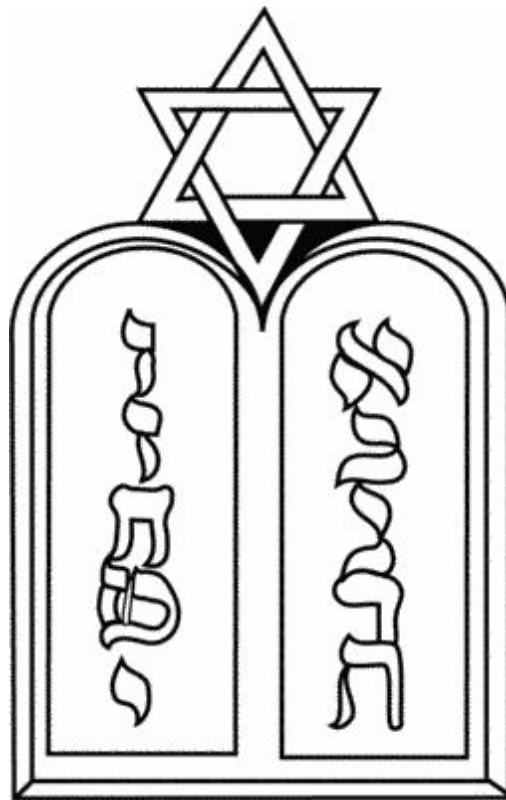


Confirmation Reflections 2018

May 19, 2018 5 Sivan 5778

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

—Book Of Proverbs



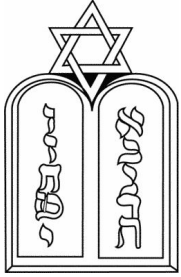
Temple Ahavat Shalom

Liat Yardeni-Funk, Senior Rabbi

Kenneth B. Cohen, Cantor

Dalia Samansky, Rabbi

Jerry Hilecher, President



Elise Barnathan

I entered Confirmation Class this year with some very specific expectations. I expected to learn about my role as a Reform Jew in today's society. I expected to solidify my belief in God, and if I believed in one at all. I expected to attend L'Taken, the social justice seminar in Washington D.C. and to lobby on Capitol Hill. I expected to have meaningful in-class discussions with my peers and my teachers and to learn how my perspective on life is different from everyone else's- but also how we're all the same. And, while nothing this year turned out quite how I expected, I was not at all disappointed in the incredible experience that we've all had together.

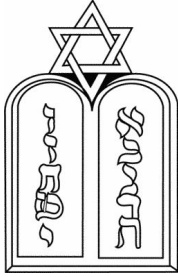
I am someone who believes that you never stop learning and growing and evolving and becoming a better person, a better you. For me, growing up, my Jewish identity was never something that I particularly valued in my sense of self. It was always just a fact that I'm Jewish, that I attended Religious School once or twice a week, that I spent my summers at a Jewish sleepaway camp. Truly, I didn't give it much thought. I remember in 5th or 6th grade, our Religious School teacher posed a question to us: Would we call ourselves a Jewish American or an American Jew? I knew there was supposed to be a difference, but I wasn't sure what it was. I said I was an American Jew. Now, I realize that I then placed myself as being an American over being a Jew. Today I'll tell you I'm a Jewish American. So, what changed? To put it simply: A lot. Like I said, I know that I am always learning and always growing. Confirmation Class this year has really helped me realize that I am not only continuing to learn as a person, but

also as a Jew. There is always still so much more to learn about our history and our culture, which I think is incredible, and I've begun to love educating people who are curious about Judaism just as much as I love learning about it myself.

In class, we've heard many different perspectives and stories of Reform Jews and rabbis throughout history and we've done our own analyses of various passages from the Torah and other texts. I'm not typically someone who loves just reading and analyzing, but what I love about our classes is the discussions that we always have, that can get so far off topic that we barely remember what we were supposed to be talking about in the first place. We often get so passionate about whatever topic we end up on that we can hardly wait for our next turn to speak and respond and build upon another person's point. For that, I want to thank my classmates, for giving me the floor to speak when I had something to say, even though I mostly ramble about nothing, and for giving me all of your ideas and perspectives to think about, most of which I had never considered before.

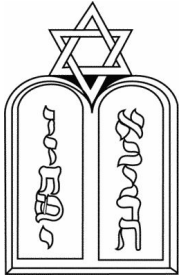
To say that Confirmation Class this year has "enhanced my Jewish identity" is a tragic understatement. It has created it. I come out of this year a changed person, just as I come out of every year and begin each new one—constantly learning, growing, changing, and evolving. Like I said, I began the year with many expectations. So many things were the opposite of what I expected, but I know that everything happens for a reason, and I think that everything about this experience was exactly what we all needed. And not only were my expectations met, this class exceeded each of them, and gave me so much knowledge and a newfound understanding of who I am, as a Jewish

American and as a Jewish adult. I will take what I've learned here with me for the rest of my life. Confirmation helped us begin to shape the rest of our lives as Reform Jews and the rest of our lives starts right now. Thank you.



