

Daniel Kleinberg
IDK my BFF Jew

Friendship is a word commonly tossed around in today's society. Most people in this day and age base a friendship on how often they see a specific person or how much fun they have together. But what people do not realize is that this is not the true definition of a real friendship. In my opinion, the real meaning of a friendship is the ability to depend on another person for assistance. Every friendship can be different. They can range from an ordinary acquaintance to even significant other. These friendships are part of our everyday lives. From all the drama to happiness, friends shape how we grow as a person.

Friendships are a huge part of the Torah. Jewish philosophers have been studying and analyzing friendships since the dawn of times. Ibn Gabirol once said, "There are three types of friends: those like food, without which you cannot live; like medicine, which you need occasionally; and those like an illness, which you never want." Not only is this quote ancient, it completely relates to our lives. You could probably think of this person in a quick second. Another Jewish philosopher that went by the name of Martin Buber came up with a concept called "I-It" and "I-Thou" relationships. An "I-It" relationship is when a person uses another person for a personal benefit. High School students are a great example of this. They may become someone's friend just because they have a car and can get free rides. Another example is when students get homework from others. This student may just be using the other because they are smart and get their work done. An "I-Thou" relationship is very different. These occur when a

person accepts a friend for who they are. Even through all the negatives and mistakes, they still remain friends. The two people don't use each other, they are there for support.

The concept of friendship is very important to me personally. I have many friends at school that are boys and girls, but some friendships are stronger than others. I would do anything for my close friends. I really do not know what I would do without them. My friends give me the ability to show who I really am as a person. I do not have to act like a fake because I know they will always be on my side. The ability to trust is a big part of who I am.

There is no way I can talk to anyone about my problems if that person is just going to go tell the world. If one of my friends lies to me or talks about me behind my back, I will not take it lightly. That is why trust is such an important part of friendships. There is one other important thing that I am starting to learn in life. A person should always stick with their true friends. Even though a girl friend or boy friend is very important, things don't always work out. True friends will always be there for you no matter what. In my case I should never let a girl come between me and my friends. In a way it would be like betrayal if I did. However I used to be like this. Girls were my priority. Now that I look back at it, I just laugh. I say to myself wow what an idiot. Always stick with your friends. It will help you in the end. It definitely helps me.

In society, friendships can be found all over the place. However, sometimes people are not the most social. It would be a mitzvah to include someone if they are shy. For example, imagine yourself as a student in elementary school. You always had a little group that you were with. Now other people

were not so lucky. Picture a little boy eating his peanut butter sandwich in the corner of the room. What would you do in this situation? Would you just keep walking with your friends and ignore the kid or reach out to him? Well hopefully you would try to include the boy and go eat with him. If not you may need some help. If only the modern world was just like this. A lot more people could be happy. Next time you see someone alone, maybe try reaching out to them. A little can go a long way.

Friendship has also been a big part our confirmation experience. It could be said that everything we have done has been centered on this topic. On the first day we met, we got to know each other by having mixers. If you don't know what a mixer is, it is an activity that pretty much helps you better get to know a person. As if this wasn't enough, some of us traveled to Joshua Tree National Park one weekend to go camping. My parents have always told me that Jews do not camp. And you know what? After we hiked for hours and barely got any sleep, I think my parents were right. Camping is definitely not for Jews. But on a different note, the retreat served a completely separate purpose. We were around each other 24/7 which allowed us to get to know each other better. Without this kind of interaction, we would not be the people we are today. During some time or another, maybe not even in confirmation, we have all affected one another. I would not be the same person I am today without these people. Every single one of them has made a huge impact on my life. Through this special kind of friendship, I have matured into what I am today. Even though I am definitely not fully mature or grown up yet, new friendships in my future will help me get to where I need to be.

Zachary Schenker
A Choice to Change the Future

Try to remember all that you have done this past year (pause). From Last summer, Hanukah and now the end of the school year. Imagine none of these things occurring. Human life is unsustainable without a working ecosystem. If WE do not save the environment, the earth's life expectancy will be reduced by THOUSANDS of years. Future generations will not be able to experience the miracle of life that God gave us.

I'm sure many of you have heard of the Jewish ethical principle: tikkun olam which means "repairing the world" in Hebrew. Most people follow this phrase by recycling, but there are some things that are not recyclable. Many companies create eco-friendly cars, water bottles, etc to decrease waste, making it easy for you to help earth, but it will only make an impact if you, the consumer, buy these products rather than non eco-friendly products.

I'm not asking you to spend an hour of your time each day picking up trash. I'm asking you to buy the more gas efficient car, not just because it costs less each time at the pump, but also because it's saving the environment. Now you are probably thinking: how would just a couple of people buying hybrid cars vastly change the environment? If automobile companies see a trend of people buying fuel efficient cars over gas guzzlers, they will start competing to create a cheap fuel efficient car.

Another Jewish ethical principle many people neglect is Bal Tashkhit which means "do not destroy". If we do not harm earth in the first place we will

not need Tikkun Olam. Even though many people work to repair the world, the same people might harm the world by polluting, thus making no positive impact on the environment.

For our confirmation retreat, we visited Joshua Tree National Park so we could understand our ancestors who traveled the deserts. The counselors assigned us to walk into the desert and listen to the silence for five minutes. Rarely do we here silence in our world today. It was then that I realized how cars not only destroy the earth by consuming its natural resources, but also create noise in a once quiet and calm atmosphere.

