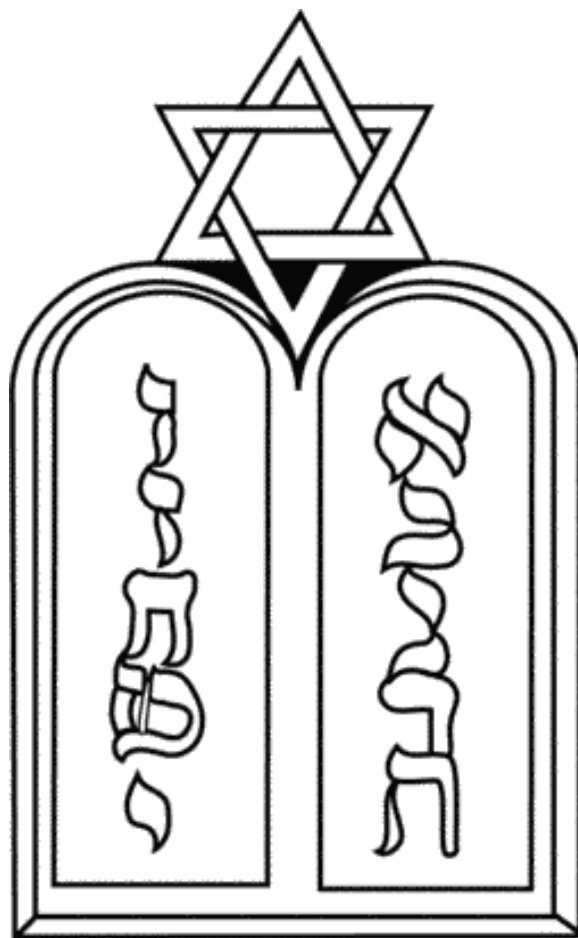


Confirmation Reflections 2016

June 11, 2016 5 Sivan 5776

*“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

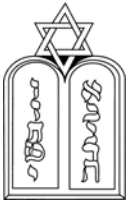
Barry M. Lutz, Senior Rabbi

Jennifer Roher, Cantor

Shawna Brynjegard-Bialik, Rabbi

Barry Krowne, President

Mira Netanya Brynjegard-Bialik



On the cusp of confirming my Jewish identity, it occurred to me that Judaism as a whole is defined by its great heroes: Abraham, Sarah, Moses, Miriam, and many others. My personal Jewish hero is Aquaman. Aquaman isn't actually Jewish in canon, but his principles are governed by a sense of goodness that forms the foundation of Judaism. A lot of people underestimate the meaning that this comic book character has to our lives.

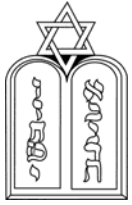
Aquaman's kingdom is the entirety of the oceans, and his ability to communicate with sea creatures gives him wisdom when he fights crime. But more importantly to me, Aquaman is an outcast. No one on the surface respects him or acknowledges his value; he's in the minority of people with superhuman abilities *and* people that don't fit the norms of society. This resonates with me — I'm Jewish, and most of the world is busy filling stores with Christmas decorations, Easter candy, and maybe a box of matzah for anyone else. I see my struggle for recognition in the world in Aquaman's struggle in his stories, and I've learned that, like Aquaman, I *am* important, regardless of others' opinions of my worth.

Confirming my Jewish identity is weird, considering that I'm still trying to figure out what it really means. But independent of what I believe about God or an afterlife, I know that I believe in something similar to the sense of purpose by which Aquaman lives his life — if something is wrong in society or the world, it's my job to fight against it. Judaism is full of heroes who've changed the world for the better, such as Moses's fight to end the slavery of the Jewish people. Heroes are only people that do the right thing. I know that there are still people in the world living in horrible conditions, and it's my job as a Jew to try and fix

that. When the environment is ruined by trash and waste, it's not going to get cleaned up unless someone rolls up their sleeves and does it. I've got the time.

I'm only 17, and not even out of high school yet. I'm still learning about my place in the world and what my future is going to look like. But I'm aware that the issues in government, cities, and forests are still going to be there when I leave college. Change is long-term and requires a lot of effort. But being Jewish inspires me to get educated about what's wrong in the world and do my best to fix it however I can. Aquaman is my hero because he represents what someone like me can do for the forces of good. As I grow, I expect my heroes will change, but my mission won't — as a Jewish adult, I'm going to make the world a better place.

Cassandra Eliana Cohen



Ralph Waldo Emerson once said, “To be yourself in a world that is constantly trying to make you something else, is the greatest accomplishment.” I think Emerson makes a fabulous point here because for me, being myself is the best that I can be. It brings me happiness and makes me feel whole. For some people, they find this happiness through God.

To me, God is the idea of love and hope in life, a way for me to escape from the outside world. At a young age, I was told that God is a part of my life and will always be there for me and listen to my prayers. However, due to a tragic loss at the age of ten, this all changed. A dear friend was diagnosed with brain cancer, so naturally I prayed to God that she would get better, and it did not work. I then thought I did something wrong. Why didn't God listen to me? Why didn't God answer my prayers? I did not understand. It was at this time that I needed to escape from reality now more than ever because I felt like God abandoned me, so I turned to my childhood obsession, Scooby-Doo.

For as long as I can remember, this show has always been a big part of my life. It made me feel happy when I was sad and made me feel like I had a friend to watch over me, it became my coping mechanism and my way of connecting with God in my own style.

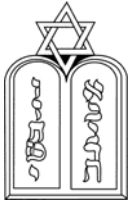
Some people pray, take deep silences, but me, no, I watch Scooby-Doo. Now, I know what you all are probably thinking, Scooby-Doo is a child's cartoon, why is a seventeen-year-old still obsessed with her childhood? Well, it is not just a cartoon for me; it is the main reason of why I am the way I am today. I have a total of four reasons.

One, he taught me to always accept who I am and embrace it. Two, he taught me

it's okay to be different, my true friends will love me for who I am. Three, I can always face my fears, and it is very important to have courage. And finally, never give up because there is always a brighter side to the darkness. As I was coping with the loss of my friend, these four reasons accompanied me and have continued to do so for the last seven years.

Being that Scooby-Doo has always been my savior because I felt like God was never on my side, it was such an amazing experience when that all changed by going to Washington D.C. This L'Taken trip really opened my eyes to all the wonders of Judaism and God. I could not have asked for a better adventure with my congregation, including Rabbi Lutz, Barb, and even Rabbi Shawna though she was not able to attend. It was not until Saturday evening when we had Havdalah at the Jefferson Memorial when I came to the realization that I was not alone because I was and am surrounded by loving people. It was at this moment that I realized God was always there and never against me. God is full of lessons to teach everyone, and I am so grateful that I finally learned mine.

