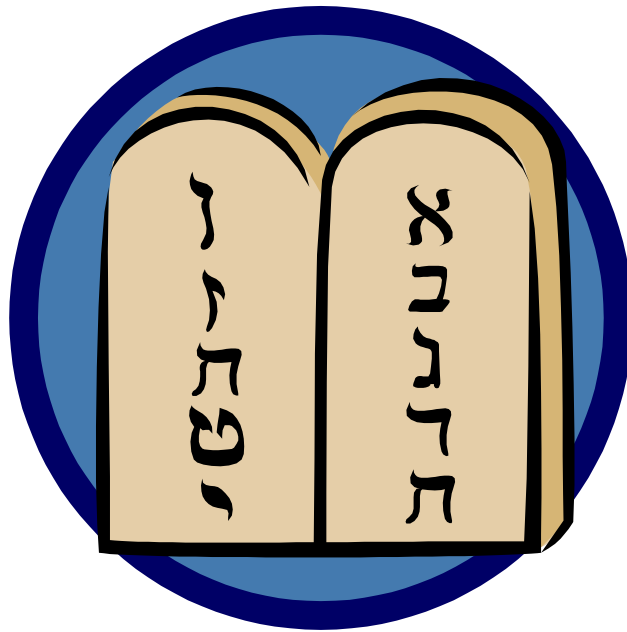


Class of 2011 Confirmation Essays



Moriah Alten Flagg

At the time of my Bat Mitzvah my Jewish identity was slightly unclear. I knew that I enjoyed being Jewish but I didn't really know what it meant to me. I had gone to Friday night services since I could remember and I went but didn't thoroughly enjoy Hebrew school. I didn't know if I wanted to continue and attend confirmation, but as I look back I'm so happy that my parents "encouraged" me go. Monday nights became not only a time where I got to explore Judaism and other religions but a time to see my friends. Although at times we talked too much, we had some really nice discussions about the topics we were covering that day. Over the three years of confirmation I learned tons about Judaism, other religions, Israel, and the Holocaust. Each Monday that I spent in confirmation helped firm up my beliefs in Judaism, and helped to form my Jewish identity.

Many aspects of my life have helped me to form and have strengthened my Jewish identity as it is today, the most influential being attending a Jewish summer camp. Each summer has been full of friends and great times. Going to a Jewish camp really opened my eyes to my Jewish identity. Everyone there was Jewish, I loved that. In my school there are less than 10 Jews so being surrounded by Jews every summer was an amazing experience. At camp, every Friday and Saturday we had Shabbat services and I truly connected to my Jewish identity at them. I remember one service in particular from this summer. It was one of the last services of the summer and being my last summer as a camper, I really reflected on how much I loved having Shabbat at camp. I sat there listening to the familiar tunes and prayers, and realized that I loved it I could never imagine my life without Judaism. It has had such a tremendous impact on my life that I would be lost without it. I cherished my last Shabbat at camp, I sang all of the songs and said all the prayers and really thought about their meanings. I listened to the poems that my bunk mates had written about their time at camp and they brought tears to my eyes. Camp has such a special place in my heart. As well does my Judaism. Camp Tel Noar has had such a tremendous influence on how I perceive Judaism and how much I enjoy being a part of it. I would say that my Jewish identity has greatly changed since my Bat Mitzvah. My Bat Mitzvah was me saying that I was the daughter of the commandments as a child, but now I'm here today to confirm my beliefs as an adult. It's hard to believe that it has already been over three years since my Bat Mitzvah. Now I'm confident in the fact that Judaism will always be a huge part of my life. Over these short three years my Jewish identity has changed from just being involved to loving every minute of it. My identity as a Jew is stronger and I believe it will continue to grow and strengthen as I continue in my life as a Jew.

Laurel Barkan

They say that when you become a Bar or Bat Mitzvah, you become a Jewish adult: independent and fully a part of the Jewish community. However, you aren't a Jewish adult when you become a son or daughter of the commandment, which I learned from my time during confirmation. When I became a Bat Mitzvah, I didn't really know what it meant, except that I would now have to fast, and I couldn't go up on the bimah to hold the challah during the hamotzi anymore. However, over the three years of confirmation, I have learned what it truly means to become a Jewish adult.

To me, I started to learn what it meant to be a Jewish adult the minute after I became a Bat Mitzvah, because to truly be a Bat Mitzvah, one has to figure out what being a Jewish adult means to them. Approximately four months after my Bat Mitzvah was my first Yom Kippur when I had to fast for the first time. As my stomach growled (rather loudly, I might add) all day, instead of thinking how hungry I was, it thought of what the day symbolized. Since then, I have honored the tradition of fasting on Yom Kippur, and to me that has been a choice that has signified my maturing. In addition, three years ago, I didn't like telling people I was Jewish, because I was one of the few people in my school who was Jewish, and therefore couldn't participate in trivial conversations such as what presents people wanted for Christmas, and how much candy they got on Easter. So much has changed since then. Now I am proud to call myself Jewish, and I'm even traveling to Israel this summer to really discover what it feels like to be in a country that is almost completely oriented around my religion.