Politically, the more oil we, Americans use, the stronger our enemies become. In the Middle East, fighting persists between terrorists and Israelis. The terrorist groups receive money from exporting the oil that we buy. The money they receive goes towards weapons which cause more violence over there. So if WE decrease our oil consumption there will be less fighting in Israel.

The next time you go to a car dealership I want you to buy the most resource efficient car and help protect the natural beauty of places like Joshua Tree National Park and indirectly reduce violence in Israel. Thank you.

Laura Klivans

Child and Domestic Abuse in our Community

Child and domestic abuse is too common in today's society. This behavior needs to be eliminated. In 2006 there were 3.6 million investigations that took place regarding children being neglected or abused. Abuse of an individual should never be ignored. Outsiders to the incident should not stand idly by. They need to step in and take action. If an individual does not know how to help the situation, there are many resources for them to use. There are organizations like the Jewish Coalition Against Domestic Abuse that specialize in abuse prevention within the Jewish community. These organizations are there to help those that are directly affected or the ones that are indirectly affected. When people do not take advantage of the information available to them, they can easily become more part of the problem than part of the solution.

The aiding organizations that are out there are actually there to help. They want the victims to be able to continue on with their lives and eventually be comfortable with who they are again. An abuse victim can be haunted on a day to day basis because of the actions of their abuser. They can see things or hear things that can trigger these terrible memories.

This social justice issue of abuse is very important to me. It needs to be talked about more so that people can be aware of how terrible it really is. We may think that it doesn't happen where we live, but it does. Or we may think that members of Jewish families are not victims of abuse. But that is not true. "Domestic abuse occurs in Jewish families at about the same rate

as in the general community,” at a rate of about 15-25% (<http://jcada.org/www/docs/4>). Abuse occurs in Jewish homes of all denominations: Reform, Conservative, Reconstructionist, and Orthodox. This account of reported abuse cases is not shown as being higher in one religion than the next. What is remarkable, though, is that “Jewish women tend to stay in abusive relationships 2 to 3 times longer than those in the general population” (<http://jcada.org/www/docs/4>). We can help the women that are affected in our community. We can sign up to be on a mailing lists of a legislative group that deals with domestic abuse, bring educational resources to our schools and youth groups, or talk to our rabbis about how they deal with abuse victims. All of the actions that we take to help people become aware of abuse can help in the prevention of it happening again.

Jewish teachings state that husbands should not abuse their wives. In the Talmud, Tractate Nashim, or the Book of Women, there are several passages that relate to the topic of abuse. Part of the text reads “And thus the sages commanded that a man should honor his wife more than he honors himself, and love her as he loves himself. And if he has money, he should increase her benefits according to his wealth. He should not intimidate her too much; he should speak with her gently, and should be neither saddened nor angry.” (Sefer Nashim 15:19).

Judaism does not condone child abuse either. Children are very valuable assets in the Jewish community. It is written that “One who teaches a child Torah is considered to have taught that child and that child’s children and grandchildren, to the end of the generations” (Kuddushin 30a). Judaism believes that it is an obligation to protect and nurture the divine spark that a

child posses because all are created in the image of G-d. By harming a child, we are going against Jewish teachings, thus going against G-d's will.

This year in confirmation we explored different aspects of Judaism. We read different types of stories than the ones we were taught in Sunday School. We explored new ideas and integrated them into our thoughts and actions. We were made to think and question what we were previously taught. The questioning that took place enabled us to be able to understand Judaism better. It helped us confirm our beliefs of what Judaism is really all about.

Alyssa Kramer
Obesity in America

Obesity is an ongoing issue that has harmfully impacted our world, particularly our country. It is a difficult topic to discuss, but often times those are the ones most important and controversial in society. Not only am I touching upon obesity exclusively, but I am reaching out to all abuses of the body; such as over exercise, under sleep, or under eating. However, obesity seems to be a leading cause of death in our country. Statistics show that about 40 million people are obese, not overweight, but obese. That includes parents that cannot actively play with their children; 40 million people running a huge risk of dying before they even get to see their grand children. The unhealthy and depressing effects of obesity are obvious.

Surprisingly, Judaism has a loud and certain voice about obesity. Tradition teaches that we are created in the image of God, which immediately associates us with various responsibilities. We need to take things into our bodies in moderation; not too much food, not too much stress, lack of sleep, or lack of exercise. Henceforth, even in extreme situations, we need to maintain that moderate state of mind. On Purim, Jewish adults are allowed to drink, but not drink till they are sick, and on Yom Kippur, we are told to fast, but this is a once a year occasion. Additionally, our physical selves reflect the Creator. What is known as “shmirat HaGuf” or taking care of our bodies, is a vital responsibility. Our bodies are said to “house the soul,” which makes our bodies holy, and we must take care of them with our utmost effort. Lastly, our bodies are also seen as a “loan” from God, and we must therefore appreciate and honor them.

