my sights on an inspirational figure in my life who perfectly exemplifies through her life what it means to be an adult, my mother. When my mom was my age and still attending High School, she decided to acquire an almost full time job. This was in order to be able not only to support herself, but to help her family in times of need. It is amazing how selfless and independent she was at such an early age, demonstrating qualities that can usually only be found in mature adults. Then after it came time to graduate High School, my mom decided she would attend College. Her decision provides incredible inspiration for me, because although no one had ever encouraged or pushed her in the direction of a higher education, she decided on her own to pursue this tough, but honorable path. I can only hope to have the enduring self-motivation that my mom demonstrated in making this choice. The actions of my mother exemplify what it truly means to be an adult. Now that I am approaching the time in my life when I must go out into the world on my own, I admire my mom's courageously independent attitude and I hope to emulate it in my life.

It is absolutely petrifying, exciting, miserable and liberating, to think that after twelve years, practically my whole life, of learning about and trying to determine what it is I want to do to make my place in this world, in only a few short months, I will be stepping out into the world on my own. I will be an adult and I still have no idea what I want to do with my life. I know that is ok, because if there is one thing I have learned from Hebrew School, it is, as in the words of Rabbi Lutz, "The learning does not stop now, it has only begun."



## Rachel Miller

Two quotations, both by icons in their respective fields, generalize my thoughts about spirituality and the nature of G-d. Albert Einstein said, "The more I study science the more I believe in G-d." This resonates with me, not simply because I am a hard core science nerd, but also because over the course of my studies in the sciences, especially this year, I have been in awe of the intricate nature of the world's mechanisms as a perfect puzzle. I couldn't help but think since even a genius like Einstein could not understand, much less create, such perfect systems, that the odds of these properties falling into place by pure chance are slim to none. Therefore, an omnipotent, omnipresent being, must have put all these workings into place to carry on without regular interference. I call this being G-d. So, speaking of science and G-d, studies have shown that the number one determiner of how long an individual lives is not genetics or economics, but the quality of the relationships he or she had with others. So what do relationships with people have to do with what I believe is my relationship with G-d?

Oprah Winfrey said that "What we're all striving for is authenticity, a spirit-to-spirit connection." This reflects a theory proposed by Martin Buber, a Jewish philosopher. The idea that G-d exists in what he calls I-thou interactions. These connections include encounters or exchanges with other humans where ideas and emotions seem to flow seamlessly and when our concern is not our own agendas, but for the other person. In a conversation this may be words. In hard times or good times it may be tears or an embrace. It may even just be a presence with no need for words or actions. I like to think of I-thou as a "pure humanity" connection, versus what Buber calls I-it interactions that constitute the majority of our interactions with one another. These are the times in which we fail to see fellow humans as fellow humans. This space in I-thou interactions is one of the places I believe G-d dwells. Building off the belief that we are created in the image of G-d, b'tzelem elohim and that we as humans are unique in our ability to possess emotions like compassion and sympathy, then G-d could quite possibly also be what seems to be the empty space that binds people together, that connection and love that humans need to survive as individuals and as a race. Over the course of this past year I have reflected on my I-thou interactions of the past and those I encountered along the way.

I know we are not supposed to do this at Confirmation, but I would like to make a confession. I did not know the first names of a good number of people in my Confirmation Class before we all went to Washington, D.C., for L'Taken. The majority of my classmates were these distant figures, like the people you see regularly in passing, but you never take the time to pause and ask their name, who they are, why they do what they do. But L'Taken, much to my surprise, worked its famous bonding magic. I know everybody's first names now. I might even be able to tell you a couple people's last names. Becoming friends with these people was not something I set out to do for my own best interest, I did not even have much intention to interact with many of these people in the first place. But, I believe that G-d wedged between all of us, to kind of weave us together and pull the threads tight. There were those moments in D.C., where I felt like we all just seemed to fit. We didn't have to do anything. We didn't have to say anything. We simply let G-d bring us together.