Rebecca Alexandra Siegel Denny



“The best and most beautiful things in the world cannot be seen or even touched – they must be felt with the heart.” – Helen Keller

This quote that was said by Helen Keller has helped guide me to establish the way I feel about Judaism. After 15 years of belonging to Temple Ahavat Shalom, I truly do feel connected to the Temple, but on a more cultural level rather than spiritual. When I was younger, I never really questioned why I attended a preschool at a Temple. As I grew older, I continued to come to Temple on Sundays, and as I reached fourth grade, I came on both Sundays and Tuesdays. Twice a week I was able to be with some of my closest friends, learn from some great teachers, and just have fun. I continued on a day-to-day basis not questioning my Jewish values or what I thought it meant to be a Jew.

Around the time of my Bat Mitzvah, I started asking questions and not just blindly believing what I was being taught about Judaism. Since then, I feel I have matured a tremendous amount. Not only do I still love being Jewish, but I now have a better understanding of what being Jewish means to me. Although at TAS, I have been taught that there is a God that we can connect with through good and bad times, I have come to the conclusion that this is not how I view Judaism. To me, Judaism is not about God and his commandments, but rather about Jewish culture. I believe that Judaism stands for its history, family, friends, and the community it creates. Judaism isn't about what you can touch or see, but rather what you feel in your heart. When I enter the gates of TAS, I couldn't feel more connected. My heart truly belongs to this community. I look around and I see my childhood – my childhood friends, my innocent laughs, many scrapes on the

playground, and the endless amount of hours I would spend trying to get across the monkey bars.

These days I am adding to those beautiful memories, being a member of the TASTY board and all of the interactions I have with the board members and my peers. Since 9th grade I have been fortunate enough to TA on Sundays. Although it's occasionally a struggle to wake up early on a Sunday morning, once I arrive at school and see the joy and enthusiasm from my kindergarteners, my heart is filled with bliss. These wide-eyed, innocent children bring me back to when I was a five-year-old just starting to learn about my religion. It gives me great happiness to know that I have had some impact on their future at TAS and will someday look back with fondness on all that they have experienced with me.

This past year I attended one of the most amazing trips of my life, L'Taken. Being able to go on this trip with my childhood best friends, Rabbi Lutz, and Barb truly furthered my love for this religion. The experiences we shared from Shabbat, to a beautiful Havdalah service in front of the Jefferson Memorial, being able to learn about different important issues, and then go lobby for one of them is something I will never forget.

After my Bat Mitzvah, it was just expected that I would continue on with Confirmation. The main reason I was happy to do this was because I had heard so many great stories about L'Taken and how this trip would enrich your life. Now looking back at it, I am so glad I continued with my Jewish education, not only for L'Taken but also for the amazing friendships that have continued to flourish and the education I have received.

All of these aspects combined together have allowed me to fully grasp my understanding of what it is to be Jewish. I finally have realized that I don't have to see or

touch Judaism to have it live in my heart. Although, I want to believe that there may be some force out there guiding me through my life, I surmise that for right now my heart is telling me the truth.

Kaitlin Eells



Many of you know that I am not the most outspoken person. I tend to keep to myself most of the time, especially in big groups of people. Even if there is a class discussion and I have a strong opinion that I would like to share, I rarely do. I'm not sure why I feel so uncomfortable sharing. I think that I believed that my opinion, or anyone's, wouldn't make a difference on the situation we were discussing.

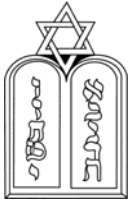
When I began Confirmation, I knew I would be going to D.C. to lobby about important issues, but I didn't know how impactful it would be for me. For years, Rabbi Lutz and the Confirmation Class have been visiting D.C. and sharing their opinions on important Social Justice Issues. Over the years, some of the Social Justice topics students wrote about were no longer options because these issues had been solved. I know that a group of teenage Jewish students weren't the ones who solved these issues, but they helped bring it to the attention of people who could help solve them, and I think that's really important and really cool.

The L'Taken trip I went on this past February impacted my life more than I thought it would, especially when I thought about it while writing my speech. Besides the amazing experience of exploring many incredible places in D.C., the best part of the trip was learning about all the Social Justice Issues in depth. I was shocked about the things I learned. Although I wasn't directly affected by most of the issues, I know they affect so many people and it made me passionate to be more informed about the subject. Even though in the end I only wrote about one issue, I am so glad I got to learn about the others so I could share my knowledge.

I learned that since not everyone is able to go to D.C. and lobby about Social Justice Issues, it is critical to spread the word about them so someone who is able to help fix the problem can. After reading my speech about abortion rights, I felt confident that I had made a small difference on the issue that would lead to big changes for the rights of women and their bodies. When I got home, I told so many people about what I learned. I still don't feel completely comfortable sharing things in front of my whole class, but I know that teaching people about what I had learned in D.C. would inspire them to make a difference.

After my experience in L'Taken, I feel so much more inclined to learn and share about Social Justice Issues. I now realize how important it is to contribute to discussions so everyone's opinion can be heard since it can make a difference. Confirmation and L'Taken taught me how important just one person's voice can be.

Justy Aaron Gluck



At almost 17, I only know a couple of things, one of which is the difference between a friend and an acquaintance. Friend is a word that is used so simply for a complex term, such as a person's Facebook friends. However, a friend is much more than that, what I just described was an acquaintance at best.

First, let me explain what an acquaintance is. To me, personally, an acquaintance is someone you can say a friendly hi to or maybe keep up a small conversation with them. An acquaintance is the type of person you can feel lonely with, even though you are with them right in that moment. They aren't always there for you, they call you a "friend" and may view you as that, but they don't possess all of the qualities you look for in a friend.

This brings me to the idea of what a friend really is, which is hard to describe. A friend is someone you know will always be there for you, through thick and thin. A true friend accepts you for who you are. One quote I really like is said by Dr. Seuss, "Be who you are and say what you feel, because those who mind don't matter and those matter don't mind." A true friend would never really judge you for who you are, while an acquaintance is more likely to leave you because of the way you act.

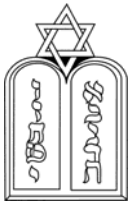
It is really important to trust yourself, to be who you really are, because the only one it matters to is yourself, and if someone doesn't like you for who you are, then they really aren't a friend after all. An important quality of a friend is the idea of trust. Trust is extremely important when deciding or not to accept a person as a friend. Trust gives people comfort knowing that the other person will follow through and save you in an instant. Without trust, there is no friendship, and there might not be anything at all between

two people.

One of the most important qualities, if not the most important, is just being able to have fun. If you are with someone you need to feel engaged but without trying too much. You need to feel included and be able to do anything with someone even if you don't like it but still have a good time. You could basically watch paint dry and still be able to create something fun out of it.

Really, what I'm trying to say is acquaintances are easy to find and we're surrounded by them every day. However, finding a friend is a difficult task and takes some time, but in the end it will be really worth it.

