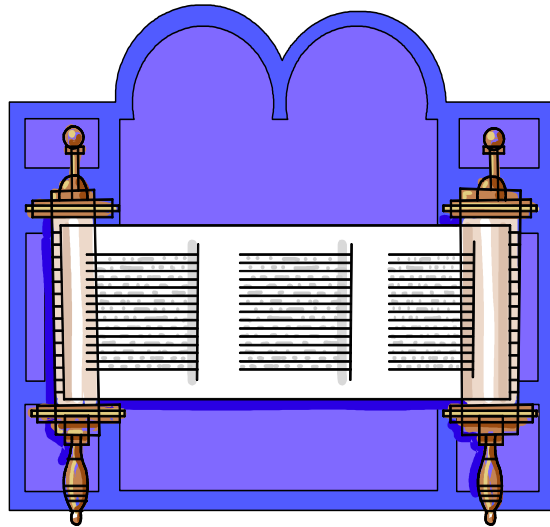


Confirmation Reflections 2014

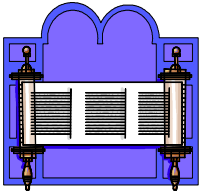
June 7, 2014 9 Sivan 5774
June 8, 2014 10 Sivan 5774

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



Temple Ahavat Shalom

Barry M. Lutz, Senior Rabbi
Jennifer Roher, Cantor
Shawna Brynjegard-Bialik, Rabbi
Gail Karlin, President



Brianna Lee Brennan

When it came to writing my Confirmation speech, I drew a blank. Not because I didn't have any memories of my time here at Temple, but that there were too many to count.

I have been coming to TAS for as long as I can remember. Not only have I grown as an individual, but I have found a way to express myself. Coming to Temple Sunday, Tuesday, and now Wednesday wasn't a grueling task for me; I didn't mind. Through the 13 years I've been here, I have matured through my Bat Mitzvah and now Confirmation. I have also learned to be more responsible and accept myself for who I am. My family here and TAS have helped shape me into the person I am today.

As the years have passed, my beliefs in God started to disappear; I stopped believing that there was someone or something out there listening. As I began coming to Confirmation, I learned more about God and what the concept meant to me. As of today, I have found my interest in God has changed and have found myself closer with God than before I started Confirmation.

When I think about it, next year I'm going to graduate from high school and go to college. That's a big step. The memories I have at Temple will never be forgotten.

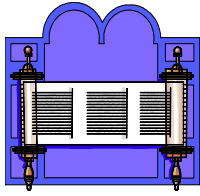
I will never forget the day Ilysa persuaded me to go to the beach bonfire TASTY event. As the day arrived, I was super excited and hyped. That was the night I fractured my wrist. Not only do I remember wearing a cast for the next two and a half months, but my best friend Sydney putting seaweed on my wrist to make the pain go away.

Furthermore, regarding the trip I took to D.C. with my fellow friends, I became close with my classmates and especially, my friend Katelyn.

In addition, I will always recall rushing my mom and sister out of our house to make it on time to class and Friday night services.

In the end, the years leading up to my Confirmation have been fun, interesting and memorable.

Thank You.



Courtney Sasha Cohen

I'm Batman. Or at least I like to pretend I am. My name is Courtney Cohen, and I have gone to Temple Ahavat Shalom since I was in Mommy and Me Classes. Ever since I was a little girl I have looked up to Batman. He is such a dark character and often people ask why he inspires me so much. Batman has a strong sense of justice and a desire to always do what is right for the betterment of society. I am also a strong believer in social justice and trying to make society more equitable for everyone. This belief fuels my passions in all aspects of my life. I have longed to be a fashion designer, forever. I want to help remold societal beauty standards so that all people, no matter what skin color, body type, etc., can feel beautiful. Because everyone is beautiful. I currently go to Cleveland HS and am part of the CORE Humanities Program. This year we have analyzed in great detail social injustices around the world. It just so happens that the focus of Confirmation has also been social justice. Coincidence? I think not!

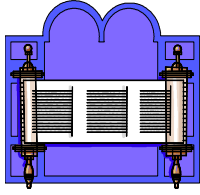
So you may be wondering why I am wearing the mask. I mean you all already know my name. Let me explain, everyone wears a mask. We all put on different identities of who we are and how we feel. When I was growing up I experienced a lot of self hatred and depression. I wore a mask, hiding myself underneath a strong exterior. But the amazing support from the TAS community has helped me become a stronger individual. (*remove mask*) Hi. My name is Courtney Cohen. And now, because of the support from the Junior Choir, Purim Spiel, song sessions, TASTY Board, friendships and so much more I no longer need the mask.

And because of these Jewish values I am proud to be who I am. I have learned to respect all individuals, and remember that everyone has a story to share. I have learned that I have to make mistakes, and that the proper punishments will come. I have learned that adults are not always right and it is okay to respectfully question authority. I have learned how to deal with tragedy and loss. I have learned how to love and make friends. I have learned how to be a member of a community.

As we went through Hebrew High we worked with Beit Schuvah; a Jewish rehabilitation center that sent speakers to talk with us about the dangers of substance abuse and addiction. I learned so much about myself and my lifestyle through the bonding and understanding that Beit Schuvah provided me with.

Our Confirmation Class recently went on a trip to Washington D.C. I can honestly say that was the most Jewish experience I've ever had. Yes, I had a wonderful Bat Mitzvah, but sitting in front of the Lincoln Memorial surrounded by other Jews at a place with so much history really made me feel like a member of the Jewish community. There we were able to lobby, for a cause of our choice, in front of congress. I chose to speak on behalf of the rights of the LGBTQ community and the workplace discrimination that they face. Being able to have a voice in our government felt amazing. I really enjoy giving back to my community in any way I can. I volunteer often with the Leukemia and

Lymphoma Society and Team in Training. I also work at Miller 5 days a week teaching disabled students mathematics. I have learned so much through these experiences about different people and their life experiences. I know that I would not be as aware of the world if it had not been for TAS. I am thankful that TAS has allowed me to not only have these experiences, but share them with others. Thank you to all of the Temple leaders who have helped make me who I am today. Because I'm Courtney!

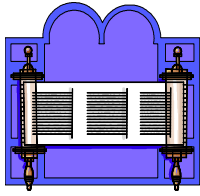


Jordon Ryan Cohen

Hello, my name is Jordon Cohen. On this beautiful Sunday I would like to share a story about my friends and me on our trip to Washington D.C. Now, I don't think I should be sharing this story, but I am going to anyway. I was fortunate enough to be in a room with my best friends who are like brothers to me; Adin, Ben, and Jonathan. Well, on the first night in Washington, we had no dinner.

Rabbi Lutz said that the one thing we could not do is go somewhere and eat. So we decided, as a group of starved individuals, that we needed something to eat. By the time we figured out where the room service sheet was it was past 12 o'clock Eastern time. 12 o'clock was when Room Service ended and we thought we were doomed. By this time it was 12:30am, so I made an adult decision to ask the Front Desk if there were any places that could deliver and were open at this time. The Front Desk assistant told me that there was a Domino's open late. I'm sure most of you can assume what happens next. We ordered pizza and cherished our first night in Washington D.C. This trip was very fun especially since I got to spend it with some of my closest friends. One thing I really enjoyed about the trip was presenting a speech to Brad Sherman's assistant. When I came back to school that Tuesday, I realized that Brad Sherman was at my school giving a presentation.

One obstacle that I overcame which I would like to share was the change of one high school to another high school. I finished my 9th grade year at Chatsworth High School with a GPA of 4.0. I was currently on the basketball team and in a few clubs. I had an opportunity to get into El Camino Real from open enrollment. This was a tough decision for me. Whether I should stay at Chatsworth and continue getting good grades in a school environment that I don't really like or care for, or transfer to a school with a higher level of education. El Camino has a very good athletics program and a school environment that fits me well. I decided that El Camino would give me not only a better education, but a better lifestyle to live through by waking up every morning knowing that there are new faces and new people to meet. I have been going to El Camino for my 2nd year now and I love it there. There are Pros and Cons to every situation. It just so happens that an opportunity came up that I just couldn't give up. I might not be getting outstanding grades at El Camino, but I am sure getting a better education and learning a lot more. One thing I have learned from changing schools is that it's not challenging unless you make it challenging. When I changed schools, I didn't realize how open everyone was and how many new opportunities opened up when I made this decision. Not only was this the hardest decision in my life as of now, but at the end of the day I felt much better about what I did and how I managed to hang in there.



Sara Ashley Cohn

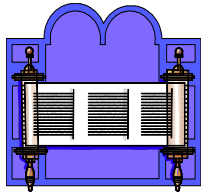
I love being Jewish, not just because I believe in God, but because of the many opportunities it has given me. For me, being Jewish is not just about the religion, it is about the community and the many things that we can achieve being part of this Jewish community. Being at the Temple from Preschool to Confirmation has allowed me to see this community in action, but not just within these walls. I have seen this community all throughout the country, from spending two summers at Camp Newman in Santa Rosa, to attending many NFTY events, participating in Urban Mitzvah Corps in New Jersey and going on L'Taken with my amazing Confirmation Class. I have learned so much about how we can benefit not just our Jewish community but also the world around us.

