

CONFIRMATION 2011

Life is about CHOICES. And with that said, I doubt that even half of you are still listening to me. Your minds have wandered to choices which you made in your life, whether sometime in the past or just recently.

But life is also about FOCUS- there did I bring you back?

Five good Jewish people have stood on this Bimah today. They are here because of CHOICES they have made. They are here because they have incredible focus. When I think of each of these confirmation students, ONE word stands out for me for each of them.

Sarah Lipitz. For Sarah, the one word the one word that stands out for me is CAUSE. There will always be inequities, injustices, and social problems. But there will not always be a young person like SARAH who wants to do something about it. In Sunday School, the students are taught about Tikun Olam, which translates: to repair the world. But that is not enough for SARAH. When she focuses on a cause, she sets out to CHANGE the world. For SARAH, her CHOICES are: which causes will she pick to receive her compassion and energy and intellect. On the lighter side, Sarah loses things occasionally. Fortunately, she has never lost her commitment to Judaism. I attribute this to her Sunday School education, her family, and to her Jewish friends. ***

Ian Bilofsky. For him the word is TEAM. Every time you turn around, it seems that Ian is on another team. I can remember soccer, then wrestling, and then track. For Ian, it is probably about playing the sport. But I see it more as a FACET of his personality. He is a person who really BUILDS friendships. The people around him are not just acquaintances or just friends. They are people with whom he has layers and layers of connection. He makes it look easy but THE LAYERS require the ability to listen, the ability to process the information on the right level, and the ability to give the right response. Friendships that are built with Ian have the building blocks that make them exceptionally strong. This Confirmation class is like a Jewish Team. The students interact with each other and enjoy each other. I attribute much of that to Ian and his ability to build friendships. ****

Carly Port. For Carly, the word is CONNECT. Carly connects with every person she meets, from little kids, to her peers, to the parents of her friends and even the grandparents of her friends. AND everyone knows CARLY. No matter who the other person is, what their background is, or where they come from, CARLY smiles and greets them and makes them feel connected to her. Carly has a genuine appreciation for the achievements and skills of others. No one listens to a speaker more intently, no one watches a play and sees every single move the way she does. When her teachers, her Rabbi, her coaches, and even her parents speak, she does not miss a word. HONESTLY, I know that at this time in these student's lives, their friends are much more important than we are. AND Carly brings an intensity to that. She is not only aware of her friends' ACCOMPLISHMENTS, she is their biggest cheerleader and fan. ***

Noah Scheinberg. In Noah's case I think the word is IDENTITY. What a strong Jewish identity Noah has. This year the confirmation class had the opportunity to go on a confirmation trip together. They went to Panim el Panim, The Institute for Jewish Leadership and Values in Washington DC. There were students from all over and from all types of congregations, conservative, reconstructionist, and reformed. You know who ruled, NOAH. Noah took his STRONG JEWISH IDENTITY and made Panim work for him.

Even in the Altoona Area High School, every member of that football team, every coach, every fan knows NOAH. And he IDENTIFIES himself by his religion. HE IS A JEW: He is an ACADEMIC student: and HE IS AN ATHLETE. Noah balances out this confirmation class with his consistent curiosity and his perceptive remarks. Modesty emanates from Noah in his approach to life's choices. It is his PRIDE in who he is, in his family, and in his congregation that is apparent as he acts upon those choices. ***

Ginger Glass. My word to describe Ginger is DEEP. Ginger reaches deep down inside herself in her approach to any challenge. She seems to tap an inner resource in almost everything she does. But it is more than that... No matter what is asked of her, you will almost never hear Ginger say: No. She is always willing to try. When Ginger is confronted with a sad situation, she reaches down deep and comes up with profound empathy. When Ginger is confronted with a difficult choice, she reaches down deep and makes a complete moral decision.

Almost every adult here has had the opportunity to teach at least one of these remarkable students. Many of you have been teachers in the Sunday School. I think that the Sunday School is where Ginger learned the skills she uses to make moral choices, to exercise sound judgment, and to approach life as a good Jewish person. ****

Sunday School has given these students excellent tools. You will find these kids not only in the role of student but also in the role of teacher. You will find them in the role of guest, but just as often in the role of host. They have no problem being the players but are equally comfortable as the responsible leaders.

Confirmation is a turning point. The choices which these students make will be governed by what they have learned so far and how they have developed their skills and gifts. I am guessing that if Rozzi Sky read the fortune of this confirmation class at the Purim carnival, she would have said:

THEIR compassion, their common sense, their belief in themselves and in each other, combined with their understanding of JUDIASM will serve them well as they make life's choices.