Shelby Rose Kaplan



Being Jewish is something that I am proud of. It is something that helped me find my voice. I was taught at a young age about all the oppression that the Jewish people faced. Due to these struggles, I learned the importance of standing up for myself and others. This was a lesson that followed me throughout my life. It was a lesson that made me who I am and who I want to be. I always try to stand up for myself and others because no one was there to defend my people during the Holocaust and at many other times. I was taught by my parents and my Temple that having a voice is one of the most important things. This is portrayed in one of my favorite songs that I learned here as part of teen choir. *Im ein ani li mi li*. "If I am not for myself, who will be for me, If I am only for myself, who am I, and if not now, when?" This is a quote by Hillel the Elder.

In choir, this has always been my favorite song, but I didn't realize why until I began writing this speech. Yes, the tune is great. Yes, it sounds nice. But really, it is the message that makes it my favorite. It is something I have been taught my entire life; something that I try to live by. It emphasizes the importance of being able to stand up for yourself as well as having a big enough heart to stand up for those that surround you. I believe that part of being Jewish is standing up for people who are too scared or have too much against them to be able to stand up for themselves.

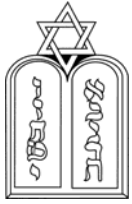
The first time I realized how to make this my life was when I joined a program called Youth and Government, and was part of my first mock trial case. It was when I made a speech on community service and its importance. I loved it, the feeling of fighting for what

is right. I love the feeling of speaking to a group of people and watching the gears in their minds turn as they think about what I said. I realized that I could take all the things I learned from being Jewish and use them in big ways.

In the future I want to be a lawyer and without the support of my community, without the strength that I learned from this community and from being Jewish, I never would have become who I am.

L'Taken only strengthened this passion that I have. Being in Washington D.C. and lobbying to congressmen was like a look into the future. A look at what I want my life to be. I know that I can make all this happen because I have been taught what I need for my future. So I stand here today, after another year of training for my future. I stand here because without this Temple and community that has taught me as I have grown, I would not be half the person I am. I would not be excited and passionate about the future. So I stand here and I thank each of you who have taught me, using my heritage to shape my future.

Allen Jerome Katz



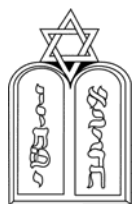
Nature forms the animal, blocks build the building, and a community shapes the child. Throughout my upbringing, the people and community surrounding me have formed my religious identity and social identity. The assertion summarizes how one's lifestyle and nurturing reflects their personality and actions. This can be interpreted to mean that one's true formation is derived from their surrounding community that one is raised in. Thus, throughout my journey through the TAS Hebrew Education I have gathered different skills and attributes from different people.

Since starting my Jewish Education in ECEC, the early bonds of friendship have greatly expanded. These early encounters imposed lessons of communication and trustworthiness upon me, and these lessons helped guide me on the road to my Bar Mitzvah in the fourth grade. In the beginning of this process I was very nervous because I did not know many of my peers since I didn't attend Hebrew School for grades kindergarten to third. Overtime, I developed a better relationship with the kids in my class, and now it is the highlight of my week to go to Hebrew School.

Also, from becoming Bar Mitzvah I received an education in reading Hebrew, which eventually led to me being able to understand the prayers. I especially enjoy going back every week to see my favorite rabbi, BB-Cream (A.K.A. Rabbi Lutz.) Moving to TAS High has been a catalyst in developing some of my best memories. From being at rehearsal for Shpiel, it has taught me to be determined, dedicated, and to value teamwork. Additionally, discussing heavy topics in Beit T'Shuvah has taught me to think more about making the right decision.

Overall, I feel that without the guidance of the community I wouldn't have been able to achieve the confidence to go through a Jewish Education.

Stefanie Krausz



At the beginning of the school year at Temple, we were given the journal prompt, "This I Believe."

What I wrote at the time was, I believe in the power of inner strength to overcome obstacles. I believe that words can give us as much strength as easily as it they can break us down.

In my life, my friends are the ones I can always go to. I love talking, and I feel truly connected to my friends whenever we converse together. Through Temple, I have found lifelong friends and the L'Taken trip only brought us closer together. I appreciate the fact that we can have discussions about God and respect that we have different opinions. I enjoy having these discussions that make me think and see things from someone else's perspective. I find that even when I don't expect it, I have much in common with my closest friend.

Besides that, music has a very profound role in my life. Having similar tastes in music with my friends is very important to me. This isn't very hard since I like all music. I appreciate the work that people put into writing lyrics and composing music. Though many artists do not write their own lyrics, someone did. I feel connected to songs that hold emotion that I can relate to. I appreciate the different types of music, just as I respect the different opinions of my friends.

If Temple has taught me anything, it's tolerance. This lesson, which has been taught to me since I was very young, is the core of my moral code. Though it was not part of my original "This I Believe" statement, I also believe that learning tolerance at such a

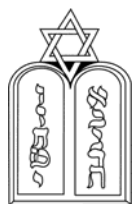
young age has taught me how to live in contentment. I not only find joy in being so open to opinions, but I also find desire to speak my own mind.

On the L'Taken trip, we advocated for issues that are our close to our hearts. As part of a group of five, I wrote on the topic of torture and advocated for the full release of the Torture Report. My reasons for supporting this cause are plentiful. I prefer sharing my personal beliefs one-on-one, to ensure a connection to the other person, and let them know that I'm also listening to their opinion. Advocating for the things I believe in makes me feel like I'm doing my part in healing the world. Similarly, my opinions of God are specific to me.

I enjoy hearing about the Jewish perspective of God, knowing that it is not definitive and denying my own opinion. My opinion of God has changed since kindergarten, as documented in my Confirmation journal.

I believe that our beliefs cannot define us unless we outwardly express them. I tend to avoid public speaking, but I guess this is an exception. I am so grateful for all that Hebrew School has taught me over the years, and I have honestly been looking forward to this day for many years. I am so glad to finally see it come, but shortly go. I will cherish all I have learned here for the rest of my life, and share that with the friends I have made here.

Michael Joseph Lertzman



For those of you who don't know me, my name is Michael Lertzman, and for those of you who do, well, I'm sorry. For the ones that do know me, there is more to me than you think. As I am sure that some of you have noticed, eighth grade until recently was a rough time. To this day, I still am unsure as to why. Reflecting back on the last couple of years, I have come to realize that the majority of the reason was because I was trying to figure out who I am. My variety of extracurricular activities has played a large role in making me the person I am today.

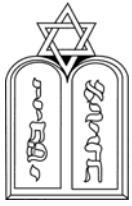
I started out at this Temple at the age of two, as a young lad in the Mommy and Me Class with my fellow peers. All of these lovely people sitting behind me play a huge role in the underlying reason of why this crazy kid is standing in front of all of you this evening, telling you about his life. Growing up at Temple was such an amazing experience for me. Whenever I was having a bad time, I always remembered that I had Temple to support me. I remember not loving Temple all that much when I was younger, but now it is such a pleasure to come every Tuesday and spend two hours with my friends. Looking back on this, I have grown so much as a person and realize that even when I am going through tough times, I have a place to turn to for love and support.