I honestly feel like these experiences have helped me figure out who I am today and who I want to become and the impact that I want to have on the world around me. From giving pennies every Sunday at Hebrew School, helping with Hurricane Sandy Relief, working with kids with disabilities and lobbying for issues such as the rights for people with disabilities as well as education reform, I have seen what an impact we can all have on the world around us and on the communities we are all constantly creating.

But so what? Yeah these experiences have inspired me in life, but what can this inspiration do to help us give back to the community that has always given us so much? Personally, for me, this inspiration has given me the confidence and the drive to become a leader for myself and for others both in school and at the Temple. Being a leader from what I have learned is not about the title, it is about what you do with the title that you are given. It is about understanding who you are as a person and understanding the people who you are working for and with. It is about finding what needs to be said and what needs to be worked on to create a community where everyone can find a place and a purpose that makes them unique.

Many times these unique aspects of life cannot be seen and are left in the dust, but I feel that they can be the most important parts of any person's life. I have personally found these unique aspects of my life while attending summer camp and Urban Mitzvah Corps and L'Taken. All activities have given me the opportunity to feel a part of such an amazing community and have helped me see the power and the strength that any individual can have within a community that can not only change their lives but the lives of everyone around them.

In the end it all boils down to "you." What I have learned through these multiple experiences giving back, participating in leadership, and "being Jewish" is that only you can decide how to make a mark and make a change in this community that offers so much. Only you can show the world what this community means to you. Because at the end of the day, only you can be "the change that you want to see in the world."



Rachael Elisabeth Siegel Denny

“Love”

Basically, this song explains my theology and my view of the world. Something that we talked about a lot in class was the question of why God lets bad things happen to good people. So based on that idea, my song discusses my belief that yes bad things do happen to good people, but as creatures created in the image of God, we have the power within ourselves to make something good out of the bad. The song is called "Love" because in my opinion, I think that God is really personified through the love, trust, and power that we have within ourselves to shape our world.

Verse One:

God is good, and God is right
That's what I've heard all my life.
But if God is good, and God is right,
How can he let so many cry?
In a world that's dark, and filled with pain
It feels like God's good is outweighed
By the flooding rain that pours down my face.

Chorus:

Maybe God is not a man, and maybe there's no divine plan.
Maybe it's just up to you and me to see what life can be.
Maybe God is not above, instead he's shining in the love
That lives in you and me, all we need, to just be free.
Maybe God's in love.

Verse Two:

I believe as people we
Are capable of so much
To make our dreams a reality
With the spark of God in our touch.
We can fix a world that's sick
With the power that's in us.
To just begin to know what lies within,
With a little care and love.

Chorus:

Maybe God is not a man, and maybe there's no divine plan.
Maybe it's just up to you and me to see what life can be.
Maybe God is not above, instead he's shining in the love
That lives in you and me, all we need, to just be free.
Maybe God's in love.

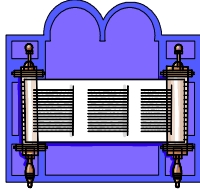
(x2)

Verse Three:

This world could be good, and it could be right...

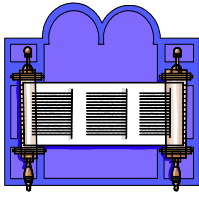
Because God is love and God is trust,

He's everything within us.



Craig Ebersold

I have come to Temple all my life and almost every year it's the same thing, Moses did this, apples dipped in honey, no talking in class, and so forth. However, this changes later, when they start to state what the Reform Movement believes in. As Reform Jews we believe this and this. Then it shifts to what do you believe because the good thing about being a Reform Jew is that you can believe in almost anything. But the truth is, even with most of Confirmation dedicated to finding out what you believe in, I still don't know what I truly believe in. I was in my geometry class and the kid sitting next to me was talking about his senior project and how he wanted to do it on, "Did God create man or did man create God?" Since then this question has bothered me. If we think about it, religion and God explains what we do not understand. It gives us an idea of the unexplainable. Many of us look to God in times of need. Now this question drives me to find what I believe in and has for the past couple of years. Temple has helped me on that path. I am up here today to tell you this and thank the community for helping me on my path to find what I believe in.



Brandon Leonard Friedman

Everyone has a defining moment when they realize the true impact of Judaism in their own life. Last summer was my moment. I traveled with three of my friends across the country to the small town of New Brunswick, New Jersey. The program was called Urban Mitzvah Corps and was sponsored by the North American Federation of Temple Youth. When I arrived, I was joined by a group of thirty other Jewish teens from across the country. From the very first day, we all felt connected to each other, like we were all best friends. We were given the option of selecting an organization to volunteer at during this program, and I choose to work with underprivileged kids at a summer camp, Play SAFE. Believe me, it was a struggle. I didn't envision coming to New Jersey and getting tackled by 60 eight-year-olds every day – that's right, sixty of them and one of me. It was a challenge I had to face every day, and in the end I firmly believe I made a difference. I received a note from one of the kids, Kenny, which read, "Brandon you are the best teacher," with teacher misspelled. This really hit home for me because it showed me that these kids wanted to learn, but no one had faith in them or the desire to help them. For the next several weeks, I put all my effort into changing these kids lives for the better by teaching them basic reading, writing, and arithmetic.

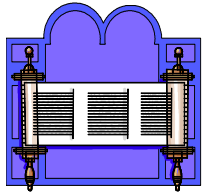
After working at Play SAFE during the day, I would return to my Rutgers University home where I would share an evening with the new friends that I had made. We participated in different programs. One night we would be building towers out of marshmallows and pretzels. The next, we would have an amazing speaker on issues of hate crimes. One day we did Hurricane Sandy work and others were having fun at the Jersey Shore. And after that was all over, we would go out for a late night frozen yogurt run.

Throughout this entire experience, I was amazed with how easy it was to make friends with the other teens. Considering the fact that we live across the country in the "far off" land of California, making us more artsy, overdressed, and best friends with all the Hollywood movie stars, the East coasters really seemed excited to embrace us! The very first thing that we bonded over was our nighttime ritual, where we all knew and sang the same tunes of Haskeiveinu and the Shema. Here, I came to realize that what I experienced as a Jew was not limited to my Temple or Southern California. There is a whole vast realm of Judaism throughout nearly every corner of the country and the world, a global Jewish connection.

We are all leaving for college in close to a year, and to me, this is a very scary thought at times. I now understand that no matter where I go there will be a group of kids that I will already feel connected to because of this global Jewish connection. I know I will be able to walk into a Hillel and feel included even before my first meal with them. It took me traveling across the country to realize how strong this connection is, and I

encourage anyone who hasn't experienced this global Jewish connection outside of Temple Ahavat Shalom, or their own Temple, or California, to do so.

Still, I cannot emphasize the importance of the foundation where the connection started. My experiences at this Temple in the past few years have made me excited about being part of the Jewish community. Every day, I love working on our TASTY Youth Group Board to plan events and retreats for all of my Temple friends. On Sunday mornings, I wake up excited to come work with the little 5th graders in Bet Class on their Hebrew and Israel projects. And of course, I look forward week after week to spend my Tuesday evenings with all of you. My global Jewish connection begins at our Temple, our home, and we all have the ability to embrace it and make something out of it. As Jews, we are all part of something truly special, and we should be proud of this no matter where our lives take us in college or beyond. Toda Raba. Thank you.



Adin Harper Goldenberg

“14 years at Temple Ahavat Shalom”

My Jewish journey started here on April 13, 2000, which was my first day of Preschool. I didn't remember that date, but my mom did! My ECEC Teachers were Anita and Patti. I have so many great memories of doing fun activities, loved my teachers, and met so many friends, who are in my Confirmation Class today. So actually, I have been driving to TAS for 14 years now. It started off with my mom driving me in my infant car seat, and then it went to sharing the back seat with Luca, and then sharing the back seat with Luca and Ella. Now, it's me driving myself to TAS, and sometimes bringing Luca. Wow, time sure travels fast, and the memories will last a lifetime.

When I started Elementary School, I was very happy to take a lot of my TAS friends to school with me, it was such a relief! When I found out that I would be coming back here to play and visit with friends, I was bummed that I had to come back to school on Sundays, my only day off. It all worked out fine, until the Sunday turned into an additional Wednesday, then Wednesdays turned into Tuesdays, then I was really bummed, but got used to it. Learning about Judaism, prayers, life and generations before me was actually very interesting. Eventually, I started liking it here, I felt comfortable and they had a basketball court so I thought, “I can handle it.”

