

**Ethical Will from Temple Israel Center
Havurat Torah - 12th Grade - Class of 5773**

It's hard to believe that our many years here at Temple Israel Center are coming to an end. Some of us had our baby namings here, and many of us also attended the TIC Nursery School. Now, we know where we are going to college in the fall, and we are about to embark on our journey into the "real world." Along the way, we will be forever mindful of the knowledge and values we obtained here at TIC, and we will carry them with us wherever we go.

In Havurat Torah, we have always focused on making a difference in the world, as well as learning lessons that would be meaningful to our future and relevant in our everyday lives. As Rabbi Tarfon said, "You are not obliged to finish the task, neither are you free to neglect it." (*Pirkei Avot*, 2:21)

This quote has special meaning to us, both pertaining to our Jewish education, and to the importance we have learned to place on *tikkun olam*, repairing the world. In the past 4 years alone, we have participated in so many volunteer projects, such as sorting clothes to be given to children at Kid's Closet, helping to beautify the community in Biloxi, Mississippi by preparing a garden, putting together food for Israel's poor at B'nai Barak on our Israel Trip in February, and helping the senior members of our community here at Kiddush, to name just a few. We have learned that we have the ability to make the world a better place and that it is our responsibility to do so.

As a teen, it can be easy to forget about the importance of continuing our Jewish education as we stress about school, and are busy with extracurricular activities such as dance, soccer practice, and play rehearsals. Sometimes it is really difficult to make coming to Havurat Torah a priority. But we have learned that making it a priority is worth it. You will find that Havurat Torah becomes the time that you can truly be yourself; that the time here gives you a break from the everyday pressures of life and gives you a chance to breathe and spend meaningful time with friends and teachers. You will find that you will want to come to HT, not because it will look good on your resume, but because you want to be in a place that supports you, believes in you, and encourages you to explore who you want to be.

Each week that we came to Havurat Torah, we were reminded how to be better people and community members, and what it really means to be Jewish leaders. We have gained life skills here while also strengthening our Jewish identity. Religious School is where we first learned about the holidays, Torah, and Israel. It's also where we learned Hebrew and prayer. But it is in Havurat Torah where we formed and strengthened our Jewish identities as we navigated our worlds as Jewish teens. This is where we were given the opportunity to question, search, and explore what being a Jewish American teen really means. That's something you will be happy you have done, too. So keep coming. You'll make friends, learn about Judaism, and most importantly, learn some really important things about yourself.