Along with having Temple, going to Camp Alonim over many summers also changed my life. Being at a Jewish camp with close friends is such an amazing experience, and has really helped me realize how important it is to be Jewish. Friday night services with my closest friends are memories that I will never forget. Camp has really opened my eyes to finding out who I really am. It has made me feel more

comfortable with myself and not so self-conscious about my insecurities. Camp is a place for me to feel 100% me. I can be independent, yet fully supported by other people at the same time, and I could not ask for anything better. If I did not have camp to support me through those rough years, I would not be the same person standing in front of you all today. Being surrounded by so many other Jews and the Jewish culture really helped me appreciate my Jewish Identity. I finally understand that wherever I go, there's always someone Jewish; just like the song!

Not only has camp brought me lifelong friendships, but being a part of this community has also given me amazing relationships. Going on our L'Taken trip has really made me connect with my Confirmation Class in so many ways. We advocated for Social Justice and that really opened my eyes to getting more involved in my community and being aware of the world around me. Having Havdalah at the Jefferson Memorial reminded me of camp and really made me connect with my Jewish Identity. Along with feeling connected with my community, it has also made me mature as a person. I have realized that I have a responsibility to uphold my Jewish culture, and I could not be more proud to embrace it, especially because I have finally figured out who I really am.

Heather Nicole Malinovitz



I spent years as a kid waiting to grow up. I was excited to graduate high school, go to college, get my driver's license and go to D.C. for L'Taken. And I have to say, I'm no longer as excited. Even though, I still have yet to leave high school and I am still waiting for my license, I am no longer counting the days until then. Today, I understand the responsibility that comes with each of those things. However, the one thing I have been looking forward to for years and did do was go on the L'Taken trip. It was a life changing experience.

It was the first time I was away from my parents and not watched by any other family members. I stayed in a hotel room with some of my closest friends. One surprising fact about it was that it was the first time I have ever seen snow. To be honest, it kind of sucked. It was cold and it was basically just ice. Anyone who knows me knows I hate ice. My Starbucks order is literally a venti passion tea lemonade with no ice. But other than the snow, it was a life changing experience to see the history of my country.

We visited places such as the National Archives, the Jefferson Memorial, the Holocaust Museum and the Smithsonian. The Smithsonian was special to me because I saw a cousin that I have only seen a handful of times. We also saw the White House (even though we did not get to go in). It was so cool to see the place where our President lives. It was smaller than I expected. We all got to see the Secret Service. They were so cool! A bunch of us got pictures of them. It was important to me to see our history, national landmarks, and where laws are made. It also marked one of the only times I did not room with my sister, Jenny.

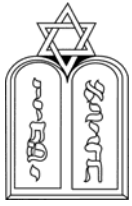
As most of you already know, but all of you will now know, we are twins. A lot of people ask me about what it is like to be a twin. My sister and I get questions like: Do you know what the other is thinking? Can you feel each other's pain? Do you know when the other is in trouble? Do you know what I tell them?

No. To me that sounds just as much as science fiction as it does to you.

What I can tell you is that being a twin means you have a special bond. She is my best friend, and I would do anything for her. It was, however, an amazing experience to be apart from each other. She would admit it too. For a couple days, we got a lot more independence than we usually do. I owe that experience to L'Taken.

As many of you parents already know, the trip is truly life changing. Whether we came back with a new appreciation for America, made new friends, or learned basic skills such as how to be independent and live with different people, we all came back different. In addition to this trip, this whole year has been life changing and has brought us all together.

Jennifer Rose Malinovitz



When I first came to Temple Ahavat Shalom in third grade, I honestly didn't like the change. It was too different from what I was used to, and I missed my old Temple. The only thing that stayed the same was that I had my sister by my side. However, as the years passed by I grew accustomed to the change, and then I began to love this Temple. It took some time but I eventually made new friends and tried new things.

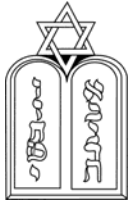
Part of trying new things has been playing around with what I believe, not only as a Jew, but also simply as the person I am. Over the years I have bounced around to believing in the traditional God, to no God, to a God that I created, and then to a God that created everything then sat back to enjoy his work. However, I learned that no matter what I believe or what anyone else in the world believes, nothing else matters but happiness – my happiness and the happiness of everyone around me. The truth about God doesn't really matter because we'll probably never know the truth. And what's the point in wasting your time to find the truth if the "truth" is fueled by other people's opinions. My own truth about God is I don't know what to believe and that's an acceptable truth too. Anything that you believe about God can be valid through your own beliefs and opinions.

My personal opinion of what Judaism means to me is not about how I feel about God, but about accepting others no matter what, and making sure everyone around me, as well as myself, are as happy as possible. Because what's the point in life if you're miserable all the time? There is none. I believe that satisfaction by helping others or making them happy can make me happy as well.

I have also learned, to a certain extent, how to achieve happiness. A big part in gaining happiness is to help others who need help, to make others feel good, and to simply treat people the right way. Another big step is to get rid of anything that makes you unhappy. If a certain person or thing makes you unhappy, all you have to do is get away from them. However, people also sabotage their own happiness quite easily and without even realizing it. Much of this goes back to arguments about God and His existence. However, happiness can also be sabotaged by many other things as well.

Maybe we'll never know why people would do such things to sabotage their own happiness, and that of others as well. However, if each one of us takes at least one step towards happiness, maybe we can all help each other and ourselves to finally reach ultimate happiness.

Ariana Michner



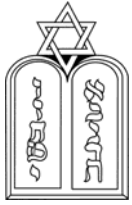
Have you ever heard the expression, "It changed my life?" I am proud to be able to say that BBYO truly has changed my life.

BBYO, or The B'nai Brith Youth Organization, is the world's largest pluralistic Jewish Youth Movement in the entire world. Its goal, as stated by its mission statement, is to provide more Jewish teens with more Jewish experiences. However, what makes the organization so appealing to its members isn't its ability to provide them with Jewish opportunities, but instead its commitment to providing these opportunities in a way that makes the teen feel like they are making a difference, because the truth is that they really are.

When I am asked what BBYO means to me, I always have the same response. It is my second home. Somewhere where I can go and be my complete self with the people I love the most. I have become a more outgoing, confident, and an outright better person. An average organization can just sit you down and tell you what you need to know in order to find your Jewish identity and how you can become a leader in your community. But BBYO does it differently; it has not taught me to be a leader through seminars or sitting in classrooms to learn, it has taught me through the relationships I have formed. After attending regional weekends and events, with people from all over Southern California, I can definitely say that it is one of the coolest things I have ever experienced. Meeting so many different people, forming connections with people you never would have thought to even talk to, and leading or being involved in some of the most meaningful and life-changing programs are what makes this organization truly amazing.

Before I joined two years ago, I had a bad impression of what this organization was actually about. Watching my two brothers be very involved all throughout high school, made me think that it wasn't really my thing. But once I started to meet people my age and the girl I am now proud to call my best friend, I had to at least try this so called amazing youth organization. Going in as a very shy girl and really not knowing anyone was hard, but after experiencing all of these things that BBYO has to offer, I can say with complete confidence that it has shaped me to be the person I am today. Not only has it changed my social self, but also my religious self. In that, it has turned the action of praying into more of an enjoyable time with my friends rather than a chore bestowed upon me by my peers. Creating new meaning to my religious identity and to my life, just as my Confirmation Class has done for me over the years.