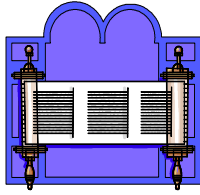
After my Bar Mitzvah, I was so relieved and really enjoyed coming here on Tuesday nights to see my friends that I did not normally see in school. There was no pressure; it was just hanging out with my friends who had taken this journey with me, in a safe and stress free environment. Whether it was a TASTY event, sitting and talking around campfires, overnight retreats or assembling baskets for the less fortunate, it was fun to be involved. The key word is “involved,” which means: connected with someone or something, typically on an emotional or personal level.

Our L'Taken Trip to Washington D.C. was amazing. Great sights, great friends, great weather and great chaperones made the trip fantastic. Friday night service was amazing, as we stood around the Lincoln Memorial and sang. Also, lobbying before Brad Sherman, and speaking about Stem Cell Research gave me power to believe anything is possible. Scared yes, but my mission completed!

What have I learned in the last 14 years of my life at TAS? I have made lifelong friends, read an impossible language from the Torah, led a Havdalah Service, made baskets for the less fortunate, paraded around a room in a chair being held up by family and friends, sang songs on the bimah, visited a matzoh factory, planted trees in the Sepulveda dam for Mitzvah Day, went to Malibu for retreats, took a class about the birds and the bees, learned to cook, learned Krav Maga, washed cars in the parking lot for donations, picked fruit off of a stranger's tree to donate, had a basketball shooting contest, wrapped holiday presents for the less fortunate, learned about the Holocaust,

listened to drug addicts teach me about not using drugs, collected 100 pounds of canned food for MEND, learned about my faith, and how I can continue to help this world today as a JEW. This has been an incredible journey! A mega sized Thank You to Rabbi Lutz, Cantor Linsky, Rabbi Shawna, Cantor Roher, Debi Chesler, Mrs. Liberman, and all the wonderful Preschool and Hebrew School teachers here at TAS.

Finally, to my grandparents, and family who have come here to see me perform in Preschool all the way to my Bar Mitzvah, I love you. Ella and Luca, please continue school here until Confirmation, it's good for you, believe me...And, to my mom and dad, for sending me here to begin my Jewish journey, I love you both and hope I have made you proud!



Evan Abraham Gurnick

What/Who is God to you? Is God an omnipotent being who hears all wishes and grants those deemed acceptable? Do you believe in the traditional Judaic concept of a higher power one prays to and thanks for all that has been given and will be given to oneself? Throughout the last 13 years of my life at Temple Ahavat Shalom, I have been searching for the answer.

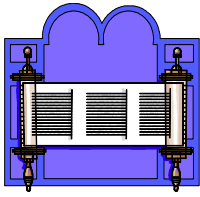
It was not until just recently that I found my answer. In fact, it was not until just recently that I realized I was looking for an answer.

Flash back to one year ago, in Rabbi Lutz's "Hangin' with the Rabbi" class, cleverly named "hangin'" instead of "hanging" to sound hip and attract teenagers such as myself, because otherwise, who wants to hang out with their Rabbi?

In this class I asked Rabbi Lutz that question, "What is God to you?" and I'll never forget his response. (Hopefully I'm not undermining your religious credibility with what I'm about to say). He replied that he views God not in the traditional sense of an omnipotent metaphysical power who one prays to for gifts, but rather that the term "God" is a synonym for "community." When one prays to God for change, they are asking their community to change. The idea that God is everywhere is true, in that your community is, literally, everywhere around you. When I ask God for help, to be strong, to get through life, I am asking my community, my friends and family, the Temple congregation, to help me, to make me strong, and to get me through my life.

As I said, it was not until just recently that this became clear to me. The night my grandfather, Santo Galanti, passed away – I prayed to God. At this time what Rabbi Lutz said was not even present in my mind. But that night, I called upon God to be there for me. It was not until my grandfather's funeral that I remembered Rabbi Lutz's words and realized the vast implications of them. I called upon my community to be there for me, and they were. My family, my friends, the entire Temple, was there by my side. They were present at the funeral, and have been present my entire life to show their support for me. Each and every person sitting before me today is God. As I thank God for all that he has done for me, I am really thanking my community for everything we have done together.

Before writing this speech I was asked why I kept attending Confirmation, when I have other activities in my life, which have caused me to miss almost 1/3 of each year. I always told myself, "Keep attending, you'll be thankful when it's over," and I am. If nothing else from my Jewish education, I will take this one piece wherever I go. Were it not for my Confirmation Class, I would not have been able to find this belief, which will help me in all my life. I also would not have been able to share this belief with all of you, which I believe it is my duty (not to sound cliché) to spread the word of God.



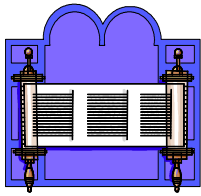
Arielle Himmel

There were many times in my life when I thought about not coming to Religious School anymore because, to be honest, I thought it was a waste of my time. I didn't know who I wanted to be as a person and I didn't know what I needed to do to become that person. Looking back, I am so glad that I made the right decision to stay. I have learned so much about Judaism in Religious School, from learning about the history of Israel, to the Holocaust and how it affected every single person in this very room, to learning how important being Jewish is. And if I stopped attending Religious School, then I would just be throwing this knowledge away.

As I think back on my time spent here at TAS, I not only think about what I learned, but also all of the memories that I have made with these wonderful people around me. It is hard to think back on all of my memories simply because I have so many. I remember my first day not knowing anyone and hoping that people would like me. I remember going to Washington D.C. and feeling closer to my classmates, and Rabbi Lutz, than I ever have before. There are so many moments to think back on, and so many that I will cherish for the rest of my life.

Confirmation has been one of the most challenging and enjoyable years I have spent at TAS. Confirmation has been more than just learning about religion. It has helped shape me as an individual and shape the way I look at the world. I would like to say thank you to everyone who has guided me through this process and has watched me grow!

As time goes on, we will all continue to change, grow, and experience life in the most wonderful ways. The memories made here will always be with me and I will always remember them no matter where life takes me. It is these memories that help make all of us who we are and help shape who we will be. No matter where my life takes me, I will always keep with me the things I learned at TAS and the challenges I faced.



Jonathan Lewis Lieber

When I sat down to write this speech, I really wasn't sure what I wanted to share with the congregation this evening. I'm usually a very private person, but when tasked to reflect on my life and think about what has made me who I am today, I only had to consider what I have gone through over the past 2 years, when I mounted a fight to be not only happy but healthy.

I think my benchmark moment happened in school this past year when we were learning about Transcendentalists like Henry David Thoreau. During class one day, my teacher took the students out to our "beautiful" lawn at Cleveland and told us to sit down and "be with nature" like the Transcendentalists. This 20 minute exercise turned into a coming of age experience for me. As a Transcendentalist, the most important thing to consider is that we can find our answers in nature. So, with that mission in my head, I put it to the test that afternoon.

As I sat on the mostly dirt lawn, I looked around and decided to make an effort to take this experience seriously. I considered one of the most important questions I would have to face as an 11th grade student who was raised to always value education and was supposed to "be something" when he grew up. So, I asked myself, what *did* I want to do with my life?

It's funny, as much as I don't want to admit it, my mother came up a lot in my thoughts because whatever the case may be, she is always in the trenches, by my side, shooting down the bad guys. Knowing this, it made me feel safe to explore what my options might be and know that I could probably do whatever I really wanted.

With serious concentration all I could think of was my family, my happiness and the safety of my health. As I sat outside and looked at the sky and heard the background hum of traffic, I had a sudden moment of clarity of who I am and what potential I could achieve. That moment has shaped me into the person I am today. I guess the Transcendentalists are legit. With a clear and energized mind, I knew what I was going to write down for this assignment and I was actually excited to do my homework and reflect back on my experience of the day.

The next day, we spent the beginning of the period reviewing the students' reflections. The teacher asked who wanted to share. I paused for a moment and my hand went up in excitement. I felt confident in what I wrote and I wanted to share it with the class. The first person called upon, said how they observed that the air conditioning was annoying them and how bad our grass was. Not much of an epiphany. The second they started talking about trivial things, I slowly lowered my hand, doubting myself that I did the exercise correctly. As a result, I lost my confidence to discuss what I wrote with the class, which I still partially regret 'til this day.

But here I am tonight, and I finally want to share what I would have said had I been called on in class. Weighing heavy on my mind was the recent physical problems I had been experiencing. As background, about two years ago, while doing the one thing I most loved, basketball, I ended up benched for the game because the pain in my leg I had been experiencing for a couple of weeks had gotten so severe that I couldn't even walk. As it ends up, after various tests and doctors around me in my underwear, it was determined that I had a large blood clot in my leg which was caused by this autoimmune disease I was diagnosed with that causes blood clots. I was only 15 when this happened, and I had really no idea what this meant or what the implications were other than my leg really hurt, I couldn't walk, I had to miss a couple of weeks of school, and because of the medication I had to take, I couldn't play my favorite sport, basketball. I wasn't happy. In fact, I kind of sank to a low point feeling that I just wouldn't be able to deal with this.