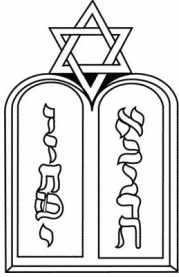
Daniel Chroman

When I first came to TAS in Preschool, and then later during Sunday School, I remember meeting all of the people up here on the bimah with me. I have many memories of coming to TAS and growing up with these people and have known them for many years. I remember going to many Bar and Bat Mitzvahs of my classmates throughout the years. We all have grown up throughout the years, and have learned to adapt to changes that happened, especially in this year of our Confirmation. But I wouldn't change a thing because as we have grown up together we have become more, and we are more involved with our Jewish identities. During the L'Taken trip we became closer as a community. We are one community that will grow together as one table. But as for me as an individual, growing up at TAS was not that easy. While growing up here at TAS I often found myself lacking a sort of community. At TAS High I did have friends but was not really close to anyone. I was not really feeling driven to continue my Jewish education. But when I joined my classmates on the L'Taken trip, I found a new sense of belonging, a new Jewish identity as a young adult with a voice who has the ability to make change and does not need to sit idly by when things happen that I don't like. This year has not only taught me so much about having a voice, but also gave me a new reason to continue my Jewish education. I plan to continue practicing and learning wherever I end up.



Jonathan Chroman

Confirmation has done a lot to enhance my Jewish identity. What it means to succeed, what our ideas of G-d are, what Jewish ideals affect our lives, and what it means to be Jewish are just a few topics that came up in class. Before Confirmation, I believed G-d was the all-powerful creator of the universe and for a long time I had a very hard time believing that G-d existed at all. I thought “how could G-d let innocent children die and bad things happen to good people.” When I think of G-d now, I think of a force that exists within all of us, an ability to help others and a compulsion to do so. When I think about what it means to be Jewish, I think about being a part of a community. All of us have said a hundred times that we left for L’Taken as two groups. While we did become closer as friends and gained a stronger sense of community as a class, we also got to meet and interact with Jewish youth from all over the country. L’Taken not only enhanced my relationship with my classmates, but it also opened me up to a much larger community. A community of young Jewish adults, like myself, who are working to find out who they are as Jews, as people, and how they personally can impact the world and make it a better place. Confirmation made it possible for me to answer questions that I had never previously thought of asking. Additionally, my time in Confirmation made me question who I am as a young Jewish adult. While I am not yet completely sure of this answer, I know for a fact that Confirmation has helped me learn who I want to be, not only as a Jew, but as a young adult in the modern world.



Elana Cohn

I have been going to this temple, along with these people standing on this bimah with me, since I was in Preschool. I have a memory in every single crevice of this temple and can say something about every single one of my fellow Confirmands as well as many other people within my community. While I love my temple and the people in it, I never really felt connected to it or my Judaism. I was never the person to go to Jewish camp, and even if I did, it was because either my parents forced me or one specific person begged me to go. To be honest, I don't even know why I opposed it, as whenever I went I would have an amazing time.

Looking back at my younger self, I now see why I never had a push to go to camp, services, or even Hebrew School. I never saw the real meaning of being a Reform Jew. At 9-years-old the only thing I really got out of going to Camp Alonim was that cucumbers look a lot like zucchini when they are grown and the only thing pushing me to go to temple, or even go back to camp, were the connections that I made. I did not feel like I was growing as a Jew and because I did not feel like I was growing or really understanding the meaning of being Jewish, I did not connect to my religion. The only thing I connected to was my memories, the connections, and of course that zucchinis look like cucumbers.

As the years went by my connection to the Jewish faith declined, and as I entered my Confirmation year I had no idea what it meant to be a Reform Jew. In the beginning of this year I was both excited and nervous to see where and how this

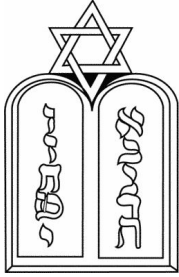
journey would shape my view of Judaism. Having my sister as well as other close older friends already go through this experience I had expectations of the year and thought that I knew what to expect. As I am sure you can all tell, this Confirmation Class is an exception to all other classes. Our class never really bonded before L'Taken. There were two groups and two different sides of the table. I am not saying that we ignored each other, but we were never a cohesive class.

When the past graduates of Hebrew School told me that the things that made Confirmation, more specifically L'Taken, so amazing, were the people you were with, I obviously had a few reservations. I was excited to go on this journey with Rabbi Lutz, to experience Judaism, and to be asked questions that I did not know the answers to. I was so excited to undergo this with the side of the table I was on and to also grow closer with my class. However, I was nervous to see how this would all play out. I did not expect the outcome that our class received.

This year was crazy for our Confirmation Class and nothing that I, or anybody, could have expected. First, we had the issues concerning our previous Rabbi, then we basically had no class, and once we finally had 2 teachers, one dropped. Leaving the one and only Rabbi Samansky. Through the struggle of making sure our voice was heard in our community, our class grew an inch closer but once we stepped onto that plane and it flew us into Washington D.C. we grew exponentially closer. It was then, once I was in D.C. and it was our second to last day, that I finally realized what it meant to be a Reform Jew.