Aliana Jade Pipolo



One of my passions is crime solving, more specifically Forensic Pathology. Surprisingly enough, Jeffrey Dahmer got me interested in this topic. Although I don't want to go down the same path as him, reading about him opening people up really fascinates me. I've always loved anatomy, but I never considered being a surgeon because I wouldn't want to feel responsible for anyone's death. I figure if I work with dead people, it would be hard to be responsible for their death. My fascination with the human body and how everything works, (or in this case, doesn't work) has inspired me to follow this path.

Forensic Pathologists should be respectful of the people they are working with. The coroner in NCIS, Ducky, is a great example of a Forensic Pathologist who uses Jewish values because he is extremely respectful of the bodies of the deceased. In our Jewish tradition, if a family member of the deceased cannot stay with the body before it is buried, an employee of the funeral home, or a member of the *chevra kadisha*, will stay with the body.

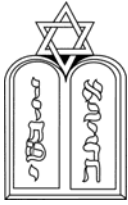
I feel like I would be great at being a Forensic Pathologist because I understand the serious need for respectfulness in a situation like this. While the anatomy is fascinating, I would remind myself that this was once a human life. (I would not want anyone to mess with my body once I'm dead.) Actually, I feel that by solving a crime, it would be very respectful on another level. It would give closure to the incident, which might give some relief for grieving families.

While the science of using amazing tools to work on human anatomy is compelling,

it is important to not lose sight of the fact that this body once housed a human soul that had hopes and dreams, friends and family. I feel it is important to not only have people at Jewish funeral homes who practice our traditions, but to have people in the Coroner's office who live our Jewish values as well.

When I'm older, I hope I am able to combine these two things that I love, so I can enjoy my job much more.

Bria Michelle Rosenberg



My grandmother is the strongest person I know, and also the most stubborn.

This woman has suffered a great deal; she has dealt with death and disease throughout her life and is currently fighting the battle against pancreatic cancer.

Yet, she is still the happiest and most positive person I know. She looks at life through the brightest rose-colored glasses, going day by day. Now, let me tell you just how amazing this woman is.

This woman, up until she fell ill with breast cancer last January, walked two miles on the treadmill every day. She was almost 90. Seven or eight years ago, grandma took us on a family trip to Alaska. She had a broken arm, yet she hiked two miles with all of us literally up the side of a mountain. It was more of a climb than a hike. I vividly remember our tour guide following her the whole way, standing behind her pushing her up the side of this steep mountain, because she was too stubborn to not go with us. I could go on and on...like the time she fell and cracked her butt bone, yet still went on a European cruise for two weeks, and didn't tell us until after she got back how badly she had hurt herself. This is a testament to the strength of this woman, both physically and mentally. I don't think I have ever heard her complain about anything in all my life. Whenever I am sad, or feel upset, I think of my grandma and her positive ways and everything she has gone through, and I don't feel bad anymore. I just smile, thinking of her saying, "I'm okay," even when we can see she is in pain.

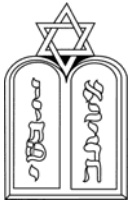
She has the biggest heart out of anyone I've ever met. It is filled with more love than imaginable. The love story of her and my grandfather is my favorite one ever, and one I

would like to share. He was a WWII veteran, and the year after the war, my grandma was having a New Year's Eve party. My grandfather was the cousin of a friend of grandma's. She opened the door, meeting my grandfather for the first time. He took one look at her and said, "You are the woman I'm going to marry." She told him he was crazy. They both ended up being right, as they got married exactly 5 months later, starting their life together. They had two children and were married for more than 60 years until the day my grandfather died. In his last couple of years, the love and support she gave my grandfather is incomparable to anything I've ever seen in life or even in any movie.

She may not have that much time left on this earth, but I feel absolutely blessed to have had her be such a large part of my life. She has been my babysitter, my playmate, and my best friend. More than anything, she has been an inspiration to me, and everyone who she meets. I know that whatever I end up doing in life, she will always look down upon me and give me the strength to do my best. I couldn't think of a more special way to honor her than to write about her for Confirmation. I am so glad she is still here to be able to experience this stepping-stone in my Jewish life with me.

I can only hope to be half the woman you are, Grandma. If I am blessed with even half of your strength and resilience, I know I will be okay in life. I love you more than words can express, Grandma. Thank you for everything.

Cayla Rose Rubin



Shalom! Shalom was probably the only Hebrew word I knew when I arrived in Israel. I think this word perfectly sums up my time on EIE. Thanks to 2 hours of daily Hebrew, I now know Shalom means, “Hello,” “Goodbye,” and “Peace.”

As I arrived for a life-changing opportunity to study abroad for the second semester of my junior year in Israel, I said, “Hello.” Hello to strangers I would soon call my best friends, hello to a new country 8,000 miles away that I would soon call a home away from home, and hello to the many experiences I was yet to partake in.

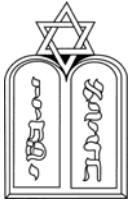
Now as I resume my life, which was jolted shut and replaced with a four month long fairy tale, I am saying, “Goodbye.” As I wrap up my EIE journey, I am saying goodbye to the people and country I love wholeheartedly. I am saying goodbye to being a silly American in a foreign country surrounded by loud and full of life Israeli’s, and hello to being just another silly American immersed in a culture of many, many other silly Americans. I am saying goodbye to trying to speak Hebrew in restaurants and subsequently always being responded to in English. I am saying goodbye to Ice Cafe, falafel, living with my best friends, taking spontaneous hikes at 1 a.m. in the morning. Saying goodbye to what seemed to be like a lifetime, but was actually just a life changing adventure.

Just as Shalom means hello and goodbye, I am saying goodbye to Israel, but hello to a fresh start and new beginnings, new best friends, and to new memories I will cherish and hold close to my heart for the rest of my life. I said hello to a five day hike across the Kineret to the Mediterranean Sea. Hello to spending a week in Poland where I learned not just of the tragic events of the Holocaust and Nazi regime, but how the Jews came out

even stronger, and I felt immensely proud. I said hello to celebrating Purim and Passover in Israel. I said hello to so much, I never thought I would ever have to say goodbye. EIE was possibly the first time in my life where I felt completely at peace with myself and my surroundings, as I truly feel I have grown, learned, and loved harder than ever before. And if I were to only take away one piece of knowledge from this life changing adventure, though I took away much more, it would be that I am proud to be Jewish.

In my Jewish History class we often talked about what it means to be a member of Am Yisrael, the people of Israel. I think that by exploring who I am as an individual and continuing to grow into my Jewish Identity I will always be an active member of Am Yisrael, regardless of where I live. Being Jewish has no limits, but I will still try to defy them.