Life was difficult for me during this time, from struggling to get to the bathroom to wondering if I would be able to one day run or walk without pain. I was actually scared that the doctors wouldn't be able to fix it and I'd end up with a peg leg. As a result of all these feelings, I started not eating right and because I couldn't participate in sports, I started to gain some weight. Once school resumed for 11th grade, I IMMEDIATELY heard jokes from some of my classmates about my weight and how I looked. To make matters worse, a couple days after school started, I stepped onto the scale during a doctor's appointment and I was in shock at the numbers that appeared. I was disgusted with myself. Here I was, a big blood clot in my leg, feeling fat, and just at the end of my ropes.

At about this time, my mom came to me and shared with me a little secret she had never told me about myself before. Apparently, when I was little, I had a learning disability and I didn't really talk until I was about 4 years old. She explained how hard I worked as a little 3 and 4 year old to learn to speak, and that by the time I entered Kindergarten, I was completely normal and at grade level. I had no memory of this or the work that I did to learn to finally talk. But knowing that I had already overcome such a big obstacle at such a young age, I had this amazing sense of confidence and truly believed that I could accomplish anything that I put my mind to. I couldn't help but think about NBA center Anderson Varejo, who is now a new role model of mine, who also had a blood clot in his leg.

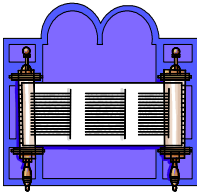
I knew in that moment that I had to do something. I had to turn myself around and get healthy and stop feeling sorry for myself. That very day I went to my mom and said, "Make me protein shakes, it's prime-time." But I said it very nicely because it was my mother I was talking to. Besides the shakes, I made it a routine to run every day after school. In the middle of my runs, I would stop and ask myself, "Why should I try?" and I would say, "This is not going to work." Then I remembered watching a video from the best speaker, Eric Thomas who said, "When you want to succeed as bad as you want to breathe, then you'll be successful." This phrase was on repeat in my head every day

thereafter. I was not trying to get the body I wanted for my classmates, but for myself. After a couple of months of running up and down my block numerous times, I felt like I was myself again. From barely being able to walk to the bathroom, to running down the street, I was ready to perform the famous Kareem sky hook at the park. I made it my mission to go every Saturday to the park and play basketball with my friends. Whenever I was on the court, I felt happy and my friends referred to my play as “Smash Mouth Basketball” because I went hard in the paint. Although I would be out of breath after the first 3 plays, I had a lot of fun practicing with my buddies. Rebound after rebound, block after block, the happier I became.

After a lot of self-doubt and a lot of hard work, I took it upon myself to play for a basketball team. From hardly being able to walk to trying out for a team, I made the greatest comeback of them all. Just a week or two after the first practice, which went well, I played my first game. For two years, I prepared to play for this team. It was my time to shine. I was proud of myself that throughout the runs and the strenuous days at the park, I did not give up. The blood clot happened, but I am still here. When it was time for my first game, I felt feelings of joy and nervousness throughout my body. I put on my jersey, my number is 00 (the secret weapon), and then came the self-doubt again.

Multiple times in my life, my self-doubt blocked the way to my inner greatness. I said goodbye to the doubt and unleashed the “Eye of the Tiger.” The game started and I felt really good about myself watching my teammates in action. After a couple of minutes, I got the call to go in. One of my best friends, who is here tonight, Ben, slapped my butt and said, “Comeback!” My first game back was by far one of the most thrilling games I’ve played. The comeback was real.

So now, getting back to my Transcendentalist epiphany and what I wanted to share with my class, had I not doubted myself. As I sat outside at school that afternoon and slowly sank within myself, searching for the answer to the question that had been weighing heavily on me, “What *did* I want to do with my life?” It just came to me. I honestly didn’t know, and I didn’t have to know. What I did know was that I was strong enough to face whatever challenges I might have to face and that I had the support of my family and friends to help get me there. I. Am. Still. Here. And. I. Can. Do. Anything.

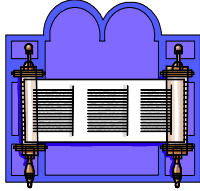


Rachel Rose Lorsch

Growing up and being a part of a Temple was always a big part of my life. My family and I would attend Friday night Shabbat Services, High Holiday Services, and other events that went on during the year. Making the transition from Temple Ramat Zion to Temple Ahavat Shalom was a tough one. When our rabbi at Temple Ramat Zion passed away and things just weren't going right, we knew we needed a new place to call home. As soon as I started Hebrew School at TAS, I made tons of friends. They welcomed me with open arms and treated me as if I had always been there. Since that day in my 5th grade Hebrew School class, I have continued to stay connected with most of the friends I had made. TAS is really a home away from home. I have experienced so much here, my Bat Mitzvah, NFTY Mitzvah Corp, our trip to Washington D.C., new friends and teachers, so many opportunities I may not have experienced; and for that I am grateful. My feelings towards Temple Ahavat Shalom have never changed. Every time I come here I just think about how grateful I am.

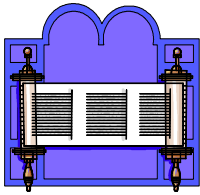
Being a part of the Reform Movement, as you know, is based around social action and social justice. Ever since I could remember I wanted to spend my life impacting others and making differences around the world. Little did I know how involved I could get with pursuing my passion for helping others through this Temple. I have been given opportunities that I will carry with me for the rest of my life. These experiences ultimately help make me who I am. Not only am I able to have a better understanding of the type of human being I am today, I also know what it's like to have a love and burning passion for social justice. It's so important to speak your mind and promote your opinions. Temple Ahavat Shalom has taught me to keep thriving and pushing for what I believe in, no matter how bumpy the road may be. There IS a light at the end of the tunnel.

As I stand here, I would like to give a huge thanks to Rabbi Lutz, my parents, my friends, and everyone else who has helped me throughout this crazy journey. You all have impacted my life like you would never know.



Ethan Philip Mermell

Hello, Congregation, I am Ethan Mermell, a Temple Ahavat Shalom member since the age of two and my whole life I have lived about two houses down Chimineas. Because of this, the Temple has always been quite a major component in my life. I have been here for Preschool, Hebrew School, and TAS High. So many of my peers up here on the bimah I have known for as long as I can remember and a few are the first friends I've had. These people and the others involved in the Temple have so greatly shaped me into the person I am now, whether it be from the basics in Preschool or intellectual ideas in TAS High. So much of what I know and have learned about myself and the world I live in has come from people and experiences at this Temple. I would like to say that many of the most enlightening individuals that I have ever been able to learn from and interact with have been here. My Confirmation Class has some brilliant minds that on Tuesday evenings always would say some amazing things. All of the teachers and rabbis at Temple Ahavat Shalom have been great. I would like to thank Rabbi Shawna, Rabbi Lutz, Cantor Roher, my peers, and all of the wonderful people involved in the Temple. Thank you and goodnight.



Benjamin Aaron Messinger

Before I get started, I want to thank all of the wonderful teachers I've had here, especially Rabbi Lutz. He has not only done so much for me throughout the years, but for my family. From being there for support when we lost a loved one, to helping prepare me for my Bar Mitzvah, I cannot thank him enough for being a great Rabbi.

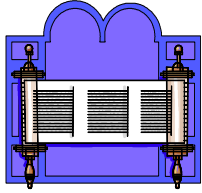
If I had to single out one specific thing that I am most grateful to have gained at TAS, it is the friendship with my three best friends. We've been through it all together, and if it wasn't for my time at TAS, we probably would have never become as close as we are.

Another thing I appreciate having learned at TAS is the set of values that are taught here. From helping those in need, to responsibility for one's actions, to how to be a good member of a community, these are all traits that will inevitably help me in life. While I may not be the person most in touch with my feelings on God and religion, it is the lessons and values we talk about here and at home, which have helped shape me into the person I am today.

I've learned that in order to make a positive contribution to the world around me, I don't need to base my decisions on what looks or sounds good to others. I only need to look within myself to determine where my passions lie and go from there. If I'm passionate about something, that passion is what will help me to be successful. When I was looking for a way to contribute to my community that was meaningful to me personally, I realized that I needed to look no further than my lifelong love of sports and basketball.

Though sports can seem frivolous to some, I was happy to find a way to make a positive impact in my community by starting a non-profit called Hoops with Heart. Through fundraisers, we've been able to raise money to donate needed athletic equipment to the West Valley Boys & Girls Club, as well as the LAPD Pals Program, which are both geared toward providing low-cost after-school programs for at-risk youth. Maybe even more importantly, Hoops with Heart is made up of student athletes, mostly at my school, as well as some of my buddies here at TAS. We mentor the kids at the time of the equipment donation, stretching and running basketball drills. We hope to help them build excitement and confidence in their ability to play sports and to be great students. What surprised me when we did our first donation event was how amazingly enthusiastic the kids were. There were a lot of high fiving, smiles, and one little girl even asked her dad when he came to pick her up if we could come to her birthday party! The TAS community has been so supportive of my efforts with Hoops with Heart, which really has been an outgrowth of everything I have come to value through my Jewish learning experiences.