It all has to do with connections and sharing your voice in the world. Making a change and being passionate in that change while also being happy with what you are doing. The people that you are with are the ones that make or break your experience and they are the ones that help push you to further your interests. L'Taken showed me this by helping create a bond with friends in an experience like no other. I was able to share my voice and to make sure it was actually heard. Most importantly, I was finally able to connect to my Judaism.

Looking back at my younger self, I think I did understand the real purpose of being a Reform Jew, I just did not grasp it yet. I thought that I had to be able to read Hebrew, know and understand all parts of the Torah, and know what every single prayer meant. While that is something that relates to Judaism, it is not the essence of it. The things that drove me to go to temple, the feeling of being empowered, and the people that I will never forget are the heart of Judaism. Connections. People. Memories. Empowerment. Love. That is Judaism. Oh, and of course, not being fooled that zucchini looks like cucumbers.



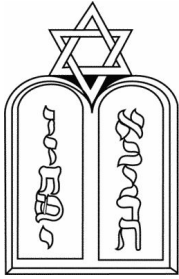
Benjamin Garfinkel

In my experience as a Jew, I have learned many things about our proud religion and the people that make up its ever increasing community. As I look back, my Judaism has played a major role in every major life event of mine. From my birth to the deaths of those around me, Judaism has been an ever present entity in my life. However, this year I have begun to ponder why this belief system has been present and if I'm truly happy with it being this way. And in all truthfulness, I am happy.

Judaism has taught me my morals and has taught me what it feels like to be associated with such a strong group of people. Our people have been through so much and this is something I am truly proud of. Throughout the millennia the Jewish people have faced discrimination wherever we have gone, and it makes me proud to be able to represent the accomplishments of all the Jews who died for their beliefs and allowed me to be here.

This year I have truly learned to formulate my own beliefs, instead of simply following the words of others. As I have progressed through life, the events that have taken place have made me question the existence of a Just God. The things I have experienced, and those I have witnessed, have not been the actions of a Just God. Mass shootings, atomic bombings, oppression, and the ideas of discrimination are not perpetuated by a God, but rather by a group of evil individuals. While I have often believed in a Just God, I now question it, because too many things presented as fact in all religions rely too heavily on "personal interpretation," and require explanation.

For example, in the Torah, which is considered to be the word of God, it is stated that the earth and all of its creatures were created in 6 days along with the infinite universe which constantly expands. Possibly God is too busy with the constant expansion of the universe to focus on God's chosen people, I am not sure. What I am sure of however, is the ability for me to determine my own destiny and make my own decisions; and I decide to remain a Jew on my Confirmation, not because of an almighty God, but simply because of the community and the amazing history and people the religion ties me to. I value the friendships I have made here since the age of five, and I value the things this temple has taught me about a group too oppressed and under-represented in all spheres.



Kara Glaser

Good morning friends and family,

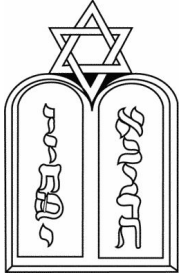
I have been attending temple here since Preschool and this year by far has been, despite it not going as planned, the best Religious School experience I have had. For the past 7 years I have been looking forward

to my Confirmation year because of yes, you guessed it, L'Taken. Prior to L'Taken I would have never identified myself as an activist, I have attended LA Pride and the Women's March and though fully supporting the causes, I was not super passionate. While in D.C. attending a session on Gun Violence Prevention, I found my passion. We received a list of facts with blank spaces and numbers, and were told to match a statistic with a fact relating to gun violence. It was shocking how little we knew about gun violence. I'm pretty sure we only got one right and that's because Daniel looked it up. Later when deciding what to lobby, Gun Violence Prevention was at the top of my list. Thankfully, Elana, Emily, Daniel and I were chosen to lobby about the Background Completion Act to Senator Feinstein asking for her continued support of making it more difficult to get a firearm in America. It was a fantastic experience and I truly felt like my words and thoughts were making a difference in our country.

Less than three days later, on February 14th, 2018, 17 people, students, teachers, children, friends, brothers, sisters, were senselessly murdered during school in Parkland, Florida. This mass murder sparked a fire in me, I would no longer stand idly by. I began to discuss with my teacher how I could make my school safer, and shortly after talking with her, I was selected with five other students at Granada Hills Charter to

plan and lead a day to say “Enough” to gun violence everywhere. On March 14th, a month after the Parkland shooting, there was a school wide walkout that lasted for 17 minutes honoring the 17 lives lost in Florida. As a school we spelled out “Enough” on our football field, making national headlines. It is estimated that 10 million people saw our demonstration. This was, by far, the most powerful thing I have ever taken part in. As I lay on the field holding hands with my best friend, a gong rang 17 times serving as another reminder of the many, too many, worlds lost on that day. There is not a doubt in my mind that L’Taken inspired me to help plan this life changing day. L’Taken has changed my life in the best ways imaginable but, truly this year had a special feeling, that cannot be explained by words.

Though today is a Jewish milestone it is overwhelmingly bittersweet. I am not done with my Jewish journey. This year has been wonderful but I think our love for each other is best expressed when Rabbi Samansky tries to split us up; we can’t help but talk to each other and have a great time while learning all about what shapes our Jewish identity. Honestly, every Confirmand has shaped my Jewish identity and I cannot thank you all enough for that.