One of the highlights of this year has been the Purim Shpiel; something I feel is almost a rite-of-passage here at Temple Shalom Emeth. Not only were we leading the shpiel, but the theme was Harry Potter, one of my favorite things, which made it even more special for me. I have also found it interesting learning about the Holocaust and its connection to Israel this year. I have always talked about the Holocaust in school, but I have never actually talked about it in temple, from a Jewish perspective. When I step off the plane in Israel, I will be stepping in to the land created for the survivors of the Holocaust. Essentially, with no other country, not even the United States, do I have such a connection with, and that's something I'm really looking forward to experiencing.

To go back to what I was talking about earlier, had you asked me what becoming a Jewish adult meant to me three years earlier, I would have given you an answer about being allowed to have more privileges. Right now becoming a Bat Mitzvah means beginning to discover my place in the Jewish faith. During confirmation I have learned this, and it is right now that I'm becoming a Jewish Adult.

Alexa Bosley

When I was just a little girl starting off in pre-Hebrew and working my way through Religious School, I remember looking up to the older kids in confirmation and thinking that someday I would be just like them. Now here I am today, many years later, amazed that I have come this far on my journey in discovering what Judaism means to me.

I doubt I will ever be able to explain exactly what my Jewish identity is since it is something that will change throughout my entire life, every year, every month, every week, every day as I continue to learn more about Judaism, its people, its history, and what it means to be Jewish. However, one thing I have realized the past few years in Confirmation, and something that I will continue to believe for the rest of my life, is that a large part of my Jewish identity is simply just being proud of being Jewish and embracing the uniqueness of the Jewish religion and the Jewish people. A large part of what I have come to love about Judaism is the connection that I have with every Jew around the world. As a minority, the traditions we share are what creates a sense of unity between us all and makes us so special. In addition, our ongoing struggle for the world to accept Judaism, a struggle that has been going on for centuries, has helped us, as Jews, become a stronger and prouder people. Learning this past year about Israel and the Holocaust, learning about Judaism in comparison to other religions last year, and learning the previous year about the different forms of Judaism has truly affected my feelings toward the religion and has made me feel closer to my Jewish roots.

These past few years have helped me realize something else important about myself as well, that being surrounded by Jews is something that I thoroughly enjoy and is extremely important to me. Through Confirmation, SEFTY, and NFTY I have been welcomed into a world where being Jewish is not only what is normal, but it's what everyone is used to. To me, that is one of the most reassuring things. It is something that makes me feel incredibly safe and it makes me feel connected to my Jewish roots because of the power that comes from it. I had not experienced what it truly meant to be Jewish until I had sat in a room with hundreds of other Jewish kids and worshiped and sang, or until I had sat around a table with my friends, the Rabbi, and my other teachers and discussed aspects of Judaism so thoroughly that I truly had to think about what I believed, what was important to me, what makes me, as a Jew, so special, and why being a Jew is such an important part of my life.

I have come to realize that for me being Jewish is less about the words, prayers, or the Hebrew, and that it is more about the stories behind the things we do and the lessons that come from them. It is about being intertwined in a community where everyone enjoys and embraces being Jewish. As a newly confirmed student, I plan on maintaining my connections with Judaism and even making them stronger. I want to become more involved in the Temple, SEFTY, NFTY, and other Jewish organizations where I can be surrounded by Jews and feel like I'm home. Ending Confirmation is like graduating college and having to go out into the real world and find a job. It's hard, and you don't want it to end, but you have to grow up and go your own way at some point. I have graduated and now I must find new ways to feel connected, but I am never truly leaving my home, here, at Temple Shalom Emeth. In fact, I'm really just being welcomed back, more mature, more educated, and more comfortable than ever.

Ben Kaplan

Judaism is unique. Judaism is not just a religion, but also a way of life. It was founded in a time when one lived their life based on a single dogma, a single tradition. For us Jews who call ourselves Reform, the necessities of orthodoxy have long since faded into the mists of time. We are no longer required, nor should we be, to follow ancient and holy dogma. But the tradition remains. Whether it is in eating Matzah on Passover or blowing the shofar on Rosh Hashanah, we follow a tradition that has been passed down to us for thousands of years, ever since our forefathers left the land of Israel and were scattered throughout the world. Tradition is the glue that binds us together. We scattered to the four corners of the earth. We scattered to Australia and to South America, to Europe and to Asia, to Palestine and to the United States. We were separated for two thousand years, but we were never alone. The tradition of Judaism bound us together. It kept us close. It ensured the very survival of our people, of our race.

