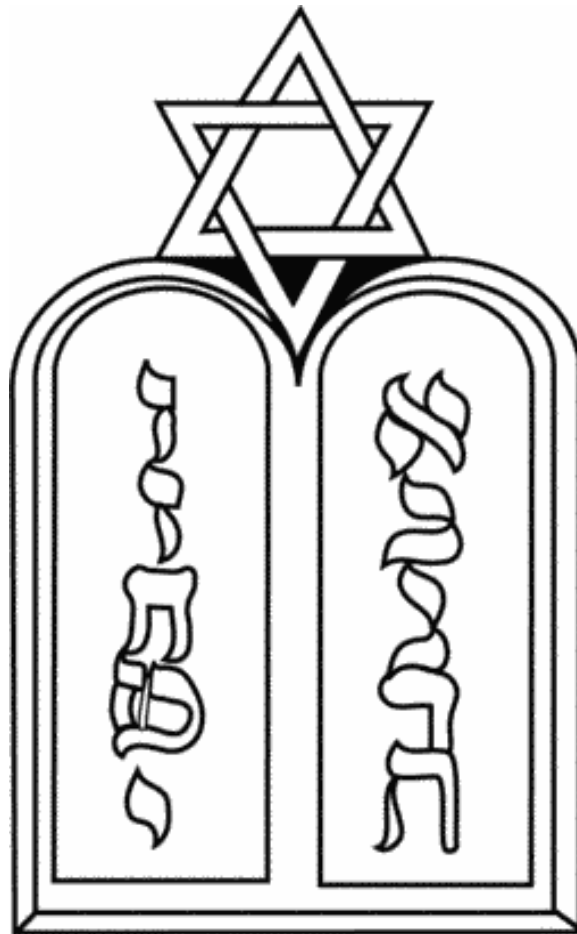


Confirmation Reflections 2017

June 3, 2017 9 Sivan 5777

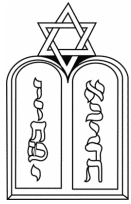
*“The Torah Is A Tree Of Life For
Those Who Hold Fast To It, And
Those Who Uphold It Are Happy”...Book Of Proverbs*



Temple Ahavat Shalom

Barry M. Lutz, Senior Rabbi
Kenneth B. Cohen, Cantor
Shawna Brynjegard-Bialik, Rabbi
Fran Krimston, President

Sarah Elizabeth Banfalvi



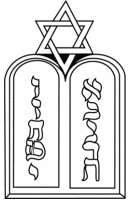
Wow. 6 years ago I came here as a little 5th grader in Mr. Morgenstern's class, starting to learn the Hebrew letters and looking at pictures of Israel. Interestingly, I never felt out of place when I came here. I remember most of the kids went to different Elementary Schools, and I didn't know a lot of people. But then I started to make friends and get super close with these amazing people. We've all grown up together. During 5th, 6th, and 7th grade, everyone was so excited for their Bar and Bat Mitzvahs! That was the big thing. We all worked extremely hard and stood up on the Bimah, recited Torah, and became Bar or Bat Mitzvahs. And 7th grade was truly the year of the best parties.

Then we all graduated Middle School and went to High School. And years later you can still find us here on a Tuesday night, giving our teachers a hard time while we talk, laugh, and for some reason try to fit as many people as we can in each other's cars. I've truly made lifelong friends here.

The next big thing was L'Taken, which I can hands down say was the most amazing trip I've ever been on, and I wouldn't have wanted to spend it with anyone else. I got the chance to strengthen the relationships I have with all these cool people and hang out with them in D.C., while making a difference for our community. I remember touring the Capital Building and we were all just sitting in the House of Representatives having a good time with each other. It felt so good to connect with my grade.

This Temple has given me countless opportunities. I started out barely knowing the Jewish holidays. Now I am part of the Teen Choir, I TA for the fifth graders, I work with the Junior Choir, and I am a member of the TASTY Board. Temple Ahavat Shalom will always have a special place in my heart because of all the different ways it has shaped me to be the person I am today. I've made so many memories here. From the retreats, to the classes, to the Bar and Bat Mitzvahs, L'Taken and many more, I feel like I have had the most amazing experience with this Temple. This Temple has been a second home for me and standing up here today means the world to me. Thank you so much to everyone for sticking with me on this journey. I can't wait to see where it takes me next.

Samuel Alexander Fischbach



My Jewish education began 14 years ago, right here at Temple Ahavat Shalom's Early Childhood Education Center. That was before Smartphones, and wi-fi, and when being social wasn't something that required an Internet connection. It was long before "fake news," or "alternate facts," or the thought that being a better neighbor means building a bigger wall.

While, superficially, I suppose that the right thing to say is that, what I've gotten from my many years here is a sense of what it means to be Jewish; to worship God and the Torah. Yes, I learned all that. I could say that I've learned to practice Mitzvot, and to live in the spirit of Tikkun Olam -- to heal the world through our actions. And, I have.

But, what these years have *really* given me most is... *Community*.

That word -- community -- it means a sense of fellowship and sharing. It's something, recently, many in *OUR* community have seen sorely-lacking in the broader global community. That sense that being at peace -- "Shalom" -- is not about distancing oneself from one's neighbors, but rather embracing them for *both* our commonalities, as well as what sets us apart.

As a Bar or Bat Mitzvah, one is pronounced an "adult" in the eyes of our congregational community. But, as we've all learned this year, important titles are not what will make a boy into a "man." No particular achievement can anoint maturity to the immature, or diplomacy to the undiplomatic, or wisdom to the unwise. So, for that, I don't ascribe a particular benchmark to this day. I don't presume a particular status, or level of stature in this community. I don't lay claim to having risen to a particular rung,

on a metaphorical ladder to greatness or holiness or righteousness -- or even humbleness.

While I have been taught, as a Jew, to follow many traditions as my parents and grandparents before me, I do not look-down upon anyone else willing to oppose any of their Jewish traditions. My place in this community, and the broader community, is with everyone, and above no one else.

Because, what I have learned since embarking on my journey is what makes us most similar, what connects our tiny community with other tiny communities throughout the world... are our common struggles -- and *not* our individual accomplishments.

