Voices
of our Confirmands
Kabbalat Torah Class of 5780+
Simchat Torah 5781
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על השלושה עולמות עולמה שלום, על חכמים והɐוֹדוֹת והם בחולים חסדים:

"The whole world stands on three things:
Torah (sacred wisdom),
Avodah (spirituality),
and G’milut Chasadim (justice and compassion)"
(Pirkei Avot 1:2)
ELENA BROSnan
To me, Torah means safety. Torah is always there to guide us, even when things are uncertain. Torah is something that we have always had to keep sacred thousands of years after it was written, so it is a constant. Torah makes me feel closer to my community because it’s something we all share. Torah is sacred because it contains stories that are like life lessons from God. It shapes the way we live our lives as Jews. Torah is sacred because it is what we built our religion around. Without Torah there wouldn’t be Judaism.

ALEXA CHAMBERS
The Torah to me is a collection of texts that can teach us, guide us, and remind us, at any time, to look and say “We can do this: We’ve done it before, and we can do it again. We will get through this.” This matters because it speaks to people. The stories we read out of the Torah always have a message or something that resonates with everyone, and that makes it something that we revere because it can help us all.

MICHAELA FOSTER
Torah is the written foundation of Judaism, carrying the tradition and story of our people. As a pillar of our religion, the Torah uses the history of our ancestors to teach us valuable lessons. I believe Torah is sacred for a number of reasons, one being its ability to provide guidance on how we can be upstanding community members, kind people, and faithful Jews, no matter our religious connections. Whether we’re looking to strengthen our relationship with G-d, make big decisions, or care for our community members, the wisdom of the Torah is valuable in all situations.

LARS KAHN
Torah is Judaism's tutorial for life. It’s open to interpretation, but generally speaking, it guides people through life and attempts to expand your understanding of it. There will be those who disagree with some (or all) of its lessons, but the Torah’s teachings are, in my eyes, suggestions for everyone to be living the best way they can.
AMELIA POSNER-HESS
One thing I love about being Jewish is our culture of constant storytelling and memories, whether that be from our families, in Shabbat services, in Sunday school, or in conversations with others in the community. This is what makes me feel most spiritually and musically connected to our religion -- knowing that there are so many profound memories and stories before us, and that we have both the duty and the privilege to try to live this wisdom and memory out in our own lives. I think this is what the Torah means to me: a sacred and timeless text of wisdom, struggle, and faith that can be interpreted and applied to our lives as we see fit and necessary. The Torah is at the foundation of Judaism’s beautiful relationship with storytelling, memory, and resilience, and I don’t think we need to be experts on the text to feel its impact on our spiritual and religious identities.

SARA ROGERSON
Torah helps me feel connected to others; it is something that Jewish people share. I enjoy studying Torah with others, and I think that hearing different perspectives on the text is very valuable. The Torah is sacred because it is one of the biggest things that brings Jews together. I have met a lot of great people, like my Judea Reform classmates, through the study of Torah, and I have learned some important lessons from them over the years.

IZAAC WOHL
Torah is full of our culture. It’s been passed through generations and is at the core of the Jewish tradition. What makes us Jewish isn’t just about the Torah, but also the interpretation that’s been passed down, revised, evolved, and reimagined over the years.
Avoda: Spirituality

ELENA BROSnan
I find spirituality with other people who can relate to me. I think because being a Jew, especially in the South, is so rare, it always makes me feel more connected to Judaism when I meet another Jew. Growing up as a Jew in the South has given me a unique perspective on religion, so it makes me feel safer knowing that I’m not alone. Outside of Judaism, I find spirituality within my family and friends. My family and friends make me the happiest, and those are the times I feel most connected with God and the world around me. My spiritual and religious identity as a Jew was hard to find at first. It’s very easy to feel isolated as a Jew, but once I started to explore my spiritual connection with myself, I began to develop a much more complex spiritual and religious identity. I think a lot of my identity also comes from my friends, who make being Jewish really enjoyable. I feel most connected to this value when I’m surrounded by people I love.

ALEXA CHAMBERS
I am most connected as a Jew to spirituality when I am with other people like me, like being at services, being a Madricha, or participating in this Confirmation class. There are very few Jews in my school -- and this has always been the case. Being able to connect by knowing the same songs, prayers, and experiences -- all these cultural connections -- always reminds me of why I choose to be Jewish and pursue things like Kabalat Torah and being a Madricha after my Bat Mitzvah.