Spencer Hyam

Throughout our time in Confirmation, we've talked about ways to solve various Social Justice issues. Throughout my time participating in Social Justice work, I've investigated the root cause of many problems. Though every problem stems from a few others, one of the largest issues we

face is, of course, the overarching monstrosity that is poverty. Many people regard poverty as an unsolvable Goliath, and I think that's a terrible mindset to have. In fact, there's already been a rather effective solution rolled out here on a limited scale in our very own U-S-of-A – a Universal Basic Income. A Universal Basic Income, or UBI for short, is a set amount of money that all citizens of a given area receive unconditionally on a monthly or yearly basis. The idea is that when everyone has the ability to pay for basic necessities such as their rent, water and power bills, and food, everyone will be better off because all the money made by jobs will go back into the economy.

Additionally, more jobs will be available, because only one part time job will be necessary to live. Thus, people will no longer have to work multiple part time jobs to live, as they will already be receiving an equivalent salary from the government. This may sound like an unachievable pipe dream, but it is in fact entirely possible, and is supported by such visionaries as Mark Zuckerberg and Elon Musk.

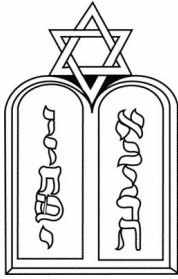
Multiple examples of UBI are already in place around the world, although there are two examples I'm particularly excited about. First is the major one closest to home—the Alaska Permanent Fund. Vox Media summed it up nicely in their article “The Amazing Socialist Miracle of the Alaska Permanent Fund,” saying, “Every resident gets

a check just for being alive, and it really, really works.” In essence, the Permanent Fund is a state-owned fund established in 1982 that pays out an annual dividend to every adult and child living in Alaska. It fluctuates with the price of oil, the state’s largest income stream, and in 2017, it provided \$1,100 dollars per month to each person in the state. That certainly isn’t a livable wage, but it definitely eases economic strain on the state’s residents, and allows more people to work part time jobs. The Alaskan UBI is important because it’s the closest to home, but the one that excites me by far the most is GiveDirectly, a nonprofit organization running a UBI experiment in Western Kenya. The organization has begun a twelve-year economic study on 300 villages. In this study, 40 villages’ occupants will receive about \$0.75 cents a day for the next twelve years, 80 villages’ occupants will receive the same for only two years, 80 villages will receive the same amount but in a lump sum, and 100 villages will act as a control group. This study will show how UBI affects people in true poverty, and will investigate the most effective way to help people with a UBI. There are many other examples of smaller UBI studies around the world, with promising ones in Finland, Brazil, Ontario, and the Netherlands, and even one up north in Oakland, CA.

The idea of a UBI even makes sense in a Jewish context, with community based financial support being mentioned many times in Jewish texts. A prominent example is that of Rashi’s Talmudic commentary on Leviticus 25:35. The Leviticus text itself talks about how, if an Israelite were to fall upon hard times and become unable to support themselves, the community should come together to ensure they can continue to live in the community. Rashi builds upon this, saying, “Do not allow them to fall down and

collapse altogether, in which case it would be difficult to pick them up again.” This shows the vast importance of supporting everyone in our communities, and what better way than a Universal Basic Income? There’s really no downside to it. By all reliable accounts it works, and not only does it work, it bolsters the economy and helps huge swaths of people stay reliably afloat. Of course, it won’t single handedly fix all of the problems associated with poverty. A UBI won’t create more housing or better education for disadvantaged communities, but it will certainly go a long way towards making all of society better.

I can’t remember a time when TAS wasn’t a part of my life. I started my journey here in Preschool, where I did a number of things including biting Kara. She bit me back. There’s a number of small, funny stories I’ve got from this place, and it’s made a huge impact on me. I became a Bar Mitzvah here, I was convinced to go to Camp Newman and NFTY here, I songlead here and lead services here. There’s certainly no shortage of things to draw from, but the most important thing to convey is the amount of time I’ve spent here becoming who I am today. Without TAS, my life would be very different, and it certainly wouldn’t be for the better.



Daniel Kantor

Wow. I still cannot believe this Confirmation year has come to an end. In this year alone, I have experienced so much and furthered my knowledge about Judaism, therefore helping me shape my Jewish identity. Unlike many of my fellow classmates, I have only recently joined this wonderful Synagogue and this is my first year in the TAS Religious School. I remember when my mom told me I should go to Hebrew School when we first joined, but I didn't want to unless I had a friend to go with. So, I looked for people in my school that were members of Ahavat Shalom and finally I met Emily. At first, she obviously didn't want to go with me because she barely even knew me. Understandable, but after a while, I was able to force her to join (you're welcome, Emily).

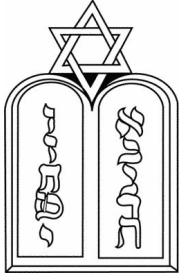
From there, I started my journey and I don't regret one bit of it. I remember when I first met Drew. He actually lives a few doors down and his mom left a kid's water slide in front of their house. So, I took advantage of the opportunity and called my mom over to help me take it. Drew eventually figured out who took the slide and being the good citizen that he is, he contacted me immediately and sounded pretty mad. But it's okay, he got over it. Sometimes, he comes over and uses the slide with me. This is how I became friends with Drew. As you could probably already tell, it is very easy for me to get distracted, so let's get back to the main point.