Speaking of struggles, it wasn't easy to be here today. This day competes with many other priorities in my life. Even the writing of this speech was fit into a very tiny niche, between AP-something-or-other and Honors-something-else. A block of time I used to call "Sleep" has become a luxury I can no longer afford.

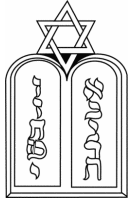
But, while I stand here today, what I lay claim to is my place in a community. My commitment to my friends, my family, my neighbors, our community, and to our common heritage.

The question is not what Confirmation means to me.... but rather, in what way this commitment -- the one each of us here have taken upon ourselves, amidst exams, and projects, and seemingly-endless reams of homework -- in what way this serves to strengthen the character of our community, and allow us, not to lay claim to any short-term achievement, but to our place in history, preserving our community, and to our contributions to the world.

That we see ourselves not as Confirmands, Bar or Bat Mitzvah, once-removed, men, women, gay or straight, adults or children, leaders or followers, Democrats or Republicans, Jews or Gentiles, majorities or minorities, citizens or immigrants -- but as members of a community that rises and falls on the strengths of our common compassion for one another. Because what will make us Great -- what always has -- is not the height of the walls we build, but the length of bridges we cross.

As a self-proclaimed member of our community, I look forward to crossing those bridges with you all!

Jordan Matthew Friedman

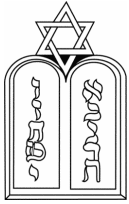


At Temple Ahavat Shalom, I did not find my connection to Judaism by sitting through services. Instead, music is the source of my connection to Judaism. Ever since I was in Kindergarten, I have always had a love for music. I started off playing piano and then moved to trombone immediately after. From then on music has been a driving force in my life. I was thrilled when I was asked to play trombone at services. When I was in eighth grade, Cantor Roher heard me play trombone and asked me to join the TAS House Band. When I first joined the band, I was shocked about the fact that I would have to play parts not written for the trombone. As a result, I had to learn to improvise. Throughout my time in the band, I became a better person as it reinforced a positive work ethic and taught me how to work with others. I also became a better musician as I learned a lot about theory. Most importantly, it was a way for me to strengthen my friendships with other teens who were involved musically.

In the end, my playing in the Temple Band has strengthened my connection to Judaism because I had to express the meaning of prayers and the Torah through music. Through improvising, I am able to express my view of the Torah. I was not reading what someone else wrote. Rather, I was creating my own harmonies that would communicate how I felt about prayers. In the end, the lesson I learned was that one's connection to Judaism is not always expressed in the traditional form. There are many unique ways in which one can connect to the Jewish world based off of their passion.

There is no traditional way in which one can achieve their relationship with God and their Temple. I can honestly say, connect to Judaism in a way that suits you.

Paige Hannah Glickman



We were told that we had to speak about something that is very important to us, so I chose BBYO.

BBYO, formerly known as *B'nai B'rith Youth Organization*, and now *BBYO INC.* is the leading pluralistic teen movement aspiring to involve more Jewish teens in more meaningful Jewish experiences. For 90 years, BBYO has provided exceptional identity enrichment and leadership development experiences for hundreds of thousands of Jewish teens. I myself am in BBYO. I joined November of 2014. I am a part of the chapter *D'vash BBG #956* from PWR #44 (*Pacific Western Region #44*). The region is located in Southern California and my chapter is located in Northridge, Granada Hills, Porter Ranch and Chatsworth.

Joining BBYO three-and-a-half years ago has been the best decision that I've ever made. I have no idea what my life would be like right now if I hadn't joined. I have met some of my best friends in BBYO and have made memories that I'll remember for a lifetime.

BBYO is somewhere where I can go and be myself; somewhere where I can be myself with the people that I love most. BBYO has also taught me incredible skills that if it weren't for joining, I probably would *not* have achieved them. Today I am *more* confident with the person I am, I am happy with my life. BBYO has taught me to be a leader. It has taught me to be a leader through the relationships I have formed, the accomplishments that I have earned, and the memories that I've made.

From getting to hang out with people from all over Southern California, (and even all over the world), going to regional weekends and events, meeting new members and going to new programs I can definitely say that this has been one of the best decisions that I have ever made.

BBYO is my second home, and I would not want to be with any other youth organization.

Luca Florin Goldenberg



For the last 12 ½ years, I have spent a lot of time here at TAS whether it was for preschool, Hebrew School, Bar/Bat Mitzvahs, Mitzvah Day, services or the Purim Carnival. I have met many close friends here, and I am proud to say that they are my second family. I have studied and made friends here for over a decade. We recently went on a trip to D.C. and I had a blast. It was very unique, standing up for my position on Gun Control, and having a great time connecting to these kids, who a lot of them I went to preschool with. On the L'Taken trip I had a fun time walking around D.C., looking at monuments, learning about the history of our nation, hoping NOT to run into Donald Trump, and of course the highlight was doing a flip in front of many historical monuments. Actually, I was impressed that I was able to put on my serious face and speak with Senator Kamala Harris' office about my view on Gun Control.

The emotional highlight on this trip was when we visited the Holocaust Memorial Museum. Wow. That was something alright as I kept thinking about my Great Grandma Sarah's family who lived in Warsaw, and sadly were all taken to concentration camps. She was the only one who survived. Although I had already visited a Holocaust Museum, I thought I knew a lot about it, but visiting this Holocaust Memorial Museum touched me in a different way. Seeing all of those pictures and reading all of the quotes and stories, it shows the pain, suffering and loneliness that these innocent victims went through. This burned a forever hole in my heart.

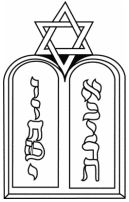
Sunday came, and we wrote our speeches that we would later present to the congressmen. We were tired from each day's events, and I knew we had to write powerful speeches, maintain some type of business attitude, so I really needed to stay awake and focused through the night to finish my part. Well, Monday came and boy was I nervous. I never saw myself lobbying in front of congressmen! I hate being the center of attention, and especially speaking in public! Well, the time came to break out of my comfort zone, state my researched facts, and give my opinion, and guess what? They listened and I survived! I am very proud and relieved that we all did so well, although I was a little hyper from the energy drink I had right before. Why did I have it? Moving on...