Now, I am not a religious person. For me, Judaism is not a religion; it is this tradition. It is a connection to my past and a guide to my future. What I do on Yom Kippur is what my forefathers have done for millennia. Today, I am not confirming my knowledge of a foreign language, or a belief in a God. I am confirming the continuation of a tradition. I am confirming that I am Jewish, that my ancestors were Jewish, and that my family will remain Jewish until time eternal. With my confirmation, I confirm that no matter the circumstance, no matter the event, no matter the hardship, no matter the pain, or no matter the fear, this religion, this tradition, and these people who call themselves Jews shall never perish from this earth.

Emily Martin

I've always been proud of being Jewish. Ever since I can remember I have shared parts of my culture with friends and classmates. When I was younger I knew what anti-Semitism was, but I had never met anyone my age that had experienced it. However, in middle school I began to hear about comments, and notice some myself, that were hateful towards Judaism. They were not necessarily serious comments, but they were comments all the same. I realized that these people not only had a very skewed and narrow view of my religion and culture, but that they didn't understand what was wrong about what they were saying. And I didn't know how to respond. I wasn't angry about what these people were saying, but rather I felt bad that they did not understand what a rich and loving culture it was. After that point I really began to associate myself with being Jewish. Being a part of the TSE community was a big part of that. I joined the junior youth group, was an aide at the Hebrew School, and started to attend more temple-wide events. In doing so, I built many friendships that still stand today. Now, I am an active member of SEFTY and a 10th grade confirmation class student. At this point in my life, I seem to be faced with endless decisions about my life, most of which I have no clue where to begin. But also, at this point in my life, I've never felt surer that being Jewish is not just a part of my life, but a part of my identity. I've never felt more grateful to be a part of this community, this culture, and this religion. So today, I am confirming that I am loved by my family, that I am cared about by the friends I've made here, that I am supported by our community, that I am safe in a time where nothing seems safe, and most importantly, that I owe all of it to being Jewish.

Josh Rosenberg

Today I am confirming my Jewish identity. Over the past three years, I have learned a lot more about Judaism. I have become more independent in the Jewish community. I made the choice for myself to lead a Jewish life.

One of the most important things to me about being Jewish is the community and family. Judaism has been a part of my life since I was born. Some of my most memorable childhood events were spending the Jewish holidays with my family. It brought everyone together for almost every major holiday. I like the feeling of having a Jewish community where being Jewish is what everybody has in common. Going to temple as a kid, I became aware of what was going on during the service. That has expanded into me today knowing what is going on in the world with other Jewish people.

The thing I like most about my Jewish identity and the Jewish community is that it always brings people together. Everyone becomes familiar with each other, and they become part of each other's lives. I will always know that I belong there with everyone else. That is why being Jewish is so important to me.

Laura Simon-Pearson

What does being Jewish mean to me? Although I don't always think about it, Judaism and everything I've learned from this beautiful community is tightly woven into me and the way I live each day. The very first thing that comes to mind is the people I've met through this temple. I have had the immense privilege to be a friend of the most loving, intelligent, and energetic people that I know in this world. It's hard to describe how much they all mean to me, but I can leave it at that of all of the 6 billion people on our planet, there's no one else I'd rather spend my Saturday night with than these amazing people. And the most beautiful part about it is that I feel confident that I will be lucky enough to one day call them my life-long friends.

The Jewish community I have grown up in will undoubtedly have a lasting effect on me. There is such a sense of security, acceptance and love in this building and always when I am around people from the temple. I have always felt that whenever I come here I can be whoever I want to be and the person next to me can be exactly as they want to be, which is really quite a rarity in our world. There is a desire, passed from one generation to the next, to reach out, look inward, and better ourselves. And I have seen growth in myself as I have grown up going to services at this temple, because as the years have gone by I have begun to find personal connection and meaning to the songs and prayers. I love knowing all of the words to the prayers in our prayer books and knowing the harmonies for all of the songs we sing together here. I remember one time about maybe a year ago when I came to services on a Friday night with my mom. I had had a bad, stressful week, but I discovered that attending services and being surrounded by all of the loving and welcoming people here was sort of a shoulder to lean on. And each time the cantor began to strum his guitar everyone in the room would sing, because everyone in the room knew the words. And I remember that being such a powerful feeling. The harmonies in Hebrew felt like a connection between me and everyone around me. Something so moving and uplifting as that cannot be rehearsed.

And, of course, so many of my happiest memories with family have been while celebrating the Jewish holidays together. I believe that my Judaism has made me the person I am today, and has sent me off into the world with a solid foundation of love and community and self confidence. With this foundation I hope to leave the world a little better than it was before, or accomplish Tikun Olam, to heal the world around us. From where I am in my life right now, if I am lucky enough in the future to have children I want them to be able to experience Judaism and growing up exactly as wonderfully as I have here. Thank you.