Sarah Ashley Sculler



One thing that shaped my life is camp. Also, a thing from Confirmation that changed my life was L'Taken. The reason camp shaped me is because when I go I feel like a new person. I feel as if I am reborn every time I go. I have different experiences every time I go. L'Taken changed my life because of what I talked about which were LGBT rights.

One of the things that really opened my mind is when I found out that in 32 states people can't get jobs or go to certain colleges just because their LGBT. I think it's just wrong because, honestly, why does it matter what your sexual orientation or gender identity is? You are still a person.

Now, going back to camp, when we do Shabbat and the whole camp comes together as one, I feel like we become one big happy Jewish family. Now onto how I believed in God when I was little and how I believe in God now. When I was little, I believed that God had a specific figure such as nature or a person. The reason was because when I was little I was told to draw a picture of what I thought God looked like. And so me being a kid, I automatically thought then that God had a figure. But now, I have a new perspective of my beliefs in God.

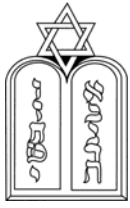
My reason for this is because my family members have suffered through a lot of heart-wrenching and powerful things, which supposedly God just let happen. So I guess I still believe in God, but whether or not I trust God and put my hopes and dreams in God's hands, I don't know. Now even though I'm still not sure my perspective on God I wrote this prayer to God or in other words a question I could have for God.

Dear God,

I would want to know when people are being mean or rude to others so I can try and stop them, but I guess asking for something like that is impossible because it's like asking for a super power, which I won't and can never have. Although I can say and do my best with what you gave me, which is my own voice. Now, I also want to know something and this question will never be answered no matter how hard, or how many times I ask, but why do you choose the good people to go and keep the bad ones? Why do you even give cancer or any type of disease; what did they do? My reason that I ask is because I know many people who didn't deserve to go when they did. WHY?! Why did they leave many people who cared for them and loved them? Why did you pick them?

Now these are the big questions – although, some of them may never be answered.

Vania Brandy Soleimani



At my Bat Mitzvah I read the words of the Exodus "הי" רשא יהי." This Translates to "I Am Who I Am." This phrase is what I live my life by. Through life, I have faced many good moments as well as difficult moments. Many things have formed the person I am today.

At the beginning of last summer, I was in a mental state where I didn't believe in God, not one bit. I based my life off of what I wanted to do. One day, I was vacationing with my family towards the end of the summer in the Dominican Republic. That night, when I went to sleep I had a dream. It wasn't just any type of dream. It felt real. It touched my life. The dream was that I was going through hardships left and right in life that I felt like there's no good anymore.

In the dream, I was standing in the bathroom crying, looking in the mirror. I asked this one thing, "God, are you there? Give me a sign, any sign. Please I just need to know if you're here." Then the light of the bathroom started to flicker. I asked again, "God is that you? Could you please give me another sign that it is you?" The sink then turned on and started running.

Since the day I had that dream, my life has changed. Yes, I still have my bad days and the good ones, but this dream helped me realize that not only is God always there, but people that love me are always there as well. Even if I feel like nobody is there, I have everyone I need by my side.

I have also realized that there will always be bad and good in life, but that's just the way God planned it. God plans everything in our paths of life. Everything has a God given

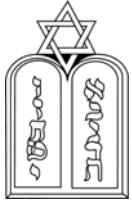
reason.

Another thing that has really changed my perspective in life was our Confirmation Class, L'Taken trip. In D.C., we were put into groups to focus on major problems in the world. But that wasn't the part that really changed my life. The part that changed my life was this. In this Confirmation Class of 2016, some joined this year, some a few years ago, some since pre-school. In D.C. none of that mattered. We became even closer as a family. That's what changed me.

I've learned that time doesn't mean anything. Lastly, there's one person from this Temple who really changed my life, views, and value – Jessica from Beit T'Shuva. Jessica has been there through my life, through everything. She knows my good and my bad. She knows my whole life story to be honest. I've always known that I can count on her for anything. I can be completely honest with her. She always knows how to help me with whatever situation and I know she always wants the best for me. Just like anyone else who cares for me.

Through the years, these things have made major impacts on my life. They have all taught me many things. Most of all, they have taught me to live life to the fullest. Enjoy the little things in life. Take chances. Just have fun and be happy. Because we only have one life, we are not promised tomorrow. So, live it up and have a good time with it.

Benjamin Abraham Tiber



My favorite television show is The Walking Dead. Even though, this television show just seems to be about a world that has been taken over by zombies and the humans try to survive this apocalypse, there is a much deeper and more significant meaning behind it. The show depicts a world in which civilization and government regulation is completely destroyed. The security of what the government provides and what society has to offer are gone.

Most people would think that the main challenge would be fighting the zombies and surviving the apocalypse. However, what I have come to realize, is that the biggest challenge is not the zombies, but the other humans. Without a government or a stable civilization, people release their inner-anarchist. The show tells a story about how a group of survivors work together in creating a stronger community and bond. Most of the people they come across are dangerous and violent, and only kill to survive. The people within the community learn how to work as a group and function as a strong community. Without a government or a strong society, people lose their self-control, and don't understand how to work with each other.

Well, although I have never experienced a zombie-apocalypse, I do however, know what it's like to be a part of a close community. One of the most important parts about being a Jew is getting involved with the people around you. Over the past 15 years here at TAS, this has been one of the topics I have thought about the most. Judaism is very concentrated around the idea of people connecting and bonding with one another to create a community. Judaism has taught me how to create a stronger bond with my friends

and family and has helped guide me to find that, communities are what keeps the world go round.

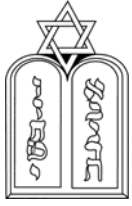
The Jewish culture has led me towards the people I love and care for the most. Without this community, I would be headed nowhere. As some of you may know, I grew up with ADD and OCD. Going to regular school where the staff and administrators only care about the student's educational statistics rather than the student's mental health and psychology, would only make my situation worse. I would be punished or shunned by the people who work there just for being who I truly was.

However, when I come here, I can truly be human. I don't have to fake my way through things in order to earn something that doesn't even define me. I'd get to spend time with the people who have been by my side along the road for my entire life, and the amazing staff who work here would actually enjoy their job, and enjoy our company.

The L'Taken trip was truly a one in a lifetime experience, not just because we got to roam around D.C., and lobby to congressmen, or go on tours, but because I got to do that with the people who have never left my side, and have been there for as long as I can remember.

Keeping this long lasting connection allows for us to continue friendships, and pass it onto our children and grandchildren. By teaching our kids, and the generations that follow, the importance of community, and the importance of bonding with each other, will allow for better learning and stronger community bonds. As the strength of a community develops, the better we can define who we are.