Thank you again to everyone here at TAS that has been a special part of my life so far.



Katelyn Mulcahy

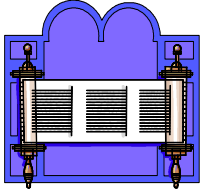
Hi. I'm Katelyn Mulcahy. (Yes I know, SOOO Jewish).

It's weird to think that our experience as Jewish adolescents is really coming to a close. Looking back, we have done SO MUCH together. This is where we switched rows after moving to the next grade. This is where we completed our 8 required services a year. This is where we presented our Holocaust Service. This is where we got pizza and popcorn at breaks. This is where we became Bar and Bat Mitzvahs. This is where we met to go to the TASTY Bonfire. This is where our school work stops outside that black fence. This is where our L'Taken trip began. This is where love and home come together and cherish us. This, right now, is where we become confirmed.

Ever since my Middle School gave me a planner I would always write down what day I had Hebrew School. Tuesday nights. It's always been my escape from the world and from school. This is the place where I found myself. I have family and friends here; I have everything I could really ever need here. Sure, maybe I felt like an outsider because I didn't go to Granada or Cleveland, but I was still greeted with the same smile by everyone every time I came. That's what I love. I can be happy here and accepted no matter what. I don't have to worry about what anyone thinks of me.

When I think about it, I've never really had to worry about anything here like I do outside of this community. And sure, maybe I was worried and nervous for this moment, standing up here making this speech. But I think I got through it. I made it. We made it. :)

A special thanks to all of my friends and family who have supported me through all of these years. Also a special thanks to my parents, whose 25th anniversary is today. I love each and everyone here, and I'm so glad to have experienced this journey with you.



Jessica Lynn Petrak

I would like to say something to the 2014 Confirmation Class.

As we reach this stressful time, we all hear, “What’d you get on the SAT? What’s your GPA? Any extracurricular?” With the constant pressure, it’s nearly impossible for any of us to feel confident in our “resumes.”

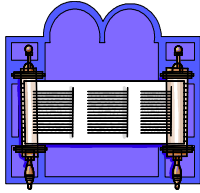
Going on college tours and filling out college applications might make you feel small. You may feel like you are just another number on a list. However, you guys are all so much more than that. No matter how much we all belittle ourselves, we need to understand that we are not your average teenagers.

Every Tuesday, all 28 of us meet in the chapel and discuss our personal beliefs on God and theology. C’mon, how many other teenagers can say they set aside time to do that?

I’m not saying we all read novels and memorize dictionaries for fun. We all still do typical teenage things like waste hours on social media and argue with our parents for more freedom. So why is it that we’ve each decided to continue coming to TAS every week for years now? We all have a different answer. I personally came for two reasons. I enjoy the two hours of being around really nice, welcoming, smart people. And yes, this includes Rabbi Lutz. Rabbi, you may not know this, but if I ever needed an adult to talk to and it couldn’t be my parents, I would come to you because I really trust and admire you. So while being around amazing people, I also came for the discussions. After being lectured all day at school, it was so refreshing to come to Confirmation and be able to use my voice in discussion. Rabbi Shawna, I’m so appreciative that you made the effort to come up with eye opening programs that allowed us to evaluate and discuss our beliefs instead of telling us what it means to be Jewish.

Even though we all came for different reasons, if we each find what we loved about Confirmation and hold onto that, every single one of us will grow up to be happy, successful, leaders of our community. So 2014 Confirmation Class, as school gets even more competitive, remember that each one of you has a special character, and that character counts.

Thank you.



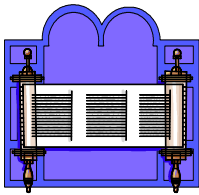
Jared Foster Renard

Choice, an intangible idea that we all possess the ability to use; our choices create lasting effects that shape our lives. The choices we make every day reveal our character and our beliefs, they show our morals and our ideals. We make choices every day, and every choice, no matter how big or small, affects each and every one of us immensely. It is like my principal, Mr. Coburn, at Noble said every day, "The choices you make today, shape your world tomorrow."

Over the past year, the choices that I have made have changed who I am, how I am perceived, and what is expected from me. I chose to take one of the hardest classes my school offers, AP Calculus BC, I chose to take a leadership position and become president of my BBYO Youth Chapter, and I chose to take on the obligation of coming to Confirmation and have the honor of being confirmed here today. These choices have shown me doors that I would have never been able to open before. These doors have led to experiences that have changed my life. The D.C. trip for example, not only did it broaden my eyes to the limitless ways I am able to help my community, but I created close bonds with people in my class that I wasn't even sure what their names were before the trip. During the L'Taken trip, I was given a unique experience to make my own decisions. I had the choice to go to whatever programs interested me, I had the choice on which museum I would visit, and I had the choice of how I would spend free time – most of which was spent with everyone in my room squished together watching movies on my computer and binging on the sour gummy worms I brought.

Taking on the leadership role of becoming president of my AZA Chapter was a huge step in developing my character and learning how to effectively work with people. As my term as president comes to an end, I can proudly say that I was able to effectively grow and strengthen my chapter; and now, I have decided to run for Regional Board for BBYO. Making the decision to join BBYO has changed my life in ways I cannot even explain; it has given me people skills, confidence in myself, and a fun and care free environment to express myself.

Over this past year my choices changed me for the better. My choices have made me a better leader and opened up my eyes to what I can accomplish. So I ask you all to do what I did, as well as everyone in my Confirmation Class, make a choice on how you are going to live your life, you will surprise yourself on what you can do if you just choose to do it.



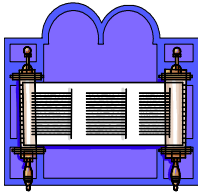
Talia Robin

About six years ago was the time that my family made the decision to join Temple Ahavat Shalom. At first I was skeptical about changing temples. I didn't know very many people and everyone seemed to already know each other since they had been going here from the time they were in Preschool. Today, I am so thankful that my family had made the decision to join this Temple because throughout the years here, I have made some amazing memories with some incredible people.

Growing up, I had always been surrounded by Jewish people and Jewish customs, so when I started high school at Northridge Academy, it was quite a transition for me. There aren't very many Jewish people that go there and not very many people that know what the Jewish religion is all about. As a result, other students would ask me questions about my religion and still do so today. I always happily explain to them the Jewish faith, which seems to excite them, even though it is not similar to most of their religions at all. Last year, in my world history class, we went into depth about the Holocaust. Most of my classmates had no idea what it was and once they learned about the true horrors of it, most of them started to develop an appreciation for Jewish people. At that point, I had never been so proud to be Jewish.

It was not until recently that I started to question my faith in God and this religion. For a while, I lost faith in what I had so strongly believed in, which made me feel like I lost a part of myself. Through this bump in the road, I was nervous about sharing my beliefs and feelings in Confirmation with my peers, but as it turned out, many of my peers had similar beliefs and doubts as I did. This period of doubt also made me realize something. It made me realize how accepting Judaism is. I've never felt any sense of discomfort in Hebrew School and Confirmation because of what I personally believed in since my peers, as well as the rabbi and my teachers, listened with an open and nonjudgmental mind.

On my way to Washington D.C., I still had the same doubtful mindset in Jewish faith, but on my way home, my entire perspective had changed. I felt as if the L'Taken trip helped me find who I truly am once again. Going to Washington D.C. not only reassured my beliefs in God and Judaism, but also helped me realize that being Jewish and going to Religious School is what helped me shape the way I live my life. I am so immensely grateful that throughout this journey, I have found myself and a group of people that I've gotten to know and love so much. I will forever cherish all of the memories I have made here at Temple Ahavat Shalom. I think it's safe to say that most of us would call it our "home away from home."



Abigail Elizabeth Segal

Euclid's fifth Common Notion states that
"The whole is greater than the part."
And this, I believe, is so.
Not just between the entire group,
But within the individual.

We are all made up of identities:
Alone, they are pieces of people, never the entirety
But somehow, people define themselves and others by only bits of who they are.
Everyone is made up of bits of themselves.

To make certain that we are still ourselves,
That we are still fully human,
We seek confirmation of our identities.
We seek the approval of the institutions that surround us, that we belong to.

And so we go through life,
building up ourselves through affirmation.

Being Jewish is an identity.
Like any other community, we have our own identity development process:
 the Jewish life cycle.
We are born like anyone else,
We die like anyone else:
 The two points that define our life-line in total.

Consecration brings (some) a Jewish childhood.
A B'nai Mitzvah starts Jewish teenager hood.
 (My Torah portion was Va'et-chanan; I read
 the Ten Commandments, the V'ahavta, and the Sh'ma.
 The word the scribe wrote for my family in the Torah I didn't carry was
 from my portion, and meant "accounting," perfect for my mathematician father.
 The Aliyah I read today is the same as my 2nd Aliyah, except for 1 line.
 Life comes to a full circle, doesn't it?)