MICHAELA FOSTER
My religious identity as a Jew is centered around community and the two places I connect with my spiritual identity as a Jew are quite opposite. The first is when I am around other Jews in Temple, at celebrations, and even in Sunday school and our Confirmation class. In communal settings, I feel an unspoken but present connection with other Jews; I find spirituality as we come together on Friday after a long week to pray, and when we gather to prepare meals for others in our community. Being a part of a community and sharing our contrasting and similar experiences represents my religious identity as a Jew. I also find spirituality in the outdoors and nature. Being in our natural environment allows me to center myself and reflect on how I can better take care of myself and the people around me.
LARS KAHN
I feel most connected to my identity as a Jew in Jewish settings like a synagogue or Sunday School. When I’m engaging with a Jewish holiday, I’m in one these two places, and am there strictly for those occasions. I don't spend much free time there - and rarely on Shabbat (unless it’s a holiday) - but when I’m there, a whole other world is reintroduced to me each time. I don’t see my spirituality as a Jew very strong outside of these times and areas (unless I’m with other Jews), so having it re-ignited at the synagogue is when I feel most connected to my Jewish identity.

AMELIA POSNER-HESS
My religious identity is defined and shaped by music, and it has been that way for as long as I can remember. Playing violin at Judea’s services has, for me, always been the most profound expression of religion and prayer. I feel like playing music has a unique duality: it feels so deeply individual and personal, yet, at the same time, so comfortingly collective and communal. When I’m playing Jewish music at synagogue, this duality feels even more pronounced. I feel so connected, not only to myself, but to my family, to the Judea Reform community, and to my religious identity. Music is what I always come back to in Judaism. Within Jewish music there lies a solemn and joyful reflection of the past, a gracious appreciation of the present, and a prayerful anticipation of the future. Music, for me, encapsulates everything about Judaism that I love, and it will always be the primary force that connects me to my religious and spiritual identity.

SARA ROGERSON
I find spirituality in nature, where I can appreciate its beauty and complexity. Being outside reminds me that I have a place in the universe, and that I am not alone in the world. I also feel more at peace when I am surrounded by nature, without other people and things distracting me from my thoughts. To me, being a Jew means that I do my best to make the world a better place, and being able to reflect on the world around me in a calm space is one way for me to work towards that.

IZAAC WOHLM
While I’m not really a “religious” person, I find connection to other Jews through service. I get to experience what other Jews experience. If worshiping is fun, we all get that fun, or maybe the service is boring, and we all get bored. I find connection is sharing experiences with others.
**Gimilut Chasadim: Justice & Compassion**

**ELENA BROSnan**
The values of justice and compassion are important to me because they shape who I am as a person. I believe that without those values, a person cannot be a good person. It is so important that people care about one another, especially during these times. Something that shapes/informs my social conscience and treatment of people is my family history. I am a second generation American, and I know how hard my mother and grandparents worked to survive in the United States. The stories that I grew up on, and even my family’s current lives, inspire me to be a better person every day. My family is very passionate about immigration and other social issues because we understand what it is like to experience immigration. My mother didn’t know English until 1st grade and is the smartest, most hardworking person I know. My grandparents came here knowing no English, with no money, and still managed to give my mom and aunt good lives. They have shaped the way that I think about social injustice and the treatment of other people because they inspire me to treat people the way I would want to be treated.

**ALEXA CHAMBERS**
The values of Justice and Compassion are important to me in large part because of growing up Jewish. Hearing all of the stories about Hannukah and Passover all my life I can connect on some level with others. I also think Justice and Compassion are important because everyone should be treated equally and there is no reason not to be fair and kind. There are ways we can change things, and being just and compassionate actually do something to make things a little more fair.

**MICHAELA FOSTER**
As humans, we all experience suffering in some way. I believe compassion is important, because we can empathize with others’ hardships, and it is my responsibility to help others, as I wish they would help me if I needed it. Especially during the pandemic, it has become harder to know how friends and family are truthfully doing. Furthermore, compassion is a two-way value, strengthening relationships.