It was quite fun if you ask me and seeing everyone dressed up made me remember everyone's Bar/Bat Mitzvah speeches! We did our job, and our mission was complete. We soon said goodbye to most of the friends we made and took off to the airports. Also, don't you love that feeling of when you come home to your very own nice and cozy bed and are surrounded by family who love you?

Well, that was my story. My name is Luca Florin Goldenberg, and I am a proud Jew. I was raised here at TAS, exposed to many Jewish values, taught how to understand my religion, and how to use an opportunity to impact our country and share my view through speaking and contributing. I may be only 1 voice, but put together with this Confirmation Class and united, we are about 25 powerful voices. The button was just turned on, and there are many opportunities for all to advocate and stand up for.

L'Taken means "To correct or repair," so I will take this trip's experience with me wherever I go!

Bryan Goldstein



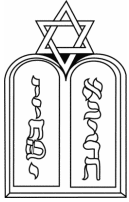
When I was young, I usually didn't want to go to Religious School on a Sunday morning, or a Wednesday afternoon, and eventually Tuesday nights. I always saw coming here as school or a chore, and not an activity that I would enjoy. As time went on I did not always feel this way, but this did not happen until recently. I always wondered why coming was necessary and why my parents wanted me to go so badly. Whenever I would ask them this they would respond with, "Because it is good for you and you can see your friends." Now I realize that this was true.

When I come to Confirmation Class now, I do not come for any religious reason or to focus on learning, but I go because I know that I will see my friends. I started enjoying coming after school on Tuesday nights, and I've seen all of the positives that come from attending Religious School. I get to see my friends, learn about my Jewish culture, and even participate in Jewish activities.

Since I attended Religious School, I got to visit New Orleans for the first time on a trip with Mitzvah Corps and go to Washington D.C. as part of the L'Taken trip we took as a class. I got to make friends and maintain friendships along the way, which is what I find important from coming to Religious School almost every week for the last 10 years. I learned who I am during this journey because of my attendance at Hebrew School and not just because I was in a class once or twice a week, but because of the people I surrounded myself with. I see most of my friends from Temple only because I have continued going to Temple, otherwise I probably would have lost contact with many of

them since we are into different activities and go to different schools, but Religious School is what has kept me close with many of my friends. Because I was forced to go to Sunday School at 9:00 am every week since I was 7, I made some of my best friends here, and I am now thankful that I have been coming after all these years.

Mackenzie Marie Graham



For as long as I can remember, my mom has always been there for me. No matter if it was asking a stupid question, help with homework, or if I needed help with friends, she was there. I might not have always gone to her for advice, and still don't, but I know she's there. I can't remember how many times I was in a difficult situation and I knew I could go to her for advice. I can't remember how many times I've come home in a bad mood and she's wrapped her arms around me. I can't remember how many times I've had to sit there and listen to her go on and on about stuff, but it's because she loves me.

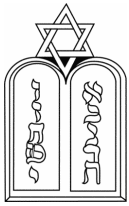
I'm going to take a minute to describe her normal routine. Every day of the week, she wakes up at 3:45am and gets ready to go to the gym. From about 4:30 to 5:30am, she is at the gym working out and then drives home to get ready for work. I wake up around 5:45, about the time she gets home from the gym. She then takes a half-hour to get ready (which includes a shower, getting dressed, doing her hair, making lunch, and eating breakfast). She leaves around 6am and gets to work around 7am. To get to work, she drives the car down to the commuter stop, gets on the commuter bus, and gets off at UCLA where she walks about a half a mile up hill to her office. She then works, in a tiny room, that's literally 60 degrees year round, from about 7am until 4pm. That's 9 hours stuck in that tiny, cold, claustrophobic room. Once she leaves work, she walks down the hill, waits for the bus, gets off the bus and in the car, and comes to school to pick me up. WAIT, THERE'S MORE! After picking me up (and sometimes she has to wait at school for a long time until I'm done at practice), we go home and she

makes dinner. Lots of times she makes two different dinners because she's vegan and I'm not. At the end of the day, when it's time for bed, she finally gets to rest, but first, she has to tuck me in. I don't think I can remember one time she didn't come in and kiss my head goodnight.

That's her day, and maybe that doesn't seem like a lot to some people, but to me, she puts in so much time, and it's all for me. Someone once told me, "There are 24 hours in a day, 8 of those hours should be dedicated to work, 8 of those hours should be dedicated to pleasure, and the other 8 for sleep." The fact that my mom works in an office for 9 hours, and spends at least 4 hours schlepping me places, already offsets that balance.

Mom, everything you have ever done was to help make me into the person I am today, and I couldn't ask for anything more of you. You always tell me, "Your beauty will get you in the door, but it's what's on the inside that will keep you there," and you have taught me how to use what's on the inside every single day of my life. From teaching me manners to how to apply for a job, you've prepared me for life. You've prepared me to go to college. You've done an amazing job, if I may say so myself. Even if I'm not ready to grow up, I know I have all the skills I need in my bag. Mom, I love you this much "I'll love you forever, I'll love you for always, as long as I'm living, my mom you will be."

Peyton Autumn Hamburg



I have been bullied for as long as I can remember. Even to this very day, I still occasionally get bullied. I am pretty sure it started in Kindergarten when I was five years old. A few boys picked on me throughout the time I was at Darby Elementary from Kindergarten until fourth grade.

I never really understood why people did not want to be around me as much as other kids. I always thought I was different in a bad way. I started to slowly understand that those people were not my friends and that they were trying to put me down and make me feel less than. We were so young and I had no idea people could be so cruel at such a young age.

In second grade it became more intense. The bullying had gotten worse, but my way of coping wasn't good. I started to self-harm myself when I was only 7 years old. At that age kids should be learning to divide and learning how to ride a bike, not self-harm!

At that point in my life it was not just the kids who did me wrong, it was also one of my teachers, she verbally abused me because I had a hard time listening. By 5th grade, I switched schools and I had not self-harmed since second grade at this point. The bullying started up again, and this time it was much worse than it was in elementary. The words were harsher, and they started to throw things at me like trash and rocks. It was horrible.

When I was in seventh grade it got worse. I started to self-harm again, but this time I knew what I was doing. The self-harming got to a point where my parents had to keep a close eye on me. I started therapy but I was determined not to let it help or to

get better. Then in 8th grade when I realized it was starting to help, sadly, I did not want to get better.