But L'Taken was not all happy memories for me. While we were in the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, I touched one of the barracks from Aushwitz. Keep in mind that I have felt guilty for a long time now, about being desensitized to a point to the horrors of the Holocaust. So as I walked through the museum and saw all of the evidence and documentation of this mass genocide against my own people, logic numbed me as I read the numbers and facts on the walls. I guess it all seemed like it couldn't be real, like the Holocaust was simply a Nostradamus-like scenario. But



once I touched those barracks, thought was cut off. The raw emotion broke down logical walls in a matter of seconds, as I broke down to tears. It all connected back to my belief in our human need and desperate search for G-d using connections with human beings, these I-thou interactions. A split second of true empathy for the individuals who experienced more suffering in their lifetimes than I ever will. I felt there was once a soul there, but now all that was left was wood and empty space. I felt the human-human bond snap, as if I had seen or known the people who once slept there. It was a hollow loneliness, as if I was abandoned by G-d, the way many of those 6 million innocent people must have felt, the way that the people that slept in that barrack felt. I felt that interaction ripped apart and a disappearance of G-d. I believe that where those souls had been was where G-d had once served in those spaces between loved ones or former strangers. Those bonds, those people, the holy spaces for G-d, were shattered by evil, hate, manipulation and inhumanity. Later I connected this incident to what I believe is the reason the Holocaust could even occur, that people were not seeing people as people. Seeing people as objects and not as people, having I-it versus I-thou interactions with one another, is what leads to evil, hate, manipulation and inhumanity. The fact that this made such an impact on me supported my growing beliefs about G-d.

Now I'm not saying I know everything, much to my own chagrin, of course. But I'm saying that this is what I know to be true as of now and I understand that my beliefs now are much different than ten years ago. My beliefs will most likely have changed by the time another decade of my life has come and gone, because any and everything, regardless of whether or not we realize it, affects and changes us. And since every person's experiences are different, so are their perceptions and philosophies. G-d is what each individual envisions it as. I do believe that there is one G-d but that this G-d manifests in many forms, most of which we can and never will see or understand.

Before you all fall asleep, I want to make a shout-out to someone very, very special to me, someone who holds a sacred place in my heart and mind forever. He has known me since birth and definitely knows me better than anybody ever has, does or will. We have enough inside jokes to keep us entertained for eons and always seem to be on the same brainwave frequency. He is my support system, my source of comfort and my biggest fan. He's my best friend. He's my dad and I'm his little girl, even as I stand here on the bimah. Daddy, I just want to tell you that I love you so much. You will always have a sacred home in my heart. Thank you for being more than just my dad.





## Sydney Elizabeth Moore

Many of you probably have ZERO idea who I am, and are trying to think of it right now. I started out here in Kindergarten with almost all of the students in front of you. I STILL don't know them very well, except their names. Honestly, right after my Bat Mitzvah I wanted to stop coming. I saw no point in coming once a week, with people I hardly knew. I didn't want to go on the Washington trip as well, because I had already been there once before. Why would I want to go with people I hardly knew. I now believe that if I hadn't gone that I would not be who I am today.

Though it was only a few days, it made me closer to all of them. I think the reason for this is in a crowd of 350 people, if you recognize 20 people you know, you are going to go straight for those people, even if you have no real relationship with them AT ALL. Not only did I get closer with my peers, but I also got closer to myself. While we were in Washington I started watching everyone have fun and laughing around them. One guy (who will remain nameless) decided to give me a new name, they called me Ramona. Why he landed on that name I STILL have no idea. Not only was my identity changed on this trip, but I got closer to people who I thought I would never know anything about. The two things that I will never forget about that trip were that I got a new name and how cold it was.



## Jordan Peskin

When told to write about anything that means something or has an impact on my life, my mind drew a blank. After a few days of thinking, I realized my problem was that there are too many things that define the person I am becoming. I came to the conclusion that religion is significant in my life, because it has gradually become a part of my identity.

Before making the decision of attending Chaminade College Preparatory, all I had ever known was Judaism. I did understand that at Chaminade that was not going to fly. I was agreeing to take religious courses and participate in Catholic procedures which I knew nothing about. Up until sixth grade, all I had ever heard were the ways of the Jewish people.

I started Middle School at Chaminade. Choosing to attend a Catholic School, my parents made a deal with me, that I had to stay in Hebrew School until Confirmation. In October of eighth grade, my Bat Mitzvah came around and I didn't really know what it meant. I understood that I had to learn Torah and I was "becoming a woman", but that was the extent of my knowledge. I wanted to quit Hebrew School after my Bat Mitzvah. I didn't feel like religion had made a big impact on my life. Before I could invest myself in Judaism, I had to understand what it meant to be Jewish.