Growing up with two parents in the medical and nutritional field, proper nutrition seems to run in my blood, and I was easily inclined to a topic that flowed straight from my heart. I have seen the devastating outcomes of obesity, and enjoy assisting others towards a healthier lifestyle. Statistics also show about \$33 billion is spent by Americans on weight loss products, books, and services. It upsets me to see all this money wasted going towards these products, when this money should be going to a greater cause, for example better understanding and attending to sugar and food addictions. Or, perhaps the money could move towards another needed area of study; lowering the price of healthy foods and examining the correlation between obesity and the poor. If you think about your local grocery store and the healthiest, organic foods, their prices are significantly higher than junk food and fast food. This explains why obesity greatly affects the working class, disadvantaged minority groups, and the poor. It no longer stands as an issue of the more nutritious choice of food between an apple and a cookie, but which of the two is affordable. Overcoming obesity means overcoming larger obstacles than simply losing weight.

Throughout America, this issue has begun to be addressed. There are various weight loss groups so one does not feel alone on this heroic journey towards a new life. Also, more and more gyms, health trainers, doctors, and TV programs are presenting the fact that weight loss can only, truly be achieved through exercise and eating healthy. But, more needs to be done, especially in lower socio-economic neighborhoods. Another matter that could help lower the rate of obesity within our country would be to replace the fast food restaurants that are conveniently close to schools, with more healthful restaurants. Hopefully, by practicing and encouraging

new life choices, the obesity rate in America will decrease, and more people will gain a higher self confidence and love their image.

It was easy for me to relate the obesity epidemic occurring in our country to my confirmation experience, surprisingly. Within confirmation is the word confirm. By partaking in confirmation, you are confirming yourself to numerous things, such as your commitment to continue your Jewish studies, your relationships with your friends, and confirming your responsibility to treat yourself and your body with respect. Additionally, for me, the difference between my bat mitzvah and confirmation was the aspect of partaking in this experience as a group; with friends to converse about the various morals and teachings with. Overcoming a world issue like obesity is also a group effort, we must think creatively and broadly together in order to solve this problem.

David Rothblum

The Separation of Church and State

The Establishment and Free Exercise Clauses of the First Amendment to the United States Constitution reads, “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the exercise of thereof.” With these clauses, the United States of America became the first nation in the history of the world to have a government free from the teachings and obligations of the church. These clauses establish a constitutional principle on which lays America’s distinguished system of religious freedom. Within this constitutionally protected right, organized religions and mutual respect for each one’s differences thrive and grow. However, Two-Hundred and Eighteen years later, the “wall of separation” established by the insight of our forefathers remains in constant jeopardy. And its peril poses as a menace for all peoples and establishments of our diverse nation. Issues such as abortion, same-sex marriage, religious teachings in schools, and church politicking bring a mighty blow to the wall fostered by generations of Americans. Currently, State and Federal Legislators draw up “Faith-Based” Initiatives and attempt to initiate them into our society. For example, last November, Californians voted on a “Faith-Based” proposal known as Proposition 8. This proposition was one of the greatest instances of Church-Politicking to hit our nation. It involved the Church of Latter Day Saints spending approximately \$24 Million to reinstate a ban on same sex marriages in California. Not only does Church-Politicking violate Federal Law, but this Pulpit-based electioneering undermines the true mission of our faith communities. These issues inspire

hatred, disgust, and anger, on both sides. But most of all, they serve to repeal the liberties that our nation has known since its inception.

First off, Judaism contains neither biblical mandates nor rabbinic rulings that order or distinctly suggest the separation of church and state. That being said, Jews are peoples of history and food, and our history and food is ingrained within our teachings, values, and practices. Throughout history, we have learned that with the separation of church and state, both the nation and our religion can flourish without interference. With this prosperity that remains free from hindrance; we are able to give back to the community which improves society as a whole. Therefore, we create a circle upon which society benefits directly from church and state separation. Unfortunately, our religion has seen the consequences of the conjoining of government and personal beliefs. We see the resentment that rises when personal beliefs hinder the ability of government to rule with reason. For these reasons, the Religious Action Center, the political arm of the Union for Reform Judaism, has and continues to advocate for the separation of church and state with a series of resolutions that elucidate the Jewish stance. In 1965, the URJ passed a decree that stated, “The principle of separation of church and state is best for both church and state and is indispensable for the preservation of that spirit of religious liberty which is a unique blessing of American democracy.”

The Jewish and Academic educations of our confirmation class are based upon fairness and reason, and the preservation of separation of church and state remains an issue that we can apply our values towards. If we work towards this “wall of separation” we can ensure that fairness radiates

throughout our society and reason exudes through our government. In order to ensure that Americans rights to a religion-free government are preserved, society should stand up against violations of the United States Constitution. We can do this by writing to our Legislators urging them to consider the Establishment and Free Exercise clauses of the Constitution when writing legislation. Also, as individuals, we can support or become activists for groups such as Americans United which is a nonpartisan organization dedicated to preserving the constitutional principle of church-state separation through lobbying, education, and litigation. It is imperative that our confirmation class, our Temple Beth Sholom community, and our American society work to maintain the right of religious freedom for all peoples of the United States by advocating for the complete separation of church and state; because religious freedom allows our confirmation class to uninterruptedly practice the religion that we stand here to affirm today.

Kennan Herkimer

Limiting Potential

Cuts in schools budgets affect the daily lives of students eager to learn. Deep cuts in funding lead to several unfavorable consequences such as thousands of teacher layoffs, larger class sizes, school closures and even a shortened school year. Schools also lose the privilege of having counselors, nurses and librarians.