During this wonderful Confirmation year, I have learned so much about what it means to be a Jewish person in today's society. I have made many friends. I have found love. I have learned how to make the world a better place and how to become a

moral/ethical person in society. I have learned how to treat others. I have learned the deeper meaning of being Jewish, not just reading prayers and practicing the Torah. I have learned that Judaism teaches how to become a better person and help others in your community. This is why I am proud to be a Jew. I experienced this most during our L'Taken trip in DC.

L'Taken in Hebrew means to fix something. We, as Jews, have a responsibility to fix the problems in society for the good of the people. We can do this by simply starting off with little things, like volunteering for our community or giving a helping hand to the needy. Together, as a Jewish community, we can make this world a better place. Judaism is here to guide us. It makes us strive to become the best person we could be. Judaism isn't just a religion, it is a way of life and we should all use it as a tool.

I am so glad I joined Temple Ahavat Shalom and especially the TAS Religious School. It truly changed my life forever. I have made so many memories here and I am looking forward to the many other memories to come. Before I finish this speech, I want to thank Rabbi Dalia for stepping up and teaching this amazing class regardless of what had happened in the past. Rabbi Dalia, you are an amazing teacher and we are so grateful to have you here with us. You truly made this an unforgettable Confirmation year. Thank you.



Sam Kazimirowicz

There is a Midrash that tells of an old man planting a fig tree. When asked why, as his fig tree would not be fully grown while he is alive, he replies, “I was born into a world flourishing with ready pleasures. My ancestors planted for me, and I now I plant for my children...” Ever since

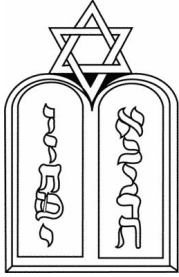
I heard this story, it has been my favorite Jewish story. The idea of helping the next generation can be found throughout Judaism, including the idea of Tikkun Olam. The phrase Tikkun Olam is usually translated as “repairing the world” and is often invoked in reference to Social Action and Social Justice. Some of my favorite lessons from my Confirmation Class were learning about social change and how we can help our communities. When we volunteer to plant trees, donate old clothes to a charity, or work in foreign countries as aid workers, we aren’t doing it for ourselves, or even just for our generation. Not only are we setting a good example for a sort of “pay-it-forward” mentality towards helping others, we are also ensuring the well-being of future generations who will carry us on their shoulders as we get older and hopefully do a better job of helping this world than we have.

If I were to have unlimited funds to “repair the world,” I would spend it on the most important aspect of the new generation: education. Malcom X once said, “Education is the passport to the future, for tomorrow belongs to those who prepare for it today.” For many, their education is what made their dreams possible. Without STEM programs that get children excited about science and technology, there might not be a new Steve Jobs or Neil Armstrong, and without creative writing classes that get kids’

creativity flowing, we might not get to meet the next Nelle Harper Lee or John Steinbeck.

Unfortunately, not everyone gets these opportunities. Many schools in low-income communities lack proper funding to keep kids interested in school, leading to high drop-out rates. Many schools offer only one language, leaving many kids going to school to learn a language they speak at home. Many schools lack important amenities such as handicap accessible ramps and large-font textbooks preventing children in special-needs programs from getting the education they deserve. Many schools don't have the proper funding to sponsor a robotics team, let alone a fully stocked library.

That's why, if I had infinite money, I would donate it towards charities like Project Magnify, which 3D prints microscopes and creates lesson plans for low-income schools, and programs like Beyond the Bell, which ensures that all kids have access to extracurricular programs that inspire growth. I am very privileged to have gone to an excellent High School and an excellent Hebrew School, and my wish is that everyone might have the access to the opportunities that I have had.

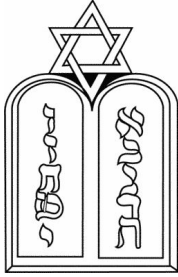


Emily Kocis

Junior year. ACTs, SATs, AP tests, worrying about grades, college, swim, violin and still trying to make time for my friends, family, and even for myself. Needless to say, it feels like this has been the most stressful, busy year that I have ever had, and I know I'm not at all alone when I say that. To put it simply, we are all exhausted and we have been in this constant state of 'being tired' for a good part of this year. That being said, I fully knew what I was getting myself into this year. From the horror stories I'd heard from seniors to the warnings I'd gotten from teachers and relatives, I knew that Junior year was going to be rough. So, when Daniel practically begged me to go back to Hebrew School this year with him, I could almost feel the hours of sleep I would be losing. For the last couple years I thought I was 'too busy' for temple that I didn't have the time to further my Jewish education and honestly, I don't think I really prioritized it all that much either. But I think the biggest proof of how special this class has been for me is that throughout the most insane year that I've had, somehow, consistently made time for Confirmation. Actually, it would have been worth it for me just to keep coming every Tuesday if only to spend time with the amazing group of friends that I have here. I truly treasure all of the friendships I have made here and I think it's definitely one of the greatest things that I have gotten out of this class.