But Confirmation...what is that?
Is it just another checkpoint on this monotonous cycle?
Is it something to be endured?
Must it be done? But I don't believe in everything!
 (This, of course, is a silly idea---no one believes in everything. The contradictory pieces
 would pull apart, leaving you back at the beginning. This is a rather painful notion.)

Everyone has---

We all have---

I have been piecing together my fractured identities,
bringing my incomplete, but somewhat comprehensible self to
each new stage
to confirm who I am.

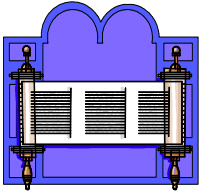
I am made up of my identities, but the whole is greater than the part.

Yes, I am Abby.

Yes, I am Jewish.

Yes, I am me.

And this is just another confirmation.



Lauren Rose Simon

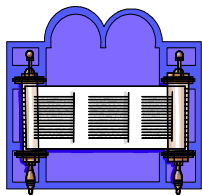
Hello. My name is Lauren Rose Simon. I have been going to TAS since the second grade. Up until about 6th grade Hebrew School was ok. I never really was what you would say “involved” with the Temple. I never really wanted to be involved with the Temple. Actually at Hebrew School I would always stick to my little group of girlfriends, never reaching out to my other classmates. I liked listening to my Hebrew School teachers, but I was always skeptical on whether or not I believed in some of the tenets of Judaism. You could say that I didn’t really care enough to be active with the Temple or to love Hebrew School.

During the summer after 9th grade, I went to a Camp in Santa Rosa called Camp Newman and generated this love for Judaism. For the first time in my life I knew what comradery felt like. I returned home from camp with a huge passion for my culture and my religion, and I was convinced that I would attend every single Friday night service so I could relive my camp days.

Of course, I did not go to every single Friday night service to relive this comradery I felt at camp, however, I did something else. I became VERY involved in Temple by first becoming Temple Ahavat Shalom’s Youth Group, or TASTY’s Secretary, going to almost every single board meeting and TASTY event. Then I began participating in NFTY, which for you who do not know is the National Federation of Temple Youth. Then this year I had the privilege to become TASTY’s Religious and Cultural Vice President. All because I went to this camp, within two weeks, I developed this ineffable love for my culture. Now, I love going to Hebrew School and learning more about Judaism.

My favorite part though, about my whole journey through Confirmation, would have to be our trip to Washington D.C. This trip was the icing on the cake for me. Going to D.C. with everyone in my Confirmation Class just reassured me how much I love Temple. Before this trip, our Confirmation Class was somewhat cliquey, and we all felt like going to Hebrew School was turning into a partial burden. But going to D.C. created a bond that will never loosen. D.C. made each and every one of us friends and enlightened us to the idea that Judaism isn’t all Hebrew School and Bar Mitzvahs.

Therefore to conclude, my odyssey through Hebrew School has been quite adventurous, and in second grade, when I first attended TAS, I never would have thought I would have accomplished what I have today. I would like to give a special “shout out” to my Confirmation Class of course, my parents for encouraging me to go to Hebrew School all these years, and the rabbis, especially Rabbi Morgenstern, for helping me be the Religious VP of TAS’ Youth. Each and every one of you has continued this comradery that I love so much, so I thank you all for that.



Rebecca Morgan Speyer

Where do I even begin to explain how my Jewish identity has had such a huge impact on my life?

I am going to start with saying how completely appreciative I am of my parents for always supporting me in the various programs I have participated in to further my experience and education. They have and will always be there to urge me to continuously give it my all no matter what. I love you very much.

Above all, there are three aspects of Israel. *Eretz* (the land), *Torah*, and *Am* (the people). Over the past few years I have had the opportunity to identify with all three of these by participating in various Jewish youth group programs. Through these programs I acquired a deeper understanding of myself and the world we live in.

For one thing, growing up at this Temple was the start of my journey. This is where I learned the foundational prayers and I met my lifelong friends that are with me here today.

Not only is Temple a part of the building blocks of my identity, but so is Camp Newman. My whole entire life encompasses the quote, "Camp is life the rest is just details." My actions in my everyday life are fueled by the Jewish values and morals I have learned throughout my ten years as a camper. Because of camp I have learned to be proud of who I am, what I stand for and where I am going in life.

Furthermore, both Tasty and NFTY have given me the opportunity to express my leadership skills. I have been on the TASTY Board for 3 years. I have had the privilege of planning TASTY retreats and other events, in order for the youth at this Temple to come together, to have a great time learning and expressing Jewish values. NFTY has occupied many of my weekends for the past 3 years and has become a community where I feel more than welcome to be myself. I have learned how to write programs encompassing Jewish values that influence my everyday life.

Temple, TASTY, NFTY, and Camp have all given me the opportunity to identify with the *Am* aspect of the three aspects of Israel.

Because of participating in NFTY regional events, I felt the need to furthermore my education by going on NFTY EIE, a semester in Israel. EIE helped me to identify with the *Eretz* and the *Torah* aspect of the three angles of Israel. Every day we would go on *tiyuulim*, or trips, to the various parts of Israel where history was made. When I am asked about what I learned while there, I am able look back to all of these trips and understand what the lesson was that day and then express that to whoever is asking. It was an eye-opening trip that only started my relationship with Israel.

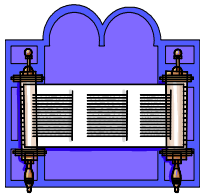
Right now I am a part of the Diller Teen Fellows. Diller is an international program that empowers us to be active, effective leaders, with a strong Jewish identity and a respect for pluralism. Through participating in Diller I have learned about my commitment to repairing the world, and I have a sense of belonging and responsibility to my community,

Israel, and the greater Jewish people. We focus on the Jewish people in Los Angeles and Tel Aviv with a focus on understanding each other's lives because that is the first step in helping each other thrive.

Lastly, L'Taken fueled my passion for Jewish influence in politics. Advocating for Jewish social justice is something that I want to create a career for myself in because I am so strongly passionate about Tikun Olam, or changing the world.

I am excited to take everything that I have learned into my college community next year in order to create a community that is enjoyable and accepting.

Thank You.

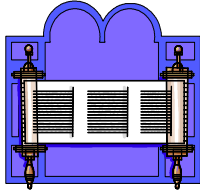


Samuel Ethan Thacker

From the time I was young, I knew something of my story, shaky details of my 10 weeks-early birth, at just over 2 pounds; of my 3 1/2-month stay in the NICU; of my grandmother's apparently continuous questioning about where G-d was as I struggled to "make it." These fuzzy particulars of my tenuous start come and go. But the one thing that stuck with me, even when just a little kid, was what my mother identified as her response to my Bubbie's reproaches: that G-d was there – she apparently indicated with a sweep of her hand indicating the entire NICU – living in that unit, in the nurses and doctors who chose this very difficult, very heartbreaking work of trying to save babies who weren't supposed to be born yet. "They could be up in the cardiac unit having people run on treadmills. Or swaddling full-term babies in the nursery. But they are here instead," my mom remembered telling Bubbie, "THAT is where G-d lives."

To live Jewishly, we are taught, is to learn Jewish history, to engage in Jewish tradition, and to love our "Jewishness." To this end, my parents, and all of you out there, have sent their children to Hebrew School, and to TAS High and its Confirmation Program. Some of us started out in Jewish Preschool or even, as in my case, Jewish Baby Class and Toddler Class, first. And my family attended services, celebrated Shabbat every Friday night for most of my life, and talked about what it means to be – the many definitions of – "Jewish." But I have often thought back to that story my mom told about the choices the doctors and nurses in the NICU made, choices that proved to her in her darkest hours that G-d is present in each of us when we act with love and compassion and heart, and especially when choosing to do so is difficult. This, I think, is what being in TAS High and Confirmation has taught me: that Jewish thought, on its own, is special indeed and has in fact changed the world, but that action, acting on that thought – with that love and compassion and heart – is what matters. Our time with Beit T'Shuva, where so many work so selflessly to help those who have been struck by the illness of addiction, and our time in Washington, D.C., learning how to advocate for social justice, taught me what Judaism in action looks like, *feels* like. Rabbi Hillel famously mused, "If I am not for myself, who will be for me? If I am only for myself, what am I? And if not now, when?" To ask these questions, and to act on them, is the quintessential ideal of Jewishness, and what I have learned through my Jewish education and hope to take into my future as a Jew.

I would like to thank everyone in this community who has touched me through their words and actions, and helped me to develop into the person I am today. To Rabbi Lutz, Rabbi Shawna, Cantor Roher, Cantor Linsky, and all of my wonderful teachers – thank you. Todah Rabah.

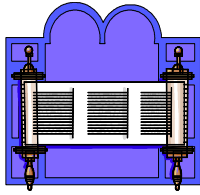


Karen Yakobi

Coming to this place with many names – that place, Jew School, Headquarters of all, hell, and home, but this home didn't tell me what to do most of the time and didn't tell me what to believe – I learned what I think, and what I feel as a Jew.

