

Torah Thoughts – January 31, 2019

In the past month I was asked by my colleagues about our *shinshinit*, Dana, and the secret of her success in our school. They even went so far as to ask if she was a magician or if I gave her a magic pill!

I realize that not all members of our congregation are aware of this program, so please allow me to share with you a little bit about it. *Shinshinim* is a play on the Hebrew words, *Shnat Sheirut*, meaning “year of service.” *Shinshinim* are talented high school graduates from Israel who are placed in Jewish communities abroad. This program, brought to our community and largely supported by, the Jewish Federation in the Heart of New Jersey, exists to build bridges between Israeli youth and Jewish communities in order to strengthen our ties and build the foundation for a secure Jewish future. In short, the program makes Israel more than just our far-flung homeland -- it makes Israel personal.

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Dana has created meaningful connections with the students of our Hebrew School, bringing her Israeli culture, traditions, and Hebrew to Marlboro Jewish Center. She has developed personal relationships with our students and families alike, and especially with her amazing host family. Dana is always eager to help and participates in all our events and helps some of our students who are reluctant to go to Junior Congregation on Shabbat. Her passion is contagious and we are so fortunate to have her with us.

Dana’s influence goes well beyond the day-to-day help she provides. A recent study from the Jewish Agency finds that “Interactions with emissaries from Israel are associated with higher levels of engagement with Israel because Jews who spent years in Jewish schools might have knowledge about Israel, but not necessarily a connection to it. The *Shinshinim* program can help make that connection.”

This study also finds that while relationships with *Shinshinim* may not be ‘transformative’ in the way that trips to Israel are experienced, but that they constitute a more intimate and a more continuous part of people’s lives.

I completely agree! As someone who has served as an emissary in the past, and who works with one now, I can attest to the power that these personal relationships can have. I have been doing my very best to help Dana succeed and flourish, giving her the tools and knowledge that she needs. I encourage you all to do the same -- If you haven’t yet met Dana, please find some time to meet her and thank her for her service to our community.

Shabbat Shalom!

Rabbi Koas