I also think that L'Taken provided an experience that I got so much out of that I didn't even know that I needed. I wrote a part of a speech on gun violence prevention to give to Senator Feinstein on our last day in Washington D.C. I was the last person to

speak in our group so I was supposed to wrap it up and leave listeners with some sort of lingering sentiment. When I wrote my part, I remember trying to wrack my brain for anything significant to end our speech with. I felt so small when I tried to imagine something that I could say that would mean anything or have any impact on a senator. And so I wrote about that. About how as young people we feel disregarded, like our opinions don't matter, like they are somehow illegitimate because we're teenagers. When I read my section of our speech to the guy who was supposed to give us feedback, he told me that I should make my ending more polite because it was coming off a little aggressive. So I went back into the lobby, found some things I could change to make the tone a little more cordial, and then I didn't change a thing. Because I just didn't think that polite was the tone of a world in which teenagers are gunned down while they are trying to get an education. Polite wasn't the word I would use to describe the protests of thousands of young adults just to make their schools safe. Polite wasn't making change, but maybe being a little aggressive would. And so we ended our speech by telling Senator Feinstein to not just listen to us, but to hear what we had to say. Because our voices, while they may be young, are important because they are the future of this country. I found my voice sitting in the middle of a hotel lobby in Washington D.C. at 12:00am in the morning at L'Taken and I've never felt more empowered to use that voice as I did when I was fighting for a change that I really believed in.



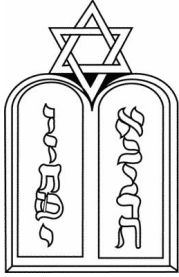
Stephen Rabin

As a young child I never enjoyed going to Religious School. I was not interested in religion, I hated praying, and I always thought there was somewhere better for me to be. I never understood why my parents wanted me to attend Religious School. As the years progressed and I continued to complain, they would say, "It is good for you to take a break from your homework and see your friends." It was not until recently that I really understood what this meant.

When I attend Confirmation Class, I do not come for any religious reasons or to focus on learning, I go to Confirmation because I know I will see my friends. Since this realization, I have also come to appreciate many other positive aspects of Religious School. I not only get to see my friends, but I learn about my Jewish culture, and even venture off into Jewish activities. Thanks to my attending Religious School, I was able to travel to Washington D.C. as part of the L'Taken trip. It was not only an unforgettable experience, but it solidified the bond that I have made with my classmates, many of which I wouldn't have had without attending the temple. That to me, has been the most important thing: keeping and developing these incredible relationships with even more incredible people. There are very few individuals in this world who care about you enough say, "Go to sleep and I'll write your paper for you."

Through this 10-year journey, I have become the person I am; not just because of my attendance at Religious School, but also because of the people I have chosen to surround myself with. These people, most of whom I have known for years, have helped

me become a happier person. I will always consider myself a realist, but in the last 10 years, I have begun to focus more on the positives in life, whether or not they are practical. I cannot express in words the impact that these friendships have had on my perspective on life. Becoming a more sympathetic, understanding, and accepting person was never something I foresaw happening to me. I am not the most sentimental human being in the world, but I truly love these people for putting up with me and helping me become someone I can truly say I am proud to be. As a result of being forced to go to Religious School each week since I was 7, I have made some of my closest friends, and I can now say wholeheartedly that I am thankful to have been attending for all these years.



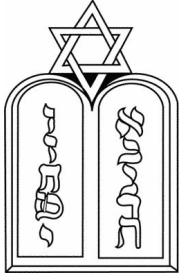
Morgan Roseman

I came barging into this world with attitude. I just knew that I had many challenges to face, being that I weighed under 3 pounds. I told God, in my infinite wisdom, that I had things to do. My coming to Temple Ahavat Shalom was a blessing. Many of my TAS friends saw me as a person, not a disability. They accepted all my quirky characteristics. I had amazing teachers along the way that taught me about Judaism, culture, and the Hebrew language. They were all very patient with me and allowed me to learn at my own pace.

After I had my Bat Mitzvah, I thought that I was done with Religious School. WRONG. My mom made me continue going to TAS. This turned out to be a blessing in disguise. I have made a lot of best friends. I also got to be in a Jewish Drama Program which allowed me to be awesome and weird (I LOVE YOU, FANNY). This year I finally made it to Confirmation (thanks, mom). I got to go to Washington D.C. thanks to a program known as L'Taken and to Rabbi Dalia, Jeff, and other awesome people. I felt that this experience empowered me to change the world. I got to talk and share ideas with Representatives about disability rights (I know that they listened to me). I felt better for it. I was exposed to a variety of policy issues even though I didn't have a clue about some of the things they were talking about. I also got to explore Jewish values surrounding some of these issues. WOW. Rabbi Dalia and Jeff made us do a lot of walking. We all got to see the nation's capitol, the Lincoln Memorial, the Jefferson Memorial, the Smithsonian Air and Space Museum (the one museum that was not boring), the National Holocaust Museum (I cried there because of what happened to all

the Jewish people and to what happened to my great Aunt Mania), the Vietnam Memorial, and we took a tour of Congress (thank you Representative Brad Sherman). I really liked taking a picture in front of the White House wearing my pink Crocs. I also enjoyed lots of different foods (oops, don't tell my mom that I ate and enjoyed lots of food that had gluten in it...giggle giggle).