In eighth grade things happened that I hate talking about, I talked to my therapist and she helped me understand that I had a lot going on. As well as the bullying, I found out that I have Tourette's Syndrome, which is a nervous system disorder causing unwanted sounds and movements. I always told people the reason I blink a lot and so hard, is because I always had dry eyes or something was irritating them. The truth was it was my tics.

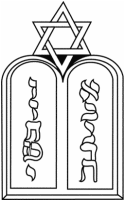
That was the year I decided I wanted to try and find who I truly was, but the self-harming continued and so did the bullying. Then I entered High School. The beginning of ninth grade didn't seem to be too bad but then the second semester was when it all started up again. I was friends with the wrong people, the self-harming was an everyday thing and I cried myself to sleep every night. I blocked unwanted people out of my life and things started to get a tad bit better, I made new friends but I still was depressed.

Over the summer everything slowed down and I told myself 10th grade would be a new year for me, I had changed my style and my attitude. I was going to be the new me. Then 10th grade year showed up and it was horrible, I lost just about all my friends, I felt so alone and empty, I did not see a point in trying anymore so I gave up. My grades started to slip and I did not care anymore, I was threatened and I felt worthless.

In the 11th grade I moved to the school where I am now, and I love this school I have been here for just over a year and within this year I have only been picked on

once. I stood up for myself and ever since then I have been wonderful. No more self-harming, I am on the Cheer Team, I am happy and I am whole again. If you witness or experience someone being bullied please speak up, do not be afraid to stand up. Make a difference in the world and Stand up to Bullying. As a community we need to stomp out bullies. Thank you.

Kayla Rose Hoffman



I love reading. When I was in Middle School, about every other Saturday my mom would drive me to the Northridge Public Library to stock up on books for a couple weeks. I would go in with a stack of books, spend about fifteen minutes prowling the few young adult fiction shelves, and check out a stack of about eight books that would be finished within a few weeks. Then, I would return to the library and the cycle would begin again. I remember walking back to the car and feeling profoundly optimistic about all of the new characters and worlds that I would soon have the joy of experiencing. I would read any fiction book from those few chosen shelves that had an especially clever title. It could be the next story I fell in love with.

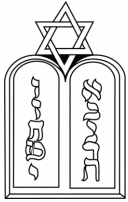
Well, I've grown up now and I haven't been to an actual library in a long time. I've switched to reading e-books, out of convenience, as they can be accessed on my Chromebook and iPad, although, I still prefer the feeling of a real paper book. That distinct feeling of optimism and hopeful expectation is similar to how I feel when I pray. Whether it is at TAS with my parents beside me or at the daily summer camp services I attended up until a couple years ago, prayer can be as therapeutic for me as reading a book. The words are the same ones I have been saying since I was old enough to start attending services, and their familiarity only contributes to the comfort prayer brings.

Some prayers, like the Shema, will always have a classic melody and tempo that stays relatively consistent. But, there are others that are updated with new versions of the songs and new verses that only add to their meaning. Recently, I was attending

services on a Friday night with my mom. It was the end of a busy week and the beginning of a weekend that wouldn't be any calmer. I was sitting right next to my mother and listening to the Rabbi and Cantor lead the voice of the community as we joined in with them. I was suddenly transported to a Friday night Shabbat Service at camp, a party with all of my close friends, and to my house reading a favorite book. I felt nothing but contentment and admiration for the beauty of a song that I may not understand the literal meaning of, but understood in a deeper, more basic way.

To me, praying and services are like reading a favorite series or talented author. Every time I reread it, I realize something new and transformative that makes it more significant and memorable. An old fairytale or myth is retold in an innovative way so that it is as familiar as the most basic of prayers, yet can be said with a new intent and has a unique meaning in that specific instance. Although I go to pray less frequently than I read a new book, they are both peaceful and restorative practices.

Benjamin Eli Lieber



I have been a member of this congregation for literally my entire life – Rabbi Lutz even presided over my bris. As a result, my Jewish education started in the Temple’s Preschool and continued on for the next 15 years until now, as I stand before you today.

In Religious School we learned about God and our Torah references God multiple times in our prayer book, and we often hear people at the Temple referring to our “all knowing” God as the source of everything. But the irony of it all is, I don’t think I believe in God, or at least I don’t believe that God has had an influence in my life. Instead, my idea of God – if existing – is just a spectator perched in the sky, giving us the sweet freedom and, at times, the miserable consequences of living our own lives.

Does that make me a bad person or a bad Jew? I don’t think so since after all, I am *technically* a Jew; my mother is a Jew...and for good measure, so is my father. When I was 8 days old, unbeknownst to me, a covenant was made between God and me with the brit milah. I was consecrated, Bar Mitzvahed, and now I’m in the process of being confirmed, like most of us, on this Bimah, so yes, I believe I am *technically* a Jew. No one can take that away from me.

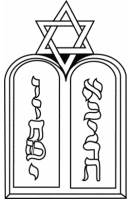
But maybe, I feel that if I don’t believe in God, or at least God’s influence on my life, then there would be some controversy if I still consider myself *spiritually* a Jew. Well, admittedly, I have not been a very good *practicing* Jew. I shy away from coming to Shabbat Services, I reluctantly attend High Holy Day Services and other Jewish celebrations, and I don’t necessarily see God within these walls. But this year, I think I

finally realized that being Jewish *spiritually*, at least my brand of being Jewish is something I need to find within myself. This year, with our emphasis of Social Action and seeing all of the disharmony in our world, the Jewish ideals of Tikkun Olam, repairing the world, seem more urgent than ever. I don't think we can leave it up to God to fix these things – I think we are each responsible for doing whatever we can to make things better.

If being spiritually Jewish means I get to stand up for the homeless, or help with causes like gun control, immigration, equal rights and protecting the environment, then sign me up. Spirituality for me is connecting with my Jewish people, being here, participating in my community over the years due to the feeling that *I* am responsible for *my* own life and everything I do in it – God is neither a catalyst nor a cause for the things that happen in my life, but merely more of a bystander.

Maybe I haven't found my "God" yet because I haven't really started to look, but I do know there is no doubt that being truly Jewish is more about taking action to help the world around me than subscribing to a predetermined set of beliefs.