The last book of the Torah, Deuteronomy, states וְשִׁנַּנְתֶּם לְבָנֵיכֶם וְדִבַּרְתֶּם בָּם (V'shinan'tam l'vanekha v'dibar'ta bam) "You shall teach them diligently to your children." This basically means it is our duty to remember the wisdom and teachings of our tradition to our next generation. The Mishnah recites, "the study of Torah is greater than all of them because it is the basis of them all." Education is an obvious value in Judaism. It is our desire to stray away and learn about the outside world.

Education is clearly important but the cuts in the school budgets affect me on a more personal level with removal of some extracurricular activities. Strong extra- curricular activities drive the culture of any high school around the world. Budget cuts would reduce the ability of high schools to have funding for drama, art, yearbook, the school newspaper, sports, and other activities. When students are involved, they try harder in their classes, elevating the academic standards. They also strive to become better leaders and are willing to voice their opinions in and outside the classroom. Extra-curricular activities are a good way to explore social, political, and career interests. Do you remember what you learned in your Chemistry

class or the year you took yearbook with your group of friends? Budget cuts deprive kids of the opportunities to create memories of being the lead in the school play or having their article published on the front page of the school newspaper; memories that define a high school experience.

Our society needs to be informed of the importance of this social issue. Education is a key ingredient of a child's future. This issue is not debatable. It is unfair to public schools who are affected by the cuts the most. Schools that are dependent on the state for funding don't necessarily receive the support of the outside community and therefore are greatly punished and their kids suffer. The general public needs to be aware of what this could cause. It should be a well known fact of the importance of the education of the kids, they are our future.

Confirmation is more than leading this service here today; it's about confirming my path to becoming an active member in the Jewish community. I stand up here with 13 other remarkable people who have each helped me in their own different ways to discover what that truly means. This year's confirmation class has grown together and together as a group effort we are entering the Jewish community. Education is like this too. It is a group effort brought by the teachers, administrators, and students eager to learn. With budget cuts, administrators have to fire parts of their teaching staff which leads to larger class sizes and makes it a challenge for students to be enthusiastic to learn. The group effort will be destroyed.

A Major Dilemma of Society “Homelessness”

Natalie Telson

Unfortunately in today’s world, there are innumerable amounts of people that are less fortunate than I am blessed to be. An inauspicious circumstance that exists especially in Southern California is homelessness. Following only Los Angeles and San Francisco counties, Orange County specifically has the third highest rate of homeless in California. The number of homeless individuals and families in Orange County grew from almost 28,000 in 2003 to nearly 35,000 in 2005, a 25% increase. Families with children represent 70% of the total homeless population, and therefore over 16,000 children are homeless in Orange County. This issue is rapidly causing more distress as not only have these numbers been exponentially increasing, but are now expeditiously increasing as a result of the financial crisis currently occurring. With the recession grasping many people within our community, we must take action to help those suffering from homelessness.

Personally, I have had memorable experiences working with the homeless people in Orange County. Various times I have worked with people from the Temple Beth Shalom community at homeless shelters. Each time I have gone to a homeless shelter, the occurrence has been unforgettable as I come back feeling extremely fortunate, feeling as though I am blessed with my life from G-d. My most momentous experience was this summer with my fellow Gindling Hilltop Mitzvah class. One part to our Mitzvah Project was making bags filled with assorted sanitary items to give to homeless people living in Los Angeles. While we all thought we were

being extraordinary people just assembling the bags, we soon learned that we were physically going to go to the streets of Santa Monica to give the pouches to homeless people on the street. When we arrived at the downtown area, I was in pure shock at how many less fortunate people were simply sitting, hopelessly, on the filthy metropolis streets. My most indelible encounter was handing a bag to a pregnant homeless woman sitting on a bench in the park. She took the bag with a grateful look upon her face that truly moved me. I was so satisfied with that feeling. As I turned around to take my last glimpse at the woman, I noticed her slipping on the socks and chewing on a granola bar from the bag. This one moment has truly impacted me and will be a memory for the rest of my life. It was honestly one of the most sensational feelings to know that I, even in the simplest way, had improved someone's life, or maybe just their day. The feeling carries with me every step of my way through life, hoping that I can perform an equally satisfying act of tzedakah.

Tzedakah is an extremely significant part of Judaism. Charitable acts are looked upon as one of the greatest things a person can do. The Torah commands us, "And when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap all the way to the edges of your field, or gather the gleanings of your harvest; you shall leave them for the poor and the stranger: I am Adonai, your God." Although there are a multitude of forms of tzedakah, the Torah directly speaks about homelessness. In the famous Passover story in the book of Exodus, the Jews leave Egypt and search for their homeland for forty years. This process of walking for the extended amount of time makes the Jews homeless. Many times, the Torah also calls the Jews as nomads; migrant people, due to the fact that they were constantly kicked

out of their homes. During the Middle Ages, Jewish people were exiled from their countries again and again, coercing them to seed out new communities. In addition, after the devastating effects of the Holocaust during World War II, many Jews had no home, due to the fact that they truly had nothing left. In all of these circumstances, the Jews have made their way to find new lives and rebuild the culture that they had lost. Our people have always persevered, determined to find their sanctuary from the horrendous conditions. After millennia of searching, we have finally found our home within the state of Israel. Now that we have happily found our shelter of safety, isn't it time that we assist others in finding refuge where they can create a better life where they will be untroubled as well?