Thank you everyone for listening to my speech. Have an awesome and glorious day. You guys rock.



Shane Salzman

If I were given the opportunity to have unlimited funds, I would like to help with the homeless people in our community and clean up our streets. I would like to have more shelters built and provide the homeless with clothes, food and opportunities to get back on their feet

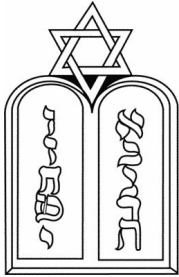
so that they can provide for themselves and in return this will let them feel like they mean something in this world. It's sad to know that there are people who don't have food to eat, shelter, friends, or family. So, if I could, I would love to give back to the people who don't have anything, and really give something they would never forget, such as shelter, food, clothes, and someone who cares. So, if I were able to help someone or something with unlimited funds I wouldn't think twice about helping the poor and homeless get back on their feet and get a second chance at making their life better.

I would like to say this is the hardest speech I have written since my Bar Mitzvah, because this class and this temple is so meaningful to me. This is, and always will be, my second home! I love this temple so much, everyone in this class, the teachers, administration, Rabbi, Cantor! Thank you everyone for being such a special part of my life! My best memory that I will never forget for the rest of my life is this past D.C. trip with these amazing people, including Jeff! I'll admit, I didn't think it would turn out so good, but it was beyond amazing.

To the Confirmation Class, I love each and everyone of you! And to my roommates, Daniel Kantor, thanks for locking me and Stephen out! And to everyone

who I woke up and worried why I didn't unlock the door that time is because I am a deep sleeper. Oh, and before I forget, Stephen don't worry I still have my room key!

Thank you, Rabbi and Jeff, for everything you did for us on that trip! And Cantor, I never really got to know you but from what I know, you're pretty cool. And Mrs. Basset, thank you for everything you have done over all the years! And Sharon, thank you for helping put this trip and this service together! And a special thank you to my amazing mom and dad for putting me in this temple and letting me enjoy Tuesdays with you people! Thank you!



Rebecca Sculler

Hello everyone! My name is Rebecca Sculler.

I'd like to introduce you to a commonly used ethics debate prompt, the

Trolley Experiment. There is a runaway trolley barreling down the

railroad tracks. Ahead, on the tracks, there are five people tied up and

unable to move. The trolley is headed straight for them. You are standing some

distance off in the train yard, next to a lever. If you pull this lever, the trolley will switch to

a different set of tracks. However, you notice that there is one person tied up on the

other track. You have two options: 1) do nothing, and the trolley kills the five people on

the main track. 2) pull the lever, diverting the trolley onto the other track where it will kill

one person. Which is the most ethical choice? With an answer forming in your head, the

situation becomes more complex. The lone person has now been identified as someone

you know and care about. Does that change your answer?

Science fiction author and journalist Patrick S. Tomlinson challenged the

common argument that abortion is unethical due to the belief that life begins at

conception. Following that logic, a human embryo holds the same value as a human

child. He explained a scenario similar to the Trolley Experiment where you are in a

fertility clinic when the fire alarm goes off. Before you escape, you have the option to

save either a five-year-old child who is pleading for help, or a container of 1000 viable

human embryos. In this case, do you save the child or the case of embryos? A

response by one of my peers was that no sane person would choose the case of

embryos over the young child. Tomlinson continued to say that "A human child is worth

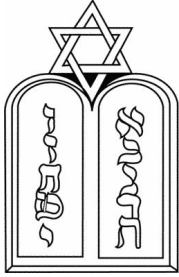
more than a thousand embryos. Or ten thousand. Or a million. Because they are not the same, not morally, not ethically, not biologically.” A human life after birth has more value than an unborn human life.

Jewish text teaches a belief that until birth, a woman and her fetus are one, and that her life is more important than the potential life. There are numerous biblical passages that represent life as breath. A person can be breathed back to life and a fetus does not breathe until birth. Have you ever been somewhere away from a big city, in the middle of nature and you get that first deep breath of truly fresh air? It’s an experience that I find myself commonly having at Jewish camps and events. I have started to associate fresh air with Judaism. I understand that correlation is not causation but in some ways, Judaism is a breath of fresh air. For those of you who believe in God, it can be interpreted that God is the fresh air, God is life. For me, camp is life, camp is fresh air.

Over the years I have had many camp experiences including multiple summer camps, NFTY weekends, and temple retreats. My best friend since birth, Elise, also has love for Jewish camp. One year, we were signed up for a week long winter camp at JCA Shalom in Malibu. I bet we had a good time, but the only thing I remember from that trip was the fight I had with her. We were in our cabin and all of the other girls began building forts with their sleeping bags and mattresses. Elise and I were on beds next to one another and we were planning on building one big fort for the two of us. When the building process began, we quickly decided to do our own individual forts that would be separated by one inch. Problem was that we couldn’t agree on what an inch actually

was. Looking back on it, I am pretty sure that my estimate of an inch was equivalent to about 2 inches. Elise, I am really sorry for telling you that your more accurate inch estimate was incorrect. I was—haha did you really think I was going to admit to being wrong? Don't judge a book by its cover.