Yes, I believe in God. To me God is like a mental thing. I is God and God is I. God is a mental sense, thought, a personality. When I pray to God I pray to myself. Like "please God help me through this," is like me telling myself to pull through. That's what I think. God created earth and the rest of the stuff we say God did, then kind of leaves and looks over our shoulder like a guardian angel. With all the problems in the world, it is like a challenge to make us closer or enemies, without evil, good, challenge, change, and everything nice wouldn't exist. Also with destiny vs. free will, I honestly don't care, I do what I do, God doing and God not doing who cares. I live, I laugh, I cry, I scream, I die, I smile, I choose my friends and stand by them, what I do is what I do, whether it's controlled or not I don't care. God is with us all, Jew, non-Jew, everybody – friends, enemies, those people. God is just there... doing nothing. Yet looking at everyone in my Confirmation Class I feel connected to them, maybe God, maybe because I see you guys every day, but you pull me through and together we are God or are we just moving.

The best way I associate myself as a Jew is to call myself a Jew. You are only a Jew if you say you are a Jew. L'Taken taught me that there is a Jew everywhere and near. I'm a Jew, always a Jew, and to be honest I don't have to come here to show that I'm Jewish, I can just say I'm a Jew. But I felt pulled by a force to come here and stand before you. So here I am surrounded by my fellow comrades that became something much closer after all these years of laughter, tears, smiles, and drama. We stand here before you, the congregation and I can proudly say, "You have a challenge, give it to me and I'll take it as a Jew, as a growing person and as Karen."



Coby Yollis

I had a dream. That dream was during my eighth grade year of Hebrew School, which was here at the Temple. I slept during a lot of classes that year. Everyone in class was preparing for their Bat and Bar Mitzvah, which was boring to me. I didn't end up having a Bar Mitzvah until the end of ninth grade, which was a year after all of my classmates. I didn't care. I didn't find any personal significance or satisfaction from my partaking in the event.

I've always had a complicated history with this Temple. Unlike most of the other students in my Confirmation class, I started attending school here halfway through third grade. Our curriculum was built around the concept of being "partners with God." I didn't believe in God, so I spent my time in class complaining to the students and the teacher about how pointless the class was. I just couldn't understand why my parents sent me somewhere to waste time. When I questioned them upon the matter, they told me the classes were important. To this day, I still believe they were a waste of time. How could I be partners with something that didn't exist?

At the age of ten, I scheduled a meeting with Rabbi Lutz. Getting right to the point, I started off with telling him that I didn't believe in God. I asked him if I was still Jewish. He told me that questioning the belief of God made me a better Jew in the eyes of Reform Judaism because I was studying my religion to obtain a better understanding of it. I thanked him for taking the time to speak with me then went home and thought about what he said. I decided it was silly. What sort of a religion encourages people to have doubt in it?

When I was fourteen, I returned to my third grade teacher and spent the next two years as his teaching assistant. I helped him teach everything to third graders that I had hated when it was taught to me. The second and third time around, I found the lessons to be even more useless than the first. However, the students in the class all seemed to enjoy it. I never once encouraged them to doubt their religion. Judaism made them happy and I didn't want to take that away from them.

When my Bar Mitzvah came, I didn't care about it. At first, I put very little effort into it. When I realized how much my family cared about the event, I began putting a lot more effort into it. I never once cared about it, but I liked making my family happy. My Bar Mitzvah was and still is completely pointless to me with the exception of it making my family happy.

On a somewhat unrelated note, I hate services. They are the same thing pretty much every time. Praying and talking about God and the Torah. I have fallen asleep during lots of services. Every week, I beg my parents to let me skip them. They rarely give into my wishes. However, every week, plenty of people come to services. People seem to enjoy them. I'm not one of those people, but I do enjoy seeing people be happy.

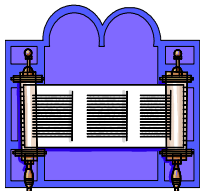
Confirmation classes changed things for me. I still don't believe in God, but no longer

feel like I am wasting my time by attending classes. My parents aren't making me come to Confirmation classes. I do it by choice. I like the people here. It's hard to find unfriendly people at Temple. I understand why people come to school here and attend services. It's nice to believe in God. There are some good morals in the stories. Plus, the Torah is just about the best soap opera script I have ever read.

I developed a lot on the class trip to Washington. It was amazing seeing our government in action. I also made friends with people that I had been in classes at Temple with for several years and hadn't ever had real conversations with. Judaism connected me with my government and with new friends. Judaism makes people happy and maintains an order in the world. I can honestly say that my life is better because Judaism has been a part of it.

If I told you that I enjoyed my time here at school, learned a lot about myself from my Bar Mitzvah, or can't wait to attend more services, or will someday believe in God, I would be lying. But I finally understand the appeal of coming to this Temple. It's that cheesy idea of a central community that links people together. I am glad to be a part of this Temple. My time here has made me a better person and has introduced me to many great people. I don't like religious stuff, but I can tolerate it now. And every now and then, it's actually enjoyable.

I'd like to thank Karen Yakobi, a fellow student in my Confirmation class. She finally apologized to me last year for beating me up in third grade. I'd also like to thank my parents for all the times they let me stay home while they went to a service. I would like to thank everyone who has ever listened to me speak about my distaste for the pleasant scam that is religion. I finally like having religion in my life and am glad people have shared Judaism with me. Finally, I would like to thank the rabbis and teachers who work at this Temple. If people like them weren't representing Judaism, I would have given up on my religion a long time ago. That could have easily been the biggest mistake I'd have made in my life. I have wasted a lot of time dealing with religion, and of all the places to have wasted my time, I am glad I wasted it at Temple Ahavat Shalom.

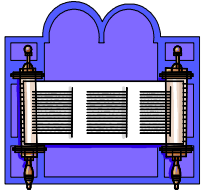


Joshua Michael Gabriel Zalmanowitz

TAS. Temple Ahavat Shalom – the place I can call my second home. I have been immersed in the TAS community from the very beginning. I remember being in a Mommy and Me Class with Courtney and Jonathan and progressing through the grades to higher levels of education. I learned important Jewish history, notably the Holocaust. I have learned good morals, which I plan on applying when making choices for the rest of my life. Most importantly, to me, I have made friends that will last a lifetime. While in Middle School, I was closer with my Hebrew School friends than with my friends at school. We would hang out together almost every weekend. We called ourselves the “Jew Crew.” We took over theme parks, always going on the water rides whether or not we were wearing appropriate clothing, went on Laser Tag adventures where everyone would fight for second place with me in first – obviously, and mall scavenger hunts, where in one case I may or may not have worn high heels. This of course, may not have been possible without seeing each other at Bar and Bat Mitzvahs every week. I remember feeling like the coolest kid at my school because none of them were invited to new parties every weekend. I found that in the recent years of my Jewish schooling here, I had already felt in touch with my relationship with my religion and came mostly to see my best friends again. TAS introduced me to this group of friends and that is what I am most thankful for.

Recently, our entire Confirmation Class traveled to Washington D.C. to lobby to our congressmen and promote the desires of the Reform Movement. We learned how to advocate for social rights, and we felt the power of making a change in our government in the places where we each individually think needs to be changed the most. We each individually made an impact in our government; however, as a collective group, the effect was much greater. This taught us the power in numbers and gave us a group of like-minded teens to achieve any goals we may have in the future.

I am proud to call this group of 30 or so kids my close friends and I plan on keeping in touch with them for years to come. I would like to thank my family and teachers for giving me the opportunity of becoming a part of this strong and powerful community.



Elijah Henry Zelonky

Expecto Confirmo (Wow, what a dumb title)

“We've all got both light and dark inside us. What matters is the part we choose to act on. That's who we really are.” - Sirius Black, *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*

This quote, by the late Godfather of Harry Potter, is deep and true. Everyone makes mistakes. No one is perfect. If people were perfect then life would be boring. But I'll get to that later. I want to start by letting you know my views of the most controversial subject in the history of civilization; God. As a boy, I never thought to question his existence. Teachers in school said he existed and I just assumed it was true. I didn't give it much thought. But as I grew and discussed religion and Judaism with many different people, I came to open my mind and really get to the core of what was actually out there. I couldn't help looking at the beauty in the world around me without critically thinking that there was someone or something out there that could ease the tension faced by reality. The conclusion I gathered was...I don't know.

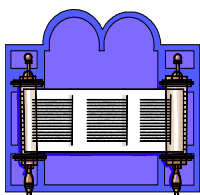
It's an unsatisfying answer, but no one *really* knows. The only thing I confirmed in *my own brain* is that whatever “God” that is out there isn't the God of the Bible. I don't think that the God who watches over us would turn people into salt for turning around. God wouldn't kill the leader who had been leading the former's people to the Promised Land for forty years in the desert without a GPS all because this leader messed up and hit a rock instead of talking to it. A truly kind, understanding God would not have killed Moses without letting him into the land he was trying to find for FORTY YEARS. There's really a lot of things in the bible that shouldn't be on the résumé of an all loving, all forgiving God. My Jewish values stand as they always were. I believe the Torah is capable of providing us all with the insight and wisdom we need to be good people. However, I believe the book is a made up story. The God I believe in is entirely ambiguous. It may not be a God even. Maybe it's a creator. Maybe it's a glorified hamster. I can't be sure. But in my own head, there is a supreme being somewhere in the universe. To me, there has to be something or someone else about whom we have limited knowledge. And that's what leads me back to Sirius Black.