Our society must take action in supporting the homeless. Can you imagine if you had no place to sleep at night? If you had no where to seek protection from a terrible day? Also, the people that we may see on the streets still only represent a small fraction of the total population of homeless. These people are called the chronic homeless, but what about the hidden homeless, those that we may not see living on the streets? These hidden homeless may just not make enough income to provide themselves with a living wage. The homeless in our society need our help, no matter if they are struggling with money or completely lost on the streets. A system of outreach, assessment, and prevention for determining the needs and conditions of an individual or family who is homeless must be created. There are many support groups for the hidden homeless, such as the Mercy House Protection Program. In addition, it truly is not that labor intensifying to make a quick dinner, bring in some canned food, or donate some blankets, clothes or means of a shelter. And if that may not

appeal to you, you can always make a simple donation. Isn't it everyone's right to a place that one can feel comfortable in and not have to worry about problematic issues?

In our Confirmation class we have truly bonded as one. We have all honestly deciphered what it means to continue our Jewish lifestyle, especially here at TBS. I know that I, along with my fellow friends, have learned through this journey that we want to continue learning about our heritage, culture, and people. Through various educational and social aspects to our classes at confirmation, we are always excited to see our Jewish friends that brightened up our monotonous school lives. Together the 2008 - 2009 Confirmation class has found a our home for Jewish, as well as non-religious, learning at TBS. I know that together we shall continue this process to enhance our understanding of Judaism, while always having a bond through our time at Temple Beth Sholom.

Kevin Rowen

Jokes

Think of a joke you have recently heard. Did it come at another's expense? If it did not, I am sure that all of us here today could think of such an instance, where in a sense, one's laughter was bought at the price of another's embarrassment. Think harder. Did the joke target one's ethnicity? One's religion? Maybe a person's height, weight, sexuality, or intelligence? The list goes on and on. Too often in our world are jokes of this nature told, most of the time without thought to the pain that could be caused. In reality, when these seemingly insignificant jests are taken just a single step too far, the jokester is perpetuating prejudicial attitudes. While he or she may not see it this way, it is nevertheless the case.

While different denominations within Judaism disagree on the exact translation of the ten commandments, the essence is always the same. It is encompassed in a phrase recurrently found throughout Judaic texts: "Love your neighbor as yourself." So is it okay to make comments, that while funny, attack someone else's belief? Some of us are probably thinking to ourselves privately that yes, this is acceptable, because to some degree, we too find this funny. But what if it was you that was being made fun of?

I believe we have a responsibility to try to put a stop to jokes such as these, not only because it is the right thing to do, but because as Jews, we know how brutal the effects of oppressive comments can be. I would be surprised if any of us up here now have never been victimized by an anti-

Semitic remark. Perhaps it was merely a joke taken too far, but I know we have all felt this pain. It happens everyday at school. Kids are mean sometimes, especially teenagers. But sometimes it's not even that someone is trying to be mean; sometimes people just don't understand that what they are saying can hurt someone else.

So how do we fix this problem? How does society move away from accepted bigotry in the daily lives of kids? Can it even be done? The answer is yes, it can be done. But as with most change it cannot be done all at once, but rather, little by little, step by step. And it starts with us, up here on the bimah. We ourselves are guilty of telling these jokes. We perpetuate discriminatory attitudes with a comment here and a comment there, often directed towards ourselves, with the laughs coming at our own expense. If we do not stop this, then we will just continue to support others who tell jokes of this nature. After that, it simply comes down to time. We have grown up in a relatively accepting time, where men and women of all backgrounds can be seen walking down the street. After all, the man who sits in the Oval Office is African-American. But even today, prejudices still exist. We must teach our children that it is wrong, so that they can teach their children, and so forth. And so in the natural order of the world: L'dor V'dor.

Now how does any of this relate to my Confirmation? Well, first off, I think you need to know what Confirmation means to me. While I have an established belief in Judaism and faith in God, I personally do not think Confirmation has to do with this; for me, it has little do with religion at all. No, it is instead a testimony to the bond that is shared by all of us in this

Confirmation class. Many of us have grown up together, learned right from wrong together, laughed together, and cried together. This day is a celebration of our community, our kehilah kedoshah. And the only way we can begin to end oppression, is together, as one community, one family. Thank you.

The Importance of Autism Awareness

Jessica Waldman

As many of you know, my little brother Noah was diagnosed with Autism a few years ago. Presently, this is nothing out of the ordinary- in fact, 1 in every 150 children in America today are born with Autism. Autism has become the fastest growing developmental disability of this day and age, affecting nearly one and a half million Americans in the past few years. But unless you, personally, know someone with Autism, it's often difficult to think beyond the numbers. This is why a vast majority of people are unaware of what being Autistic really means. As a sister of an Autistic child, I have come to realize that those who do not understand this disability are likely to be scared of it, just as it is common for people to fear the unknown. I feel that it is immensely important for us to spread Autism Awareness- not only for those *with* Autism but also for everyone else.

Autistic children, or children with any developmental disability, for that matter, are often the most optimistic and friendly people you will ever meet. While they may feel inhibited by the limitations presented by their disabilities, they seem to take a much more positive attitude towards life than the average person. This is especially true for my brother, who is just about the happiest kid you will ever meet. Yet while Noah's friendly and outgoing nature permeates the world around him, he has a hard time making friends with non-disabled peers.