Daniel Isaac Mervis

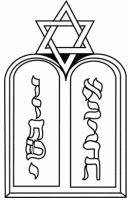


Throughout my experience at TAS High, I could definitely say I have completely become a different person since I walked across the Bimah almost four years ago. I have not only changed physically, but my mindset on many things has changed completely. I never really knew what God meant to me, and I just went with that generic definition that everyone has, like that guy who lives in the clouds with the long beard. Then I began to deal with struggles in my life as I came into young adulthood and wanted help from God. I was upset because I thought God was supposed to just press a button, wave a wand, or something and solve all my problems. As I began to overcome those problems and as I look back, I realize that no one, including God, will ever be able to solve my problems. The only person who was able to solve my problems was me.

Life is not about the obstacles we face but is about how we overcome them. I have been through many hard times in my life and there were days where I just lay in bed and wished I could disappear. I realized that sitting around and wishing for all my problems to go away does exactly nothing. I believe that God is there for us, not to solve our problems for us, but to be there every step of the way. There is a popular song by Jon Bellion where he talks about God and says, "Nothing has changed, He is the same." I really love this idea because it made me realize that God will always be there for me, on every bumpy part of the ride known as life. I believe that God was meant to watch over us and reassure us that everything will be alright.

The truth is no one, whether it is God, a therapist, a parent or friend can make everything alright. The only person who can really change your perspective on life is you. One thing I have learned in life is that everything in our world revolves around our choices. Whether it is your parents forcing you to be here, or you choosing to be excited about Confirmation, every little choice has led you to this moment. I know that we have all been through some tough times but the amazing thing is we chose to be strong, and look at us now. As I become an adult these next few years, I know I will have to start making more choices and I know that with God by my side, I can choose to make my life as amazing as I dream. Thank you.

Jillian Hope Mervis



As I'm sure most of you remember, the majority of our Confirmation Class took a trip to Washington D.C. just this past February. I don't know about the rest of you guys, but it truly was a life changing experience for me.

All of us were assigned topics to write speeches on and read them in the congressman's office on the last day of our trip. I need everyone to realize the amazing opportunity we were given when we were able to lobby to congress about issues that we are actually able to make a change about!

Who knows the difference that our speeches alone made, but it should also open our eyes to realize that we have a voice in our country. We have the power to make a change and it isn't that hard to use it. This trip educated me so much on so many policies and ways that our government functions today and most importantly, how easy it is to be involved.

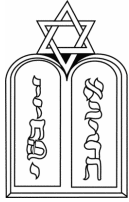
My favorite part of L'Taken that I cherish the most was the amazing experience of meeting other kids and making friends from a number of other states. Although we only met for a short amount of time, they made a great positive impact on my experience that I will always remember.

A different part of L'Taken that has made a lasting impression on me is something that they presented to us at one of the services. They had a man explain to us how he was homeless and the series of events that led him to be that way. He explained how he was Prom King and voted most likely to be successful in his class in High School. By the end of his speech, he had taken off his ragged clothes which

revealed a suit underneath. All of a sudden he was an outgoing businessman who told us the struggle of getting back on his feet and how he is now extremely successful. The part that really struck me was when he told us about how it felt to be homeless. How no one would look at him and how he felt completely alone. Since L'Taken I have thought about that demonstration often. It made me change the way I carry out encounters with homeless people and it also changed my mindset on motivation to be successful.

Multiple areas of the entire trip have made lasting impacts on me that I will carry for the rest of my life. Life is what you make it and everyone has the power to create their own future.

Jordan Philip Hirsch



12 years. To think I've spent my whole life here at Temple Ahavat Shalom is an incredible thought. A thought backed up by amazing memories, people, and opportunities. But the main thing I got out of growing up in a Jewish environment is my love for Judaism.

I don't tell myself or say out loud the phrase, "I love being Jewish!" It's just something I've always known. It's given me a great life so far and an even better life for the future. This is a religion that is so welcoming that it warms my heart.

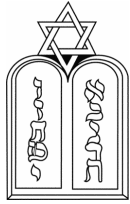
I've been told one sentence by so many people at various points in my life. That sentence would be, "You are the most Jewish person I've ever met." I take that as a compliment every time. I've gone to Hebrew School, grew up around a sweet, loving, and caring Jewish family, and been to the Western Wall.

When I was 8 years old, I went on the 2008 trip with the Temple to Israel. Surprisingly, I remember that trip very well. Though I didn't really understand how marvelous Israel was at the time, and would wonder why cars were so different there or why we were walking so often, I did realize this would be one of the many opportunities I would get in my life to really see how beautiful the world is. To this day, I have not seen a place more gorgeous than Israel.

Sometimes in life, I wondered why Jews have always been targeted throughout history. At the end of the day, we're still proud and strong no matter what obstacles we have faced. I am more than happy to say that I am a proud young Jewish adult who will

always have Judaism throughout my whole life at the best times and the worst times. I will forever be grateful for growing up Jewish.

Leah Sayoko Robin



I was a part of TRZ, along with a couple others on the Bimah tonight. We all graduated Preschool and continued being a part of their Religious School for the next few years. However, my Jewish journey started here at Temple Ahavat Shalom in the second grade with teacher Esther. I had the time of my life, learning songs that I still dance to and learning about holidays like Tu Beshvat, which is about trees, and Simchat Torah about, well, Torah. I look back at my first 2 years at TAS and laugh about how bashful and timid I was. Fortunately, that's not the case anymore.

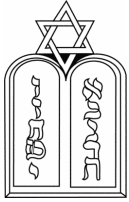
It was then I was in this routine of going to Hebrew School every week for almost 10 years of my life, learning about how God created the universe in Genesis, or how God got us out of slavery from Egypt in Exodus, and having the obvious theme of God in our learning of religion. As I grew older to where I could make "smarter" decisions, I couldn't really make up my mind to whether I had the confidence to say that I truly believed in God. In the 4th grade, my naïve self would think that God was always on my side or that God was this almighty being who'd only help and not hurt. But then I was told otherwise by my 10th grade science teacher that "God isn't real." I was confused and was stumped on how I can make a commitment to something that has left me with more questions than answers.