Madison Tilner



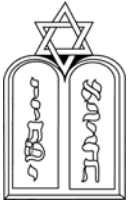
Ever since I was little I've loved to play pretend. I have such clear memories of my best friend Taylor and I playing in my backyard, pretending to be animals, pop stars, and a couple times even sister witches. We pretended we were in the movie "Twitches" and started to make up our own spells. I remember a couple times when my mom would tell us to come inside for a dinner or for a snack, we always stayed in character. We were so consumed in our imaginary world that we wouldn't want to stop. We'd cast spells on our food, call each other by our made up names, and continue to pretend we were in a different world even though our game had ended. We were passionate. Passionate about everything we did. I see myself as having the same passion now as I did when I was a kid, which is something not everyone can say.

Passion is defined by an intense desire or enthusiasm about something, about anything. In this time in our lives, we are often asked what we're passionate about. When deciding on a college or a major, we are asked what our passions are. When we were in D.C., we were asked to pick a social justice issue we were passionate about. When writing this speech, we were told to write on something we're passionate about. For me, these kinds of questions are extremely difficult to answer.

Although I see myself as an extremely passionate person, it's hard to pursue or write about what my passions are, which has caused me a lot of stress in a time where I'm supposed to be making life decisions and getting my life together. I'm passionate about my friendships and my relationships with my family. I'm passionate about teamwork and I'm passionate about taking action. I love adventure, making change, and being impactful. TV

shows like Lost and Hawaii Five-O are about people who make a difference. In Lost, the characters take control of their lives, fight for their survival on a deserted and supernatural island, and build long-lasting relationships. In Hawaii Five-O, the characters fight crime, protect the good guys, and make the world a better place, all while using trust and teamwork. These shows, as well as the L'Taken trip, have inspired me and motivated me. They made me realize that all I really want is to make a difference, no matter how I accomplish it. It's okay to not have a specific goal in life, to not have a career or my life planned out. I can be a detective fighting crime, an actress inspiring others, a doctor who saves lives or a scientist that makes amazing discoveries, I can be whatever I want as long as I do something meaningful with my life. Looking around at this group of people, I see great potential in all of us. I can't wait to see where we all end up in life and what we've accomplished. I look forward to meeting everyone again down the road, wherever our passions take us.

Julia Danielle Trites



Songs that mean something to you when you are 7 surely mean something different when you are 16.

As I look back on memories from previous TAS years, I remember all of the times when we would have so much fun singing songs in the classroom or at performances. So many inside jokes and priceless memories that will forever be in our hearts have stemmed from these short children's rhymes or prayers like "The Tree Song," "The Super Jerky Ultra Rotten Extra Large Atrocious Song," "Apples Dipped In Honey," "The Shalom Song," and many more.

As we stand here today, we recite the same prayers and read from the same Torah as we have been for years, but now the words have a slightly different meaning. We aren't just reading and singing lyrics that we are forced to memorize. These songs offer a sense of home and a sense of comfort in that they aren't just words we don't understand. These very lyrics take the form of motivation to advance our community and to also help each other get through tough times. Over the years, our minds have expanded with knowledge that might not have contributed to learning the meaning of every single word, but to the general concepts that act as lyrical strings tied together, creating a colossal web of community, love, and understanding.

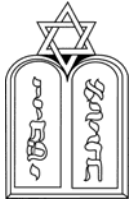
As many of you might already know, I was a shy kid. My mom always reminds me of how clingy I was at social events. Although I don't seem to remember those times, the most prominent and first thing that comes to mind when I think of my childhood is music. When I first started performing in plays, I was quite reluctant to even smile, but through a

loving community and support system made up of my theater families and my actual family, I found a place where I could truly express myself. The stage was a place where my talents developed and I was able to find my passion and “come out of my shell.” I get a sense of satisfaction and a sense of home when I’m performing. I most definitely felt, and always will feel, the same at TAS.

I believe that the key to making and growing lifelong friendships is music. It exists as a connecting piece to Judaism in which our individual Jewish identities shape who we are in the next generation to progress society as a whole. As we end our TAS Tuesdays together, the familiar soundtrack of our lives will always be something we can lean back on to escape stress and connect with each other.

Although we would often dread the overwhelming services, what we didn’t realize was that they were the very essence of our existence. That, whether or not we noticed it, the music would flow through us and shape our view of ourselves in the Jewish community. Even as the Confirmation Class of 2016 may slowly drift apart, we will all have precious memories and cherish the melodies of the songs and dances and special times we all shared.

Amanda Wilhelm



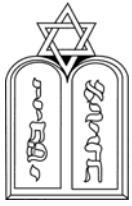
It seems to me like everything around me is ending. School is over. Only two weeks ago, my junior year of high school ended. All my senior friends graduated and are going off to college, and soon their time spent with me at school will end. My older sister is going to college across the country in New Jersey, in only three months she will move out and our time living under the same roof will end. And now this – we stand here at Confirmation and after today, our Jewish education here at TAS will end.

Now, this thought of everything ending around me really started to get to me. It makes me nervous to think that a lot of the things I know and love are coming to an end, and I started to fear what lies ahead. My most recent thoughts have been that next for me comes SAT testing, and then senior year, and then college applications, and then the next thing I know I am out on my own, in the real world. Everything seems to be moving so fast and it's honestly scary and overwhelming. For me, all this talk about college applications and moving out on my own makes me feel really small, and I'm already a short person as it is. When I think about my life a year from now, when it's finally time for me to enter into the real world, I think and I think, but I can't see a clear picture. I am still uncertain what I want to do, where I want to go, and who I want to be. All the many choices to make in the near future and the possibilities there are make me feel as though I am shrinking even smaller. It gets hard to stay completely confident when the expectations are so high and the pressure starts weighing in.

But through all the uncertainty and doubts, I've loved how I could come here on Tuesday nights and be certain in this. I can be certain that I have a solid group of friends here who care about me and who support me. I have loved growing up with all of my friends here. Throughout the years, I loved how we could confide in each other and have serious talks in Beit T'shuvah, but how we could also have fun like going on exciting retreat weekends and our most recent trip to Washington D.C. We've learned, laughed, and cried together, and I thank all of you because each of you have taught me something new, and collectively you have all taught me that the most important thing in my life is the people in it.

This sense of community at temple gives me hope. It gives me comfort to know I always have this community and gives me courage to move forward and be okay with all things that are ending. I'm excited to create new beginnings by taking all that I have learned here and applying it to my future experiences. When I think about TAS, I am not as scared of what lies ahead now because I know Judaism has given me a good set of morals, determination to always work my hardest, and a community full of all my favorite people and some of my best friends. Knowing this, I become less focused on what is ending and more eager to enter into the next phases of my life.

Jessica Wilhelm



Hi, my name is Jessica Wilhelm and I couldn't be happier to be here today as part of this year's Confirmation Class with the people who I have grown up with and who have helped me to become the person I am proud to be. It's crazy to think that in a year from now we will all know where we are going to college, and shortly after we will all go on and enter a new chapter in our lives. This sounds terrifying, but Temple has taught me the importance of trying new things and that there truly is a first for everything. After all, Temple Ahavat Shalom has been my first school, where I met my first friends, my first comfortable place away from home, my first sense of independence from my parents, my first responsibility to attend and my first community.