Now, why is this? What sets an autistic person apart? (pause) Autism is characterized by great difficulty in communicating and forming relationships

with other people. Autistics sometimes have a hard time making eye contact or have trouble exhibiting social understanding. Yet contrary to popular belief, autistic children do NOT prefer to be alone. Maintaining a friendship might be difficult for them, but no one likes to be lonely. Disabled people need friends just as much as we do. Those with autism may have a hard time in social situations, but in truth they are not much different from us.

Contemporary Judaism teaches us that we are bound as a community to be compassionate, understanding, and facilitative towards people with disabilities. There is a Jewish principle, *kol yisrael arevim zeh la zeh*, which says that all of Israel is responsible for one another. Therefore, as Jews, we should be committed to supporting those who may not be able to support themselves. Even Temple Beth Shalom is dedicated to this concept. My family actually belongs to our temple's Special Needs group, to which many families of disabled children belong. The Special Needs group integrates these children, allowing them to finally be a part of a loving and welcoming community.

So what can *we* do to help? *Tikun Olam*, or repairing the world, is our responsibility as Jews not only to help our Earth but also the people who live on it. And while volunteers may not have the ability to generate a "miracle cure" for people with Autism, there is so much work to be done in order to help developmentally delayed and disabled people. Participating in fundraisers and events to support research for Autism is a fantastic way to get involved, but I know from experience that those who suffer from Autism need friends and acceptance more than anything else. The next

time you meet someone with a mental disability, think about how much it would mean to them to have you as their friend. (pause) By reaching out to others and explaining that Autism is no reason for alienation, we can absolutely make a difference. If every single person in this room became an active advocate of Autism awareness, I truly believe that we can spread tolerance and acceptance, making the world a more welcoming place for both children and adults with Autism.

The Holocaust is a Myth

Brooke Glasky

As time keeps ticking and the future is getting closer and closer, history keeps moving farther and farther away from us. We enjoy the great that has been brought to us from people and things that came before. But as much as we try to not remember the bad, we can't always stop ourselves from remembering the pain and suffering that people throughout history have had to go through. I believe we must try as hard as we can to learn from it.

One of the most painful things that our people ever had to go through was the Holocaust. If not for the 6 million Jews killed by the Nazis, just imagine how many lives could have been here today and the generations that would have followed them. As we have primary sources of proof that there were concentration camps and irrefutable evidence of the mass slaughtering of millions of people, no one should be able to deny the horrors of the Holocaust. But sadly, there are still people who say that the holocaust was just a "myth", and it didn't happen. These people ask: why is the Jewish community complaining and wanting us to feel sorry for them? They say Jews made up the Holocaust as an excuse to create the State of Israel.

Most of you are probably wondering who would say such a thing. You might be surprised to know that Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the Iranian president, has said this many times publicly. "Today, they have created a myth in the name of Holocaust and consider it to be above God, religion and the prophets." He said this in one of his speeches in the city of Zahedan to hundreds of people. In fact, in 2006, he held a Conference for

Holocaust deniers in Iran, so people could gather together and question if the Holocaust happened. He expresses hatred toward Israel the state and the people. He also stated that he wished that the Holy land of Israel were to be “wiped off the map.” You would think that people in this time had sense and cared about the people around them, but sadly, the hatred of the past continues until today.

It is so horrifying to think that there are survivors today who have permanent tattoos on their arms, tattoos which show their camp serial numbers. These people, along with thousands of others, are permanently physically and emotionally harmed from the Holocaust. And there are people who want to say that all of that is just a myth? Many of us have family members who were killed, young children who couldn't defend themselves were killed, and elderly people who had done no wrong were killed. How can President Ahmadinejad, and deniers like him, have the courage to stand up and say that those people didn't die, it was just all made up.

It is very important for the youth and adults of this time to learn about the Holocaust. There are many things that it teaches including: the understanding of racism and stereotypes. It also teaches to think about the people around you and to put yourself in someone else's position and think about how being hated would make you feel. Finally, it teaches you to open your mouth. When you have an opinion and feel like something is wrong , you can not be silent!

As I stand up here today, I stand up here for all of those children and

people who couldn't defend themselves and didn't have the choice whether they wanted to die or not. And as a Jewish community we all need to stick together and speak out against the people who want to erase our history and break us down. And that is why I am apart of this confirmation class, because I want to be a part of one of the strongest communities this world has to offer.

Taking Care of our Bodies – Body Image (Tattoos, Piercings, etc.)

Sarah Newell

Tonight I will be talking about the issue of body image. Especially amongst us teenagers, we have difficulty maintaining respect and responsibility for our bodies. We tend to give into peer pressure about harming our bodies in ways we might possibly regret later on as adults. God gave us this one body so we should treat it like a Temple.

This holds interest for me personally because being a teenager myself, I'll have to admit, is challenging. In today's society, all we see in magazines, TV, commercials, and online are basically very thin beautiful girls. That's hard to compete with when you're in high school and going through all these hormonal changes. While going through these changes, all we want to be is "in," but what exactly is "in?" To some people being "in" is being yourself and who you are, and to others it is the total opposite. Being "in" is not being you. Being you is "in." Sometimes we do these things to be true to ourselves, and sometimes we do it to be true to who others tell us we should be.