Here I am at the end of my Junior year of High School and I have gone on my most intense religious journey yet. In the beginning of Confirmation, I underestimated my trust and self-assurance in Judaism as a whole. The year started off with discussion

about the deeper meaning behind High Holy Days all the way to creating our own PSA, which was not my most favorite experience I've had at TAS. It came down to excitedly counting the days of L'Taken in D.C., which was the trip that kept me coming back every week to Temple for the last year. It's an understatement to say that L'Taken changed me as a person, but also helped me understand what having a Jewish identity means. It was almost nostalgic for all of my childhood friends to be together again in such a different environment. I also had the opportunity to work with people I usually wouldn't hang out with for our lobbying speech and feel so grateful to now have close connections with them.

I then had this realization that maybe if I don't believe in God, I can still be a Jew. And that maybe Judaism isn't always about reading from Torah, or going to services, but that Judaism can mean community, friendship, nostalgia, and appreciation for the connections this religion has given all of us. Without Rabbi Lutz, Rabbi Shawna, and of course this Confirmation Class, I definitely would be even more lost and puzzled. I cannot thank you enough. Like from the musical *Wicked*, "Because I knew you, I have changed for good."

Dana Elise Rubanowitz



Have you ever imagined one of your fears becoming a reality? Well, I have. With a little research, I discovered that most people fear the idea of being stuck in life or death situations. Maybe we fear the idea of death because most of us are unsure of what may come next. Metaphorically speaking, what if there is an in between of life and death. For example, a coma.

There's no way of knowing if a coma means the same thing in your head as a coma means in my head. Personally, I fear the concept of falling into a coma. To me, one cannot justify the horrific thought of falling into a coma. Who knows what occurs when you're unconscious. We know that the world around us continues to prosper, people's lives continue while our life's on hold. Depending on how long one remains in the state of a coma, they miss out on the opportunities of life. They are oblivious to what is happening around them.

Honestly, I'm not sure how I can prepare myself to face the challenge as such a surreal possibility as falling into a coma. Maybe I can tell myself that yes, some things do happen for a reason. Maybe we are supposed to grasp the chaotic events life throws us, and make sense out of it. Maybe we cling to the concept of hope, so that we won't need to face the tragedies or our fears throughout life. Thus, causing us to forget our priority which is to focus on the reality, which is the chaos of all the "what-ifs" of life that surround us.

Then we have that epiphany moment, our lives flash before our eyes, we realize that maybe things don't happen for a reason. We're just lost. Our minds are lost

wondering about the possibilities we may encounter throughout life, seeking for the comfort that maybe things will be okay. But then I think that I have just given myself false hope, tricking my mind into believing that everything will be okay, just so I don't have to face the reality that maybe it won't. Maybe I end up falling into a coma, maybe I'll wake up. . .maybe I won't. That's alright. I know that life is a one time offer and I plan to live life to the fullest. I will just wake up every morning thinking that today will be a good day, nothing bad like getting into a car accident and falling into a coma will happen, right? Then as that day comes to an end, I know that tomorrow is a new day with new possibilities.

You never know the challenges that may arise, some may completely alter the path of your life. Sometimes, these challenges are accompanied by fears, leaving you no other option but to face the fear head-on. How could you face a fear that is almost unreal? And I'm sorry, I'm not quite explaining it right. It's just the more we think about our fears, the more real they become. The possibility of losing control, not knowing what comes next is overwhelming. The thoughts become reality and the reality becomes tough and it burns inside of us and hopefully, one day, it'll fade. But that day isn't today!

Imagining the possibility of our fears becoming a reality becomes immense. Our imagination takes us on an intense roller coaster of the possibilities of not knowing, where our hearts are pounding, and our minds are working then suddenly everything...stops. And though our imaginations are still running, our thoughts are still growing and the fears are still forming. They cannot reach us anymore and it all stops, then we are calm. We realize the possibility of our fears becoming real. We accept the

“what-ifs” associated with that possibility, and then we turn the opposite direction and live our lives.

Jacob Maxwell Salzman



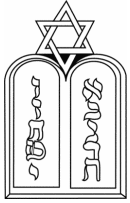
L'Taken in Washington D.C. was fun because I got to hang out with my friends who I consider my second family and we got even closer than we already were. It was meaningful because of the experiences that we all had together. One of the events that I loved the most was when someone that appeared underprivileged, who wore ragged clothes, told us his story about how he grew out of poverty. He is now out of poverty and is the manager of a charity for homeless people. At the end, he took off his ragged clothes and underneath was a suit and tie. That was my favorite event in D.C. mainly because of his amazing story of how he transformed into a high middle class man and created this organization that was never there to support him. He selflessly helps people that are in the same position he used to be in, while he never received that support when he was homeless. He gives hope to those who don't have any.

In D.C., I became so close with each kid in the class that I now have a handshake with everyone. Every time we come to Hebrew School on Tuesday we all still do our handshakes. Another incredible thing that we did was lobby in front of congressmen. My group, which consisted of Ruby Salzman, Sammy Wane, and Jordan Hirsch talked about voting rights. That topic was based on the idea that no matter if you are an immigrant or not, you should be able to vote. A great example was Jordan Hirsch's housekeeper. She has been living in California for 20 years and she is still not able to vote, which is unfair because she still pays taxes. I feel that if you pay taxes, you should have the right to vote.

We went on a great tour of Washington D.C. and it was so stunning. We saw the White House, several monuments, and on Saturday had a Havdalah Service. The service was amazing because we were outside of the Jefferson Memorial at night with lit candles singing songs.

Overall my experience at L'Taken was astonishing. I met new people from San Francisco and learned things that I never knew about rights and Washington D.C.

Ruby Isabella Salzman



It was the night of August 8, 2000 when my best friend and I were brought into this world. Jacob is my hero. I might sound cliché and all, but he truly is. Many twenty-first century teenagers would commonly describe their fellow brothers and sisters as “jerks.” Being completely honest, I say the same. On another note, Jacob is currently a cadet for the Fire Department. His passion for making our world a better place and for saving people puts me in awe. Not many teenagers pursue their childhood dreams, but Jacob is halfway there. Personally, I have never seen him so passionate about anything in my entire life.

The Los Angeles Fire Department Cadet Program is known to be one of the hardest programs to join, along with the Police Department Cadet Program. The cadets are forced into building upper body strength and to memorize each and every tool and gadget on the different varieties of the fire trucks in the station. This may not seem like a lot, but when it takes 7 hours to memorize only one drawer of the truck, you can now put it into perspective.