I seriously believe that Sirius' words of wisdom were accurate. We all have sides of good and evil, and the side on which we act determines who we are. Another man from the series, by the name of Albus Dumbledore, said that it is not our abilities that define who we are, but rather our choices. Basically, I think that if there is a God, the only thing he would really care about is how good we are as people. He'd want us to act on the side of light. He'd want us to make good choices. He'd want us to respect everyone. Another saying of insight from Dumbledore is this, "It matters not what someone is born, but what they grow to be." That's insightful too. Think about it like the greatest wizard of all time telling us that even if we were born into a certain set of beliefs, we can always change them. It's like he's promoting the idea of questioning things. Questioning things makes people discuss more, and in the long run it makes people wiser and more thoughtful.

So yes, what I'm basically saying is that the *Harry Potter* series is my version of a bible. The Torah is great and important too, but the sentimental aspects of *Harry Potter* have honestly helped me grow into a young adult. The books have taught that tolerance is important, that good conquers evil, that relationships between men and women can actually be platonic, that love is the most important magic of all, that death is nothing but the next great adventure, that there are people worth dying for, that seeking for the well being of others as opposed to the greed of oneself is more likely to be ultimately successful, that critical thinking is important, that hiding from the truth has negative consequences, that procrastination is a bad habit (even though I still do it), that empathy and selflessness can lead to achieving your goals, and that there's no post on Sundays. If you want me to digress on everything I've learned from the books, ask me after the ceremony if you have an hour or three to spare.

So there you have it. The most important values in my life come from my parents, Judaism, and *Harry Potter*. I believe that general goodwill, compassion, and thoughtfulness will take you where you want to go. Just be a good person.

You might be thinking, "Hey, this is your own thoughts. It's all happening in your head, so there's no way it is real..." And to that, I have to quote Dumbledore again. "Of course it is happening inside my head, but why on earth should that mean that it is not real?"



Benjamin Zev

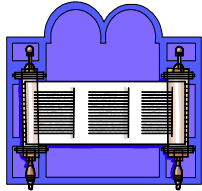
I have always enjoyed theoretical math. The idea of adjusting for real-world values always has seemed cumbersome and ugly to me. Instead, I tend to look at things which don't have huge amounts of direct real-world significance, but instead are critical subjects of number theory or discrete mathematics. One place I find these is the Millennium Prize Problems, a set of seven of the most important problems in mathematics. Only one of these has been proven thus far, and I would like to guide you through understanding my favorite of the bunch: The Riemann Hypothesis.

The hypothesis itself in its simplest form is actually pretty simple. Let's look at the function $\zeta(s) = 1/1 + 1/2 + 1/3 + 1/4 + 1/5 + \dots$ and so on and so on, forever. Now, we take each term and square it, so our function is $1/1^2 + 1/2^2 + 1/3^2 + \dots$. However, that's not general enough. As a mathematician, I am always looking to make my functions more general, and so instead of specifically squaring each term, we raise each term to an unidentified power s , so that $\zeta(s) = 1/1^s + 1/2^s + 1/3^s + \dots$ and so on and so on, forever. That's well and good, but it's still not general enough. Mathematicians looked at that exponent s and thought, "Putting normal numbers in there is well and good, but what if we put the square root of negative one in there?" And by putting what are called *complex* numbers into the exponent in that infinite series, we get the Riemann-zeta function. Note that this function was made by taking slightly simpler functions and making them that much more general. I have always believed that generality is important to discovery. This is a trait shared by Judaism. Judaism – or at least forms of it – I am exposed to is an *inclusive* religion. You will not be disowned by the community for being unsure about one's beliefs in God, or even for being explicitly atheist. Jews will also take steps to support everyone who needs help. One organization I have been mentioning a lot recently, because of how important I believe it is to Judaism, is the Jewish World Watch. As Jews, we do not simply look out for ourselves. Instead, organizations like the JWW fulfill the important idea of *tikkun olam* – of fixing the world. We do not protect merely the Jewish population, but instead we reach out to stop all forms of genocide, prejudice, and injustice in general.

Of course, I have not yet shown you the Riemann Hypothesis. I have merely shown you the Riemann-zeta function, and a simplified version of it at that. However, the hypothesis is simple enough. Recall that $\zeta(s) = 1/1^s + 1/2^s + 1/3^s + \dots$. While it may look as if the answer would be infinitely large in all cases (because there is an infinite number of terms), the answer is actually in many cases a specific, finite number. If you use complex numbers such as $1 + \sqrt{-1}$ or $4 + 5\sqrt{-1}$ as the exponent in the function, the answer may even be zero. The hypothesis simply states that if the answer is zero, the "real part" (the "1" in $1 + \sqrt{-1}$ or the "4" in $4 + 5\sqrt{-1}$) will be $1/2$. The exponent might be $1/2 + 3\sqrt{-1}$ or $1/2 + 126\sqrt{-1}$, but the real part will always be $1/2$. While that does not seem simple enough to be worth a spot as one of the most important unsolved problems of all time, the beauty of this hypothesis lies in the various other ways of expressing the Riemann-zeta function. I won't get into any major consequences here because they're complicated and

I don't have *that* much time, but the hypothesis is critical in discovering how close together primes happen to be. The Riemann Hypothesis is a fascinating intricacy of number theory, and one major part of mathematics is that it gives mathematicians a space to search for these intricacies. Mathematics is a creative space for people to find meaning, and as such, it is important in my life. I have found Confirmation an important time in my life for similar reasons. Just as mathematics involves building an entirely new concept from a simple formula, Judaism gives me a framework to create meaning I may not have otherwise discovered. While I may never get concrete answers, the most important part of this search is the steps taken to get there—the lemmas I prove and the discoveries I make along the way. Even if I never prove true beauty, I will always find a little bit of beauty around the corner, and for that I keep searching.

This would not have been possible without the love and support of a whole bunch of people including, but not limited to, our beloved rabbis and cantor, the friends I have made throughout the years at this Temple, my inexhaustible grandparents, my brother—without whom this speech would have been wildly different, and my wonderful parents — thank you for letting me disappear from the house nearly every day of the week for my various interests. I look forward to taking my first steps of the rest of my life!



Joshua Harrison Zweig

I love chocolate. Now, you're probably thinking, "Josh, what does liking a delicious treat have to do with becoming confirmed at your Temple?" Don't worry, we'll get there.

TAS has always been like a home away from home for me. I started Preschool here when I was less than three years old, and didn't leave until I was almost six because I was one of the lucky ones who got to stick around for the first year of the Transitional Kindergarten Class. Our class was small and always stuck together, and for a while we were all obsessed with the first Shrek movie (much like we still are today). We thought we would always be together, but sadly, most of the kids in that Transitional Kindergarten Class didn't stay at TAS for long. This encouraged me to make new friends.

It was because of this transitional year that I ended up a year behind my Hebrew School friends in Public School and a year ahead of my Public School friends in Hebrew School. For years I had two sets of friends: my Public School friends from Monday through Friday, and my Sunday School friends on Sundays. Even though many of my Monday through Friday friends were here on Sundays too, they were a grade below me at TAS. This made things weird and hard to keep up with, so I ended up bringing my weekday friends and my Sunday friends together. As I got older this was great because it gave me double the Bar/Bat Mitzvah parties to attend.

As the years of Hebrew School flew by, we started calling it "Jew School" because it became the place to hang out with our Jewish friends. After a while, it stopped feeling like "school" and just became a place to catch up on the week with your "Jew Crew."

Now that we're in Confirmation, actively learning and talking about God, I feel a greater connection to my religion, my community and my Confirmation Class. I'm so glad that my mom made me stay with my age group here at TAS because otherwise I would have never gotten as close to so many of you as I have over the last few years, especially in D.C., on the nights when we were all gathered in one room wondering where Ben, Adin, Jonathan and Jordan were. Hopefully, as we depart from Confirmation Program...

Hey, remember that time I said I like chocolate? Here's the tie in!

Chocolate is something that people all around the world enjoy. It's flavorful, rich, soothing and something that everyone should experience. I feel as though the friendships I've made at TAS fall under this description. Attending TAS from the beginning of my Jew School career has been filled with many memorable experiences that I'll carry with me throughout the rest of my high school years, to college and for many years after that. I hope my own kids (sometime in the distant future) have the opportunity to enjoy the TAS community too, just as much as they might enjoy chocolate.



וּמַעֵץ הַדַּעַת
טוֹב וְרַע לֹא
תֹאכַל מִמֶּנּוּ