All of these "firsts" that I have experienced here at Temple have brought me even closer to all the people here and have helped me in every new experience that I've gone through in my life. I have learned how to properly deal with these situations and the importance of cherishing each one.

Receiving encouragement at such a young age that being involved is absolutely necessary for each person is definitely something that made me who I am today. Personally, I am always interested in involving myself in as many things as I can possibly handle. My mindset has been, and continues to be: The busier, the better. These are definitely words that I live by because I have a passion for so many things, and as a result, I am always making time for more and more activities in my schedule.

Another thing I always say is, "Sleep is for the weak" because I would rather spend my time doing other things than sleeping, but I never think of any of this as a hassle

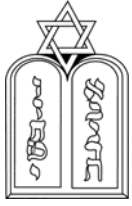
because I love everything that I do. I am always inspired to try new things and join more activities because I was taught, and now feel, that it is important for me to go through many different experiences.

This has led me to some of the most important things in my life, like being involved in cheer and a part of student leadership. These passions, as well as many others, are because I was interested in trying these new things and making them a big part of my life. So, as you can see, many things that make me who I am started here at the Temple, and this reminds me how important this community is to me.

This makes it even harder to comprehend that we are being confirmed today because I do not want this to end. Therefore, I like to think of Confirmation differently, it isn't the end... and I do not like to think of it that way. Instead, I like to think of it as just another start to a new experience, and an opportunity for me to take everything I have learned about my religion, life, and myself here at the Temple, and use it as I encounter more new situations.

And this is exactly what I intend to do, thank you.

Tali Yollis



My favorite part of Temple has always been the music. I joined the choir here in third grade. Before I joined I knew nothing about it and thought we had to audition. I was really nervous and when I walked in, Rick, (the choir teacher at the time), told me that there were no auditions. I was really shocked and relieved. I couldn't believe how open they were to me joining.

By being in choir it also got me going to Friday services. I enjoyed the services only because of the music, but that was enough for me. Then choir changed. Rick was no longer the teacher, it was now Cantor Roher. At first I didn't like it because I don't like change. I made her life pretty difficult to show how much I didn't like it. Over time, I couldn't help but begin to love it. I stayed in choir over the years and kept singing in services. I stayed in choir even though I was older than everyone else in it.

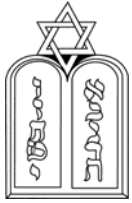
When I was in 7th grade, I was sad because it was my last year in junior choir. There was still teen choir after that, but they didn't practice regularly or sing at a lot of the services. I decided that it wasn't worth it, and I wasn't going to do teen choir. Shortly before the school year started up, Cantor Roher came up to me and asked me if I was going to be in choir, and I told her no. She then told me that she was going to try something new this year. She was going to try having music Avodah and wanted me to be in it.

Her music Avodah Program was where the older kids like me would help out with the younger choirs. We would meet Sundays at 10 in the morning in her office. I would be lying if I said that we were hard at work the whole time. We did practice music, fix binders, and plan things, but there was also a lot of storytelling. Music Avodah was a place where I

not only got to sing, but I also got to share the important things in my life with other people. After an hour of “practicing” in the Cantor's office we would go down to the music room and help teach the younger kids in choir.

I hope my time spent at this Temple has helped other kids enjoy their time here just like Rick and Cantor Roher have helped me enjoy mine.

Jacob Zelonky



Most religious people live their lives by the word of their bible. They observe the lessons learned from the different books and apply them to their everyday lives. In choosing what to write about for my Confirmation speech, I took a look at the notebook I have kept all year in order to refer to all the things Rabbi Barry Lutz and Rabbi Shawna Brynjegard-Bialik have taught me. While I found many valuable lessons, I found one thing on just about every page of the notebook that stood out to me. You see, subconsciously throughout my learning, I had been doodling the Deathly Hallows symbol ad infinitum all over my notebook. For I too have a set of books I refer to in my everyday life, almost all the time, and that is the Harry Potter series.

Throughout this year, I have learned that my most praised books have a lot in common with the book most Jews deem holy. Yes, the Torah and Harry Potter share a number of similarities and some of my favorite lessons from the Torah tie into my favorite lessons from Harry Potter, both of which have given me some of the most valuable lessons which I carry throughout my own life.

David and Goliath is a story from Judaism that has stuck with me throughout most of my life, much like the iconic story of Harry and Voldemort. Both David and Harry knew the odds against them were great. They knew they didn't have the same skills as Voldemort and Goliath but they were able to win due to the fact that they allowed their choices to define them, rather than their abilities. Though in my experiences the stakes may have been much lower, I too have had experience in fighting my own "bad guys". The bravery of Harry and David showed me that I didn't need rely on my abilities to stand up to any

childhood bullies, but rather my choices would define what I was and am capable of.

Harry and Moses were both destined to be killed but were saved by their families' love and sacrifice, which is what guided them in the direction of their destinies. Both Harry and Moses were reluctant heroes, thrust into their leadership roles. Neither of them thought they would be able to uphold the mantle of hero. However, both heroes managed to find their voices in the end. Both Moses and Harry have to convince those doubtful to trust the information Moses and Harry received from God and Dumbledore, respectively. The people did not have faith in them as the leader or that they knew what they were doing. Sometimes Moses and Harry didn't even have faith in themselves. And all the "followers" who were brave enough to follow Harry and Moses weren't really followers at all, but leaders themselves for showing everyone else that they were willing to transform the first lone nut into a leader. Leadership has come to me fairly naturally for most of my life. The lessons from these stories that affected me specifically were that of the followers. I've made more decisions than I care to admit based on just following the popular opinion. But the loyal supporters of Harry Potter and Moses have influenced me to stray from the path of normality and form my own opinions, make my own choices, despite whatever likelihood of this leading to me being considered abnormal.

Esther and Harry put their lives on the line for the good of their people. Despite their fears, they had what it took to stand up and face the challenge ahead. Esther had the support of Mordechai, the same way Harry had the support of Ron and Hermione. But when it came down to it, both needed to rely on themselves to make a difference, when they could have more easily run away. In my life, I have struggled with depending on others to support me. I was unable to conquer my demons, both physical and mental

without being lenient on other people. I have only recently discovered that my well-being is my own choice. Despite the immense support systems of our incredible friends and family, it was Esther who would be talking to the king, it was Harry who would be walking into the forest alone, and it will be me who I will rely on when going out into the world.

As Sirius Black says, “We’ve all got both light and dark inside us. What matters is the part we choose to act on.” Every one of us has different parts to who we are, and different qualities. We are multitudes, made up of many things. The characters of the Torah are multitudes. The characters of Harry Potter are multitudes – brave/doubtful, proud/embarrassed, angry/happy. The condition of humanity is that we are multitudes made up of multiple different parts. The best parts of me – the ones that want to help and give and believe in me – are the ones I hope I can push to the forefront. And like David, Moses, Esther, and Harry Potter, I hope I can find the best parts of myself.