Taking care of ourselves is a way of respecting and honoring God.

Therefore, we need to treat our whole selves, including our bodies with care and dignity. The Torah forbids gashing yourself, which was an ancient mourning practice. In modern times, smoking, tattoos, body-piercing, and drugs are questioned. All of these things are found to be destructive.

We've established that God has given us the responsibility of Shmirat HaGuf (taking care of our bodies.) When we think of taking care of our bodies, we think of the basic necessities- eating, washing, and sleeping. But we also need to have an attitude toward the body that is respectful, responsible, and appreciative. Additionally need to be aware that there are outside influences, like the media, that do not care for our bodies. We should love and live our lives the way God intended us to. That means not pretending to be someone we are not; for all the good, the bad and the ugly.

I don't think anyone should feel obligated to be "in" all the time. Hey, we are only human. No one is perfect. I know it's hard when we see magazine articles and television shows that talk about ways to improve our appearances, but just remember, we should all be who we want to be, and those who matter don't mind and those who mind don't matter.

As we are now Confirmants, we are becoming a part of the Jewish community in a bigger way than before. So we have to be even more careful of our surroundings. Live in the moment, enjoy your youthfulness, but also be thinking about your future, because whatever you do now, will affect you later. So make good choices everyone, and no regrets!

Emily Nagel
Euthanasia – Wrong or Right?

For my confirmation speech topic, I decided to choose euthanasia.

Euthanasia is assisted suicide, or an act of inducing death painlessly for the terminally ill. It literally means “a good death” or “mercy killing.” A physician may lawfully decide not to prolong life in cases of extreme suffering and he may administer drugs to relieve pain, even if this shortens the patient’s life. In the late 20th century, several European countries had special provisions in their criminal codes for lenient sentencing and the consideration of extenuating circumstances in prosecutions for euthanasia. The only places in the world where euthanasia is legal are: Oregon, Washington, Belgium, and the Netherlands. Over the last 50 years, medical understanding and technological advances have raised questions and concerns never imagined by our ancestors.

Judaism clearly professes that life is sacred and that we must do whatever we can to protect and preserve it. We believe that murder is forbidden and injuring another person or oneself is condemned. However, Judaism also stresses on the idea of compassion for those who are suffering. So since it is wrong to murder and we should feel compassion for those suffering, making decisions about euthanasia are much more complex. Some doctors argue that administering lethal quantities of medication or removing life support systems is equivalent to murder and is not seen as “compassionate,” while other doctors feel that it is alright to increase medication for a patient who is suffering greatly from terminal illness.

Jewish sources are not always in agreement on how to define death in difficult situations.

In my opinion, I believe that the only time euthanasia should be legal and used is in the case of a terminally ill patient, who has been sick for an extended period of time and is in pain and suffering. I do not think that there should be any other reasons to use assisted suicide and take someone's life. An example of when it might be alright is maybe when there is minimal brain activity and the patient's heart cannot be sustained on the patient's own. If a family member is not sure if the patient is going to be alright or not, then I think it is wrong to use euthanasia, especially if it has been a short period of time. If you are unsure about it, you might regret it in the future, but if you know you are doing the right thing for the person you love, then maybe it is okay.

Euthanasia is a complicated topic with lots of different thoughts about it in the Jewish religion and in my own opinion.

I chose this topic for my confirmation speech because I did not know a lot about it, and I know that other members in my class did not either. So I thought it would be a good idea to research euthanasia so I could share the information with my class and the congregation. By talking about an important issue such as euthanasia, in front of everyone, I feel like I am confirming my identity with the Jewish religion to myself. Thank you!

Samantha Abelove

GLBT Equality (Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender)

Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender people, or GLBT people, should have the same rights as everyone else. Everyone is equal and no one should be discriminated against. The passage of Proposition 8 in California this past November, which eliminated the right of same gender couples to marry, brought about many different views about GLBT people and their rights, particularly their right to marry. I was shocked and embarrassed to see that our society discriminated against others. Making it illegal to marry the one you love is clearly immoral. America upholds the values of freedom and equality. If someone cannot have these two things in America, then where can they? GLBT people should be able to share equal opportunities America promises.

In the book of Leviticus it states, "You shall not lie with a man as one lies with a woman, it is an abomination." However this does not condemn same gender love. It never says it is a sin to love a person of the same gender or for gays and lesbians to be deprived of their rights. Leviticus also declares "love the stranger as yourself". Even though the stranger may be different from us, we still must love them. To love another we have to treat them with respect and equality.

GLBT people should /and deserve to be treated with equality. People do not realize how cruel and unethical it is to not allow a person to marry the one they love. It is immoral and against human nature to deprive one of marrying the one they want to be with the rest of their life. I would be

devastated if I could not marry the person I wanted to. I strongly am against discrimination in our world today. In the Torah it says we are created in the image of God. Therefore, everyone is created equally and should be treated equally and no one should be discriminated against.

Many people do not realize this issue is among many discrimination issues in our world today. I feel everyone has the right to live life the way they want to, no matter their sexual orientation. We only get one chance at living in this world. So why is it that we have the right to limit an individual's freedom?