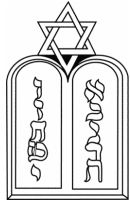
Anyways, Jacob and I share an inseparable bond that many siblings, let alone twins, are not able to have. I cannot even go a couple hours without talking to him or getting into contact with him one way or another. We are able to support each other at our sporting events and in the classroom. He pushes me to the next level on and off the field.

Besides our bond being extremely strong, Jacob is one of the most genuine and sensitive people I know. He is always the first person there to help anyone whether it is

my Poppy or my Mom or even Shane. He can always sense when there is something wrong with me, but only by our twin powers. Jacob is always there for me at my best and at my worst. I am able to go to him about almost everything without feeling any signs of judgment coming from him. Jacob's energy and happiness to live inspires me to become a better human being so I am able to fulfill the talents that God gave me. He does not take any second of his life for granted, which lets him live his life to the fullest. If anyone knows Jacob, he does not give up, he just goes out and does whatever his task may be.

When Rabbi Lutz and Rabbi Shawna assigned us this speech, the prompt was open to anything. I wasn't sure what to write about, but Jacob just gave me that look, and I knew right then and there I wanted to take this time to show my appreciation for him and how much he means to me. I don't know what I would do without him. Jacob, I truly love you with all of my heart, and thank you for being in my life.

Wesley Emerson Scherr



Hi, my name is Wesley Scherr and I'd like to share my experiences at Temple Ahavat Shalom. My journey here at TAS started at Preschool and now I am finally being confirmed and I have made so many great memories.

This Temple has played a big role in my life as a Jewish individual. Outside of Temple, I always get the same general question: "Why do you have to go?"

In ninth grade, my answer to this question would be something like, "My mom is making me." My friends want to make plans after school every so often and on Tuesdays they ask if I can go hang out with them. Before, I was not as dedicated to my Jewish education, but now, my friends know I am unavailable on Tuesday nights. A friend recently asked me what Confirmation is and what it means and I told him this, "Confirmation is a part of becoming a Jewish adult and it is very important as a young Jewish adult..." but by this point, he had lost interest in what I was trying to say.

Over the years, I have met so many new people and I look forward to coming to Temple to see all of my friends that I don't get to see every day. Most of the friends that I have met through TAS don't go to my school and I enjoy reconnecting with them every Tuesday. In my room, hanging on the wall is a cutout of a school house and in the windows of the cutout are pictures of almost everyone in this Confirmation Class from when we were in Preschool. If I had to pick my favorite memory from all of my years at TAS, it would be my Confirmation trip to Washington D.C. We went to D.C. for a "L'Taken Social Justice Seminar". L'Taken directly translates to: to repair or fix. While in D.C. we were able to explore different topics of interest and towards the end of our trip, we

chose one of these topics that we were passionate about and spoke about it in front of some of our congressmen from California. I had such an amazing time except for the fact that I got very sick while I was there, but I pushed through it and tried to make the most of it.

Seven years ago, my sister went on this trip as an 11th grader and she was so happy when she learned that I would be going as well. She told me about all her memories of her trip and before I even went, I knew I would have a life changing experience. Almost everywhere we went, our congregation was always together and I was able to become closer with my peers. I was also able to meet many other people from other congregations. People came from all over the Nation. This was an experience that I will never forget and it was a great story to tell when I came back home.

Through this trip, I became even closer with everyone in our 11th grade class. This was just one of the many memories I have made throughout my years here. This Temple has had a very strong impact on my life and it forever will. One day when I have kids of my own, I will be coming here again for the High Holidays and I will be reminded of all of the memories I have created here. Until then, I am going to enjoy my youth as a Jewish individual. I am so glad to have been a part of this congregation and I hope to stay involved for many years to come.

Shane Benjamin Turer



Growing up at Temple over the years has changed my life. I have experienced so much over the years, both good and bad. I started at TAS in Preschool and have attended Temple my whole life. I have developed a lifelong connection with my friends and the people that I've met here at TAS. It has made me a better and more caring person overall. The nonprofit organizations that have been introduced to me have really opened up my eyes. They helped me help those that are in need of basic necessities. Volunteering is not only fun and entertaining for me but is a great cause that helps others too. I have really enjoyed spending time at Temple and learning about Judaism.

One of the most difficult things that I've had to do at Temple was my Bar Mitzvah. I practiced for countless hours and did my best. In the end, I loved what my mom planned and did with me for everything to go off without a hitch. After my Bar Mitzvah, I decided, with a little convincing from my mom, to stick with my Temple roots and continue to get confirmed.

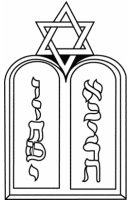
This past year, we have learned about what each of us personally believes in. We have gone over lots of different types of beliefs from what God is to what God isn't. I believed in God growing up because that's how I was raised. Now, not so much. What kind of God lets such horrible things happen? I could keep asking similar questions, but I'm not trying to convert anyone. I see God as an idea for people that need to believe in a higher power in order to have comfort in certain things. For me, there is no higher power, there are just the natural laws at work.

After speaking and reflecting on our spirituality, most of the class went to D.C. D.C. was a life changing experience. Living with my friends and waking up at 7am in the morning on the weekend was a major change for me. Usually, I wake up around 12 noon on the weekends. Going through a completely new area that I knew virtually nothing about with my friends was definitely an experience that will stick with me forever.

First of all, I would be nothing without my mom, literally! She has helped me through so much that I couldn't have done without her. For example, I love getting borderline grades, which stresses her out and then she pushes me to excel and bring my grades up. I can't even keep count of how many projects she has done...I mean, helped me with. Being influenced by such an amazing and exquisite person is the real reason that I am who I am today. Thanks mom!

Last, but not least, I would like to thank Rabbi Lutz for being a great mentor as well as teacher, which means a great deal to me. Also, Barb has been such a kind and considerate person to me. I'd like to thank her for all that she has done for me, like that Letter of Recommendation that probably got me accepted into an internship, and I will miss seeing Barb at TAS. Thank you!