Justice is also an important value both in Judaism and my life. Building each other up and fighting for others so everyone is able to share an equal role in the community is something I value. I know that when opinions are shared equally and everyone is valued, we will be able to have a more inclusive and enriched community.
**LARS KAHN**

Justice and compassion are the values that defeat injustice and hate. G’milut Chasadim is the light in the dark, and the way to the brightest future. Personal experiences that make me believe in what I’ve just written consist of hearing others’ experiences who have been wronged by hate or injustice. When I hear an elderly man cry for the loss of his friends in the Holocaust, I know that it’s the hate of the Nazi regime that led to mass genocide and men like that to lose people they love. When countless people are incarcerated wrongly each day while the President rage-tweets, a man who has been impeached and proven to have broken the law, I see the injustice. Rooting for love and justice to prevail over the hate and injustice is a logical and compassionate response, and it is why G’milut Chasadim is important to me.

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**AMELIA POSNER-HESS**

Over the past year, the world has faced an unprecedented number of tragedies and losses, and on Rosh Hashanah this year, I was so excited to begin the year anew. That night, however -- less than an hour after Erev Rosh Hashanah services -- we found out that Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg had died. For me, this felt like a breaking point. RBG was my personal hero, as a Jew and as a woman. I saw and still see her as an exemplification of the Jewish values of compassion, justice, and g’milut chasadim. She always talked about how her Jewish identity inspired her to fight for change, and she inspires me to do the same every day.

After Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg died, it felt like the notion of justice had faded away with her. Her death felt so deeply personal -- many of us were mourning our hero and role model -- but also so harrowingly political. The future feels too uncertain for words. However, what I am trying to remind myself in this time following her death is that there is still reason to hope; that justice and compassion on the national level didn’t die with her. I’ve been thinking about this a lot over the past few weeks, specifically in relation to Judaism. Something that we talked about in Confirmation class is how justice, specifically social justice, is about building each other up and that justice goes past one action; it’s a lifelong commitment. Things feel very hopeless right now, but I have been returning to the memories of these conversations, and they’ve helped me to understand what Justice in times of unrest and uncertainty really means. I think justice is about remembering and honoring those before us, and holding up and embracing the people living here now. Justice is more than a legal phrase or a concept that is chanted at protests; it’s a rallying cry for all of us to support the common humanity within each of us. And this feels even more important to remember and to remind others of right now.
SARA ROGERSON
Justice and compassion are important to me because they help me be thankful for all that I have. I believe in using our privilege to help others who are not as fortunate as us, and engaging in social justice allows me to do that. Ultimately, I care about social justice because I believe that everyone should be treated equally. Throughout my life, I have heard about many injustices occurring in the world. Since I was little, my dad has listened to NPR every morning in the car on the way to school, and this way I learned about many tragic and unfair events. I don’t think there is one specific story that inspired me to get involved in social justice; I have been influenced by my family, my friends, the media, and my own personal experiences. One of the biggest role models for me is my mom, who volunteers and works tirelessly to help people who are in need. Just this winter, she hosted a fundraiser for the Compass Center, which helps victims of domestic violence. I am lucky to be surrounded by so many amazing people who have shown me how to treat others with respect and be kind.

IZAAC WOHL
Ever since I was a little kid I was always obsessed with things being fair. Whether this was me being a prodigy of social justice, or just me having OCD, will forever be up for debate. When I was in 2nd grade I had issues with my stomach. It would always ache and I had to go home multiple times. Eventually I went to the doctor and was diagnosed with Crohn's disease, an illness that sticks with you your whole life. I’m in remission now and feel well but when I was first diagnosed, I had a lot of trouble. I couldn’t run at recess because of a treatment I had and I got really lonely. To help me feel better my friends would sometimes just hang out with me and keep me company, so that until I could run again we could still be having fun together. It was hard for me not to be able to play with friends and I was nervous when presenting in front of the class, but my class was very accepting of it and I always had someone to hang out with. When I needed help others showed me compassion and the small acts of kindness they did affected me a lot. This to me is at the heart of what tikkun olam is.
The Meaning of Confirmation

“My Name is Elena Brosnan, and today I confirm my Jewish faith.”

“My Name is Alexa Chambers, and today I confirm my Judaism.”

“My Name is Michaela Foster, and today I confirm my continued study and worship of Judaism, and involvement in our Jewish community.”

“My Name is Max Gray and today I confirm human right.”

“My Name is Lars Kahn, and today I confirm that I’m a Jew.”

“My Name is Amelia Posner-Hess, and today I confirm my commitment to Judaism and to this community.”

“My Name is Sara Rogerson, and today I confirm my continued contribution to the Jewish community.”

“My Name is Izaac Wohl, and today I confirm my tradition.”