GLBT people have been discriminated against in history and are still being discriminated against today. People do not have to be totally comfortable with same gender marriage; however, they should treat GLBT people with equality. GLBT people have the right to live their life by choice. We do not have the right to eliminate their options.

In confirmation, we have confirmed ourselves as members of the Jewish community and who we are, as individuals, in society. We have learned to stand up for what believe and speak our opinions. Confirmation has taught me a lot about who I am in and out of the Jewish Community.

Benji Wigley
Never Again

“Never Again.” After the Holocaust the Jewish community said, “never again.” “Never again” would they allow genocide or ignore the issue. “Never Again.” But have we kept to this promise? Unfortunately not. The world community has acted too late to stop genocides in Cambodia, Uganda, Bosnia, and Rwanda issues. Now we have been faced with our own current issue of Darfur, where the government has sent out armed militia groups to massacre many people living in the Darfur region of Sudan. The Jewish community has not repeated history. They have taken action and not stood by, like an ostrich with their head in the sand, as thousands of innocent lives are taken at a cost that we vowed we never happen again.

It is my personal belief that no country or person should ever stand by and watch genocide occur. I hold that the Jewish community now feels it is their responsibility to lead the global community in acting upon genocide issues. They have finally started to live up to the statement of “never again”, and decided to not ignore the issue and instead decided to lead the world in dealing with genocide more particular the Darfur issue. While I understand that we cannot fix what has happened in the past, we can help to pave the way for further prevention of these issues now and in the future. The Jewish community has only begun to make a difference in dealing with genocide issues through leading the way in speaking up against them. Our actions towards the issue of Darfur show the new way we are dealing with genocide. Darfur has become such a high profile issue in recent years that

many different groups have helped with this issue, but most groups can only go so far in helping the issue. We, the Jewish community, have joined together as a larger voice. We have begun to speak out, as well as attempted to show the horrid crimes committed by the government funded terrorist group. The Jewish community has organized itself to speak out against the Darfur issue through organizations like the Jewish World Watch, but we need to take more actions and hold to the statement, “never again.” Although there seems to be only minimal efforts the Jewish World Watch is calling for these actions:

1. Immediately press for multilateral targeted sanctions against Sudan and government officials at the UN Security Council.
2. Press for immediate and full deployment and logistical support of the UNAMID peacekeeping force.
3. Press for immediate deployment of EUFOR, the EU peacekeeping force for Eastern Chad.

Another action the Jewish World Watch is taking is asking for \$30 donations for solar cookers for displaced people in Darfur. The kit includes many necessities such as two solar cookers, pots, etc, as well as teaches the refugee women how to use the tool. This is an important step taken by the JWW to help refugees become reacquainted with society and is a very important humanitarian assistance program. Beyond this program the JWW has also asked the Jewish community to send letters to the president and UN Secretary general Ban Ki-Moon for further assistance in controlling the Darfur issue through having pre-written cards on their website; they have also held quite a few rallies for genocide, in fact next Sunday on June 7th

they will be holding a walk against genocide in the LA area. The Jewish community is taking some important steps to leading the way for future actions against, which will pave the path for generations to come. An example of this is the rally held in Orange County, because of the situation in Darfur. With more actions like this, the Jewish community has begun to be the major speaker against genocide.

The world community should look down upon these actions taken in the Darfur region. I have always felt that if there is something wrong going on that countries should act out against it. It is well known that Non-governmental Organizations or NGOs have been at work in helping with the human rights issues in Darfur. Many people in Darfur have been torn apart from their families by the conflict and there are grand numbers of children who have been orphaned by the genocide. The entire world should be in shock by this issue, and needs to support these NGOs in Darfur. It is most important for the international community to support the United Nations. The UN has many different groups at working in Darfur right now and these groups help in many of the human rights issues as a result of the Darfur situation. One of the most important actions taken by the UN is the charging of the president of Darfur, Omar al-Bashir with war crimes in the ICC, just days after he kicked a majority of aid groups out of the country. Now the Un has a harder time with bringing aid groups into the area, and has to think of new ways to help the people of Darfur. One way the UN is helping is through peacekeeping efforts in the area that are attempting to control the issue at hand. It is absolutely vital for the resolution of the Darfur issue, that our society supports the actions of the UN as well as makes others aware of the actions that the UN has taken to solve this conflict. The

only way to solve the Darfur issue is through further awareness, and only through awareness can we help others understand the grave importance of controlling the issue of genocide.

The issue of genocide as well as the Darfur situation is very important to the Confirmation class. As the future leaders of the Jewish community, my class has recognized the importance of the choices we make and we will be the ones that make the difference in the way the future Jewish community deals with the issue. Our opinions will be the ones heard by the masses and our ideas are the ones that can help us in being leaders against genocide. We will be the ones that will hold the Jewish community to the statement of “Never Again” or will become like those of the past, not willing to path the way against genocide. I see the future though, as people who will not make the same mistakes of the past, and we will stand up for what is right and become the first to speak out against horrible crimes of genocide. This community will be able to hold their heads high as they say “never again” and know that they are speaking out against the atrocities of genocide. It is too late for us to become the major voice against Darfur, but many of our recent actions show that the current generation of Jewish leaders is beginning a new path against genocide. This new path will lead us away from actions of the old and begin a new era in the way we deal with genocide. Only when we follow this new path set out for us will the Jewish community completely hold to their promise of “never again.”