When starting High School my parents gave me the option of quitting Hebrew School, because they were tired of driving me. I decided to stay, due to the fact my best friend went and I could see her. At Chaminade there are various activities and classes that I am required to take part in, that implement the teachings of Catholicism.

During these religious activities and classes, I would feel like I didn't have to listen because I was Jewish and it didn't pertain to me. I eventually realized that while I thought I was getting nothing out of these religious courses, they were actually driving me closer to Judaism. I found myself being confused in the classes and lost in the masses. By being confused and lost, I wanted to learn more about a religion that I could understand a bit more, which was mine, Judaism. It was my Sophomore year when I recognized the fact that I wanted nothing more than to study and focus more on my religion. I was required to take a Hebrew Scriptures course, where obviously, we learned about the Jewish people. The way my teacher would talk about the Hebrew Scriptures and Israelites, made me beyond proud to be Jewish. I was amazed at the way a woman of Catholic faith could talk about how amazing another faith really was.

Although Chaminade has educated me on a variety of religions, I know that through my educational journey, it has brought me closer to my religious journey. I realized over the past couple months that even though it is a school, Temple Ahavat Shalom is my home. It is my home outside of home, a place of security, a place where I have learned to love who I am and what I believe in. It truly is where I find that through my religious journey I can form my own identity.



## Joshua Daniel Rehhaut

I have been an active member at Temple Ahavat Shalom since I was in Pre-School. From the moment I was able to walk I was a fierce competitor, which was probably around the same time as my Pre-School years here. Since that point I faced the pressure to succeed. 14 years later and I still deal with the same challenge, the pressure of success, on a daily basis. Success is one thing in my life that I continually strive to achieve. Success is achieved through hard work, effort and even a little bit of luck. All of those attributes will get me to where I want to be. Oftentimes, people will not be satisfied with themselves unless society is pleased with them. However, I find pleasure when I am able to make myself happy, along with making the people around me happy. The pressure of achieving success has pushed me in several directions. On one end it propels me toward a goal and the hard work and effort pays off. On the other end, sometimes the pressure becomes too much and I have to rely on an emotional outpouring or as my parents describe it, “A Breakdown”, to rid my body of the stress that I put myself under.

Baseball and school are two of the many areas where I try to achieve success. I have been playing baseball my entire life. Anyone who knows me could tell you that I am a fierce competitor on the field and I love to win. 30 years from now when I look back at my childhood, the first thing I will remember is playing baseball. The sport has so much meaning to me other than the ball and bat. It is something that I work hard to become better at and to see the improvement is the ultimate feeling. Throughout Little League and even High School baseball, I witnessed the pressure of parents upon my teammates, usually resulting in negative effects. I am pleased to say that my parents never placed any overlying pressure on me to do things a certain way or do things I didn't want. They wanted me to learn through doing and gave me all the tools to succeed. They give me freedom to do what I want in baseball and in most aspects of life, for that matter. However, there is a tremendous amount of pressure that I still carry upon my shoulders due to my lofty self-expectations. I have noticed that I oftentimes put myself in situations where I put pressure on myself to succeed, sometimes too much pressure. The result is a lot of hard work and determination. Many times this is a very good thing, resulting in positive things and lessons learned. As a young competitor who is driven by my own desire for success, the pressure comes from me. I see this in many of the things I do in and outside of school and baseball.

I am driven to succeed in school because of the pressure I put on myself. I work hard and study hard, even pulling all-nighters every now and then. This leads me to be too prepared and those of you who know what an IUE is, know what I am talking about. I have found that it is in school where pressure has the most negative affect on me. When I don't succeed in school, I feel the pressure pushing down on me. The pressure puts thoughts in my mind like “I'm not going to succeed” or “how am I supposed to get into college with this score?”. It's times like these where I have mini-meltdowns. With any problem, there is always a solution. When I have mini-meltdowns, I know I have a great support group consisting of my friends and family. They help me get over whatever trouble I am having. My friends and family are my biggest fans and their commitment to me is why I will always strive for success and be the very best person I can be. I will continue to push through all of the things in my way until I reach where I want to go.