Daniel Isaac Segal

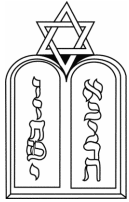


When I was a little kid, I had a hard time paying attention during services. I've never really had an interest in theology or God; they've never really appealed to me. However, I always loved watching the Rabbi and Cantor play the guitar as well as listening to the accompanying pianist. I would sit on the benches, wishing I could play nearly as well as the people up on the Bimah. I've been in music lessons since I was five, but I didn't appreciate them for the longest time. However, every winter, my piano teacher would give me a Jewish piano piece to perform at a recital, and I always loved playing those. Up until I was thirteen, those songs were the only songs I liked playing on piano. When I began playing guitar in eighth grade, and even though I didn't play many Jewish songs, the early education stuck with me. Growing up with Sunday Religious School, I learned some religious songs like Leonard Cohen's "Hallelujah" and Pete Seeger's "Turn! Turn! Turn!" I think early exposure to this music has really impacted my style of play.

I can attribute some of my success as a musician from sitting in services for so many years, listening to the melodies and harmonies of the clergy. It never occurred to me that Friday night services would have such a huge impact on me. Music has become a form of relaxation and comfort for me, which stemmed from the peaceful nature of Shabbat Services. As a budding musician, I try to play as diverse a catalog of songs and styles, which traditional Jewish songs fulfill. Also, many of the songs I've learned at TAS incorporate different styles of music like blues-style "V'shamru", or rock like "Or Zarua". It's amazing how far a combination of three or four simple chords can

bring you. If you really think about it, those chords can be used to play just about any song, which I quickly learned from my Jewish music education. Jewish music has opened up a world of creativity for me and other musicians I work with. It's been incredible how far I've come in my music education, and I can thank the Temple and this community for fostering that growth.

Sally Frances Vogel



Have you ever visited a new city, state, or country and felt a sense of belonging? That is how I feel when I travel to new places. I love to see everything the new place has to offer, to experience new locations, scenery, cultures, and people. I believe travel will always be one of my passions. But I am saddened when I come across people in need, or when I hear about the poverty, violence or illness that plagues a community I visit. I am frustrated by these intractable problems and I want to help.

My family, my Synagogue and my community have taught me about Tikkun Olam – the repairing of the world. This concept from Judaism that we all are responsible to repair, rebuild and heal the world is one I can relate to. I have learned that, in order to resolve the problems in the world, **I** need to take action. Our tradition teaches, “It is not up to you to finish the task, but neither are you free to avoid it.” This means that one person alone may not rebuild the entire world, but **every person** must do their part. I truly believe in this. And you can never be too young to start.

I am a lucky young woman. I have food to eat, a roof over my head, a family who loves and supports me, a dog who wakes me up every morning, teachers who prepare me to face an adult world, and friends who make my days full. But I have encountered people who are struggling, and I embrace the opportunity to assist them. In Israel, my 8th grade class volunteered at a children’s heart clinic called “Save a Child’s Heart,” where thousands of kids each year come for life-saving heart transplants. Rather than

touring or relaxing with our host families, our group spent time with children who truly needed our comfort. It was the most worthwhile part of our trip.

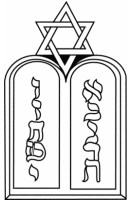
The L'Taken Program is another example of how we, young people, can help improve our communities and the people in them. The L'Taken Program taught us about social justice. We had the opportunity to lobby at Congress on current, meaningful issues about which we felt passionate. I lobbied about climate change. We sure fight hard to protect our environment and repair our world.

Even at home, there are many in need and I believe people of all ages can serve. Through TAS Religious School, I had an idea for a social action project, and the Temple has guided me to make it a success. It is called "Bags of Hope," and it focuses on assembling bags to comfort the homeless we encounter on the streets in our own neighborhoods.

All of this is Tikkun Olam.

I hope to continue to travel and see the world. And I will always remember what I learned throughout my life -- that the world is our neighborhood, and we have an obligation to repair it and help others in need.

Samantha Ileen Wane



As I stand before the Bimah with my fellow Confirmands, I reflect upon my years here at TAS with bittersweet feelings; on the one hand, feelings of pride in what we have learned and hope to accomplish as young adults, and on the other hand, feelings of sadness because we will be off to college soon and our paths will be going in many different directions.

I have been an active member of TAS since I was two-and-a-half-years-old. I grew up on the TAS playground. Ever since those early days on the playground, the idea of performing meaningful Mitzvot, which is a commandment that we as Jews are obligated to do, has been emphasized.

And for as long as I can remember, I have always loved helping people and have always wanted to be a doctor. I've always been overcome by a feeling of believing I can make a difference in someone's life by helping them, no matter how small the deed may be. Starting from when I was a young child, both of my sisters and I took dance lessons. With the help of my grandfather, who contacted assisted living facilities my sisters and I were able to perform for the elderly. Many of the residents had no visitors and had medical problems that didn't permit them to leave the facility. So getting them out of their rooms to enjoy music and a show for a little while put a smile on their faces which was a very heartwarming experience for me.

For my Mitzvah Project, my twin sister, Frenchy, and I helped teens at LA Family Housing through a Jeans for Teens Program. With the help of our guests, we were able to donate more than 60 pairs of jeans and toiletries to a community that is forever

grateful for all our help. My family and I also donated shoes to "Soles for Soles" that my cousins sponsored last December, which is a program that works to ensure everyone around the world has shoes on their feet.

As I grow older, I am given more opportunities to see how I can perform Mitzvot, from as little as holding the door open for people, to buying and donating food for the less fortunate. I also volunteer Saturday mornings at Valley Presbyterian Hospital in Van Nuys, where I am very grateful to fulfill the Mitzvah of the Bikur Holim (caring for the ill) through assisting nurses as well as providing comfort and aid to patients in need of assistance. These are just a few small examples of Mitzvot that I have consciously and perhaps unconsciously incorporated into my life.

Overall, I believe that the Temple has immensely contributed to showing me that Jewish values have a major influence in my life and also enables me to figure out what I want to pursue as well as allowing me to express my passion for helping people. Furthermore, my lifelong friendships made through TAS will continue to remain close to my heart as I go off to college as well as my feelings for TAS. Thank you to Rabbi Lutz, Rabbi Shawna and the rest of the TAS family for the journey.