From sleeping bag forts to ethics debate prompts, and from generation to generation, this Confirmation Class is a part of my Jewish educational and Social Action journey. L'Taken was an experience of a lifetime and I got to share it with all of you. We experienced a lot together throughout the trip, and were able to grow as a group and as individuals. Thanks for the memories of a lifetime.

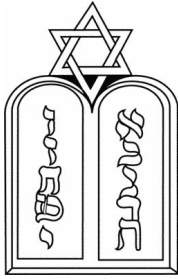


Nathan Soleimani

Being in my life is pretty cool. There are many things that have made me the person that I am today. Going through things that I have went through really affected my life and showed me which things are truly important to me and what I want to continue my life. I'm glad the things that I went through affected me the way they did because there were two ways for me to go through with my life, and I could have chosen the bad way or the good way to live my life. I chose to go down the good path, and so far that has been the best for me. I'm glad that I have a really good relationship with my parents and family members and all my friends. I see friends as really important people in my life and the respect that I get and give to friends is something very special.

Something to know about me is that once we are friends and really close I will never backstab you and go behind your back. Yes, there might be arguments and little fights, but at the end of the day if you're in my life, you are someone that I think is important and someone that I care about. Having this as something that I believe in is something that makes me the person I am. I believe it is important to have really good relationships with the people in my life. It's not always about how many people you have in your life, to me it's really about the relationship that you have with the people that you have. In my life I try to make sure that the relationships that I have are healthy relationships to have with people. Going to Washington D.C. with the temple was a really good experience for me. The relationships and bonds that I made with everyone was very cool. I also met some really interesting people there and it's cool to have

relationships with people from all around the US. Having many friends sometimes is a lot of stress because, yes, there will be great experiences with them, but you need to make sure the close friends you have are loyal true friends that will not backstab you and hurt you and that they will be there for you throughout your whole life. You should have trustworthy friends and friends that would help you through tough situations and not just leave you back. The friends that I have made here at TAS are very good examples of that because I know that they will be there for me.



Drew Weinberg

Judaism...one simple word that means so much to me. When I was younger, Judaism didn't mean that much to me. I'm going to be completely honest here...whenever Sunday morning would roll around I did NOT look forward to going to temple. Don't even get me started when I started going to temple Sunday and Wednesday, boy was that a mess. As it got closer to the day of my Bar Mitzvah, I started to take temple a lot more seriously because I didn't want to look like a fool in front of my family and friends, not knowing what to do when I was up there. But once my Bar Mitzvah training days were over...I started to appreciate going to TAS a lot more. Maybe because I started going once a week again, but who knows.

When Tuesdays came about, I was so excited to go because I loved seeing my friends that I don't usually see at school or people that didn't even go to my school. However, as I continued going to TAS on Tuesdays it wasn't all about seeing my friends, I started to appreciate being Jewish and why we are so special. When I was younger, I was afraid to tell people that I was Jewish, but as I got older and learned more about Judaism, I became more open and started to brag that I was Jewish. I love telling my friends about our holidays and what it means to us because I think that it is a religion that everyone should know about.

Throughout my years of going to Temple Ahavat Shalom, I didn't really have a bond with all of my classmates and I'm sure the Confirmants around me feel the same way. Yes, we said the friendly "Hi" every now and then, but we were split up into

different groups and it was obvious. I did not think for one bit that I would make as many friends as I did this year with this class. One friend making experience that stuck out to me the most was with this guy named Daniel. He was my neighbor and he took a slide from the front of my house that consisted of so many of my childhood memories. Daniel was filled with excitement that he just got an awesome slide. Later Daniel told me that he took my slide and I got really mad at him. We talked and talked and eventually we got to the point where we are now best friends (even though I will never forgive him for taking my childhood slide.)

But as we entered 11th grade at TAS, things started to feel different. This class for sure had obstacles in front of us that we had to jump through to get to our ultimate goal—Washington D.C. I think we all can agree our first, and by far the biggest, obstacle we will ever face is dealing with Rabbi Lutz no longer being our Confirmation teacher and taking us to D.C. There were rumors that we might not go to D.C. anymore which led to people quitting because they weren't going to D.C anymore. But I'm so proud of my fellow classmates because we stayed together, trusted the word of Ms. Bassett and Sharon, and showed that we weren't only going to TAS just to go to D.C. but to explore Judaism and what it means to each and every one of us.

Unfortunately, I was not able to go to D.C. as I chose to be involved in my American Sign Language play called "DEAFinitely Grease" that my ASL 3 Class put on for our school (see me after if you would like a digital copy of the film and a signature). I know what you guys are thinking, I'm crazy, but trust me when I say this, I thought long

and hard about this decision and I knew that going to TAS wasn't all about D.C., it was about finding my Jewish identity and I'm proud to say that I have achieved that goal.

Before I go, I would like to thank a very special person and if it wasn't for her we wouldn't be here on this beautiful and memorable day. Rabbi Samansky, thank you so much for stepping up in a tough time and becoming our teacher, you truly made this year one to remember!