Though pressure takes a toll on me, it has made me a better person who is self-reliant and determined to get what I deserve. With all the ambition inside me, I know that I can push myself through anything to achieve what I want. “A dream doesn't become reality through magic; it takes sweat, determination and hard work.”



## Maxwell Scott Seltzer

Hello everyone and welcome. My TAS experience has been different from most of my friends over here. I know that they started here during Kindergarten and some of them even earlier than that. However, my story is different. When I was younger, I went to a more conservative Temple for a few years. I went to Religious School and attended some services, yet I didn't feel very involved. After that I guess I could say I took a few years off of Judaism before arriving here at TAS.

Ever since my first Tuesday night class in Ms. Koyman's class, I have felt a sense of the community. By that time, everyone in my class had learned the basics of the Hebrew alphabet and here I was starting at square one. Over time I caught up with the rest of my classmates in our Hebrew progression. To this day, I can still clearly recall the immense amount of joy that came with passing my first prayer, Ma'ariv Aravim. That day began my Jewish transformation that I am still undergoing to this day.

Throughout the Middle School years, we spent a great deal of time learning about Jewish history and its importance. Those years, especially seventh grade, were some of the most enlightening for me. Now, this year's Social Justice Program has definitely shaped my own identity and who I seek to be in the future.

Over this past year, I have come to understand the significance of standing up for what I believe in and how even the smallest actions can make a difference. During the L'Taken trip to Washington D.C., we were invited to pick Social Justice issues to pursue and write speeches about. This was the first instance in a long time, in which I could actually pick a topic I felt very passionately about and apply both my knowledge and Jewish culture in order to voice my own opinion. Not only was the trip refreshing and inspirational, it was also a time for our group as a whole to bond together. Actually, that may have been the first time that I talked to some of my classmates. Overall, it was an extraordinary experience that I will never forget.

Needless to say, I am grateful to be a part of this awesome community and I hope to further develop my Jewish identity beyond this Confirmation ceremony. Thank you.



## Stephanie Meghan Shaw

About five years ago, I sat on the other side of this bimah. Being eleven years old, my attention span wasn't exactly able to handle twenty speeches from teenagers proclaiming their views on Judaism and life. However, for about five minutes, I sat intently listening. My brother spoke with eloquence and charisma, no surprise to anyone who'd previously met him. These five minutes listening to him seemed to define my entire life up to that point; listening, observing, admiring.

Now, unlike most, I am fortunate to have a role model with whom I grew up with. Be it putting on his own concerts, being known school wide for his effervescent personality or writing a book, my brother is someone I'm proud to know, let alone be related to. His speech was captivating and everyone seemed to be interested in what he had to say. Being eleven years old, I knew only that I admired him.

Middle School. Middle School is an awkward time for everyone. Girls quickly try to find their cliques and boys start wondering why they ever believed in cooties at all. However, Middle School is also a time when jealousy takes form, maturity begins and you begin to think for yourself. During this awkward transitioning period I went to Jewish summer camp. I experienced the time of my life, found independence and ways to incorporate the pillars of Judaism into my everyday life. For example, Tikkun Olam, the Jewish idea of repairing the world, is something I strive to do every day.

As a girl, I never saw myself as a follower. I enjoyed being a leader, helping people when they needed it, being listened to and respected. I liked to be heard, when I had the chance. Perhaps it was because I came home to a rowdy, talkative teenage boy at every night's dinner table. Slowly but surely, however, I found my voice.

Anyone who has met me in recent years would never label me as shy or introverted, because I am not. Nor have I ever really been so. But now, as a sixteen year old Confirmand, I can speak my mind, share ideas and stand up for what I believe in, without a twinge of doubt or hesitation. It seems that growing up with loving and supportive parents and someone as wild as my brother, has taught me to find my voice. Be it loudly or quietly. Temple Ahavat Shalom has provided me with a lifetime of memories and best friends. It is the people up here with me today that I have learned to grow with and find out who it is I want to become. Time here, though often dreaded, was never wasted. I look forward to continuing my search for individuality, with the support of this Confirmation Class and the rest of you here today. Thank you!



## Ariella Rachel Tiber

“When it hurts to look back, and you're scared to look ahead, you can look beside you and your best friend will be there” – author unknown. About thirteen years ago, I had met my best friend that has been there by my side through thick and thin and that is Stephanie Shaw. She has been my friend since I started coming to Temple Ahavat Shalom in Pre-School. She is my person, my sister, my love, my anger and she is my best friend. I don't know what I would do without her. She has made such an impact on my life. I don't know what life would be like if she never entered it. She has always been there for me, whether it was in the ER that one time, or just going through a break-up. So, I just wanted to dedicate part of my speech to you, Steph, for always being here for me and being one of the only people I could trust with my life.

This past February, my Confirmation Class and I went on a trip called L' Taken in Washington D.C., where we lobbied with Congress. I lobbied for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender rights. Having been able to fight for LGBT rights and tell Congress my opinion on the subject, was such a life changing experience. Having so much passion for LGBT rights and being given the opportunity to write down what was on my mind and then read it to Congress, was absolutely amazing. I am so grateful that I got the chance to experience something not many people get the opportunity to do.

My family. I don't know what I would do without them. To my brothers, you guys make my life quite interesting. Without you guys, I would probably have the most boring life ever. We are always going out of control. We are taking weird videos and pictures. I just wanted to thank you guys for being the best two brothers a sister could ask for. I also wanted to say thank you so much to my amazing parents, for your love and support. Although you make my life tough sometimes, I wouldn't be where I am without you. You have inspired me so much in many different ways, to become the person I am today. I cannot thank you enough for that.

I'm sad that my Hebrew School days have come to end, but all that means is that my life is ready for a new beginning. As people say, “When one door closes; another opens.”



## Ethan Richard Turer

I would like to dedicate this speech to my Mom. I love her and couldn't imagine my life without her. Thank you for being my friend when I needed someone to talk to. You are the guiding light of my life that has always been there for me. Thank you for giving my life meaning.

What has made me the way I am today? I am defined by my actions, learn from my experiences and live for myself, my family and my loved ones. This July 31<sup>st</sup> will be the 8<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of my dad's death. Many things come to my mind when I think of that tragic day. I remember crying like I never had before. I remember feeling numb like life had no purpose and that it never would again. Just like the switch between BCE and CE, July 31, 2005, was my year Zero, was my switch between childhood and adulthood. I remember driving to Las Vegas with my Mom and listening to the radio. This guy was running his mouth about how messed up kids are these days because all their fathers left them. He said that because they didn't grow up with a father figure that they were going to turn out bad. I felt angry, not because of what he said, but because I did have a father figure in my life. He was the best dad anyone could ask for. All that I have of him now are memories, memories that will be with me for the rest of my life. I remember at the funeral people coming up to me with their condolences. I don't remember much of what they said, but the one thing I do remember hearing was "He is going to have to grow up so fast". The sad truth that my childhood had come to an abrupt halt at the young age of 9 is where my journey begins. The reason why my journey starts here, is because this was my first major dose of reality that life isn't fair and I needed to grow up fast.

I've come a long way since the beginning of my journey. It hasn't been easy and life continues to throw challenges in my direction. Some say that everything happens for a reason. I disagree. I think that things don't happen for a reason. There's no reason why my father had to be taken away from me. There's no reason why the Holocaust had to happen.

So what about God? What is it? Is it a man up in the sky or a supernatural being that created life? Personally I believe that God created the universe, made the earth and then just spun the top of life that continues to spin today without interruption. That at least explains to me why there are good things and bad things that happen in the world.

What is our purpose? Since I began adulthood I've learned a lot. There's a lot of stress and responsibility that comes with growing up. I think though that my favorite part of being an adult is changing the world. You may not be able to change the whole world, but you can change the world for someone else. After my father passed away, I joined Our House, a group that helps thousands of grieving children, teens and adults as they embark upon their journeys to hope and healing. It helped me talk about death and move along in my grieving process. I had such fond memories of Our House, that I decided that I wanted to be a teen leader for a group of little kids whose parents have also died. Every other Thursday I am able to make a difference in these kids' lives. And that is my purpose in life. I believe that what doesn't kill you makes you stronger and that my father is looking down on me today happy, happy that I've gotten this far on my journey and that no matter what hurdles life throws my way, I will overcome. So what defines me? I am defined by my actions, learn from my experiences and live for myself, my family and my loved ones.





## Tyler Harris Wainfeld

In the past, it has not been clear to me what my connection to Judaism is. But that does not mean that I do not know about Judaism, the holidays and the Torah. I have been coming here every week since I was in first grade and twice a week from fourth to seventh. During those classes I learned about the holidays, like Passover and Hannukah, the famous people in the Torah, like Moses and Abraham and the morals we learn from stories. Now that I am in High School I have learned about more contemporary ideas in Judaism, as well as how Judaism relates to me personally. Yet after all of this time, I still didn't feel a connection to Judaism. This would all change.

One day in ninth grade, I went to a meeting for a Jewish youth group called AZA. I learned that night what being Jewish meant to those people in that room. They saw being Jewish as a connection that nobody else in the world shared with them. As Jews, they saw themselves as brothers and they made me feel like one of their brothers. It only took one meeting, but almost everybody in that room knew my name and wanted to be my friend. It was at that moment that I began to believe in what they believed too. Being Jewish is special. It draws you to people who you would never meet otherwise, leading to lasting friendships with countless people. The people that I met that night I still know and keep in touch with and I have met many others in the past two years, both locally and around Southern California.

A principle that is stressed to a great extent in Confirmation is that of Social Action. This was emphasized in our trip to Washington D.C., in February, that focused on lobbying members of Congress, to pass bills that would help to better our society. I learned much about many different topics while there, including hunger and poverty. This principle is stressed very much in AZA as well. Our chapter spends a great deal of time figuring out which organizations to help out and donate to. One of the organizations that we donated our time to this year is Sherut L'olam. Sherut L'olam is located out of JCA Shalom in Malibu and is a big part in helping to keep the camp beautiful. The teens that run it help lead a day of service for Jewish teens known as J-Serve. This year, on April 28<sup>th</sup>, my chapter went to J-Serve day and helped to make fences for gardens at the camp. The food that will be grown there will be donated to SOVA and other organizations that help those in need. I learned much from both of these experiences and hope to apply this new knowledge into my life.

Overall, I would say that my life is drastically different from what it was four years ago. I used to be quite naïve about Judaism, but after going through Confirmation and being in AZA, it is clear to me what it truly means. Having fellow Jews who I can call friends and repairing the world are what make Judaism what it is. I only hope that I can take what I have learned and turn it into something that will have a lasting effect.





## Noah Gray Weinberg

“The Caged Bird Sings Of Freedom” said Maya Angelou. Everybody in this world is in the cage we call society. I am a man who does not believe in caging people meant to fly. I will read a poem that I wrote that describes me as a person and my community.

I sit upon a nest where my body lies  
A nest full of sticks and twigs and branches and leaves  
The nest that supports me for my weight in this world  
As I grow my wings and build up courage  
The fear within my heart burns a healthy fire  
As the panic increases the nest gets stronger  
The sticks grow bigger and the branches become colossal with support  
Trembling with terror, I step onto the ledge of the home that protects me  
My life behind me, I look to the unknown for inspiration  
I jump but the sticks and twigs and branches kept me from flying  
So I kept trying  
Each time I tried, the nest that held me in place grew weaker and weaker  
To the point where the nest had nothing but  
One branch  
One twig  
One stick  
One leaf  
All that was holding me back  
Vanished before my eyes  
So again I stood on the ledge  
With the unknown as my inspiration  
Trembling with terror as I open my wings  
And when I look back to see my last memory of my nest  
I was startled  
The nest that seemed to be weak and out of strength  
Was there in full support of my flight  
So I jumped  
With the unknown as my inspiration  
Trembling with terror and the world under my wings  
I flew  
But the unknown was no longer an inspiration  
And I was no longer trembling with terror  
But I flew regardless  
Right back to my nest

I am preparing my life for the journeys and obstacles awaiting me, but as a Jewish man and a child of Temple Ahavat Shalom, my nest, or everybody here tonight, will never be left. I will always be here, whether or not I am here physically, or in spirit, I will always call this my home.

With my world ahead of me, I look to the future and recognize that I am a man. What makes me a man is not a job, it is not how mature I am either, but who and what I surround myself with is what makes me that man. So to my friends and family, I thank you for making me a man.

