Teens Find Community and New Meaning During Martin Luther King Jr. Weekend Service Trip

BY JENNA FERRARO, 9TH GRADE

This Martin Luther King weekend I went on WJC Teens’ yearly service learning trip to Houston, Texas, which is still recovering from the devastation of Hurricane Harvey. It was an amazing experience. We helped at the Houston Food Bank, a local Conservative synagogue, and an organization called “Undies for Everyone” where we packed over 2,500 pairs of new underwear for kids in need.

From Sheryl Eskowitz at Congregation Beth Yeshurun, we heard how their entire synagogue, including the main sanctuary, had been damaged. The extensive loss from the flood was unbelievably upsetting and an eye-opening experience. We helped unpack books in their library that had been emptied and taken apart after the flood. Although it was very hard work, it was worth it because we were helping bring the synagogue one step closer to recovery after the storm.

At the Houston Food Bank, I was astonished to learn that children comprise a large number of the 800,000 people fed annually. This made me feel grateful for what I have. At the food bank, we packed boxes upon boxes of rice, which at the end of the day amounted to over 1,500 bags! I was so tired when our volunteering came to an end, but I couldn’t help but smile knowing that I helped all those people feel a little less hungry.

We also went to a Temple in a poorer neighborhood to make mezuzahs for people whose houses were damaged or destroyed in the flood. Destruction from the flood was immediately evident when we arrived at the Temple, including leaking bathroom pipes and drains gushing water. It was sad to see, because I knew in other more affluent neighborhoods, this would have been an easy fix.

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THE REVIEW of
WESTCHESTER JEWISH CENTER
Published Monthly (except July & August)
Westchester Jewish Center
Mamaroneck, NY 10543
914-698-2960 • wjcenter.org
Editor: Pat Tinto
Design & Production: Evan J. Schapiro

RABBI ADIR YOLKUT

From a very young age, whether explicitly or implicitly, I believe I was taught that to be a leader means to be brash and bombastic. Unafraid to take charge in a situation, the leader in various youth to young adult settings was the person who often had the loudest voice. In this month though, where we honor the leaders who have dignified one of the greatest offices in our land, let us look to our tradition to frame a different way to look at leadership, that of presence and empathy.

In the vast swaths of the Mishnah that detail the minutaie of the Temple service, there is a profound teaching (2:2) in the tractate of Middot that illustrates how the worship took place:

“All who would enter the temple mount entered toward the right, and would encircle it and exit through the left, aside for one to which something unfavorable has occurred, that he would encircle it towards the left [even when he entered]. [If he was asked] ‘Why are you encircling towards the left?’ [If he answered] ‘Because I am a mourner.’ [they would respond] ‘He who rests in this house should comfort you.’ [If he answered] ‘Because I am excommunicated.’ [they would respond] ‘He who dwells in this house should put into their [the judges’] hearts and they will draw you near.’”

Not only is this teaching transformative for what it illustrates about being welcoming for communities, but it also elucidates an important but elusive leadership concept. So often, when we are put in leadership positions, we are incredibly worried about our own ambition and drive. How do I look? How is my vision being implemented? Although this serves an important purpose, it also blocks our ability to look outward and think about the people we are serving.

In the Temple, everyone walked in the same direction except those people to whom misfortune had occurred. Instead of their flow in the room just being observed, we are told that those who were there asked them what amounts to “what is going on in your life right now?” In response to whatever their challenge was, some sort of empathy and concern was voiced. God should provide you comfort for whatever your situation is.

When we are leaders, this is how we should operate. Look around the room and see whose eyes are looking sorrowful. When you are at Kiddush the next time, find someone sitting alone at a table with their head down, and ask them how they are doing. The willingness to place others’ needs before our own is a true benchmark of leaders. It’s a simple step. All it takes is learning how to ask the right questions and listen.
Saturday, February 3: Yitro – Jethro
Moses’ father in law, Yitro, advises Moses to create a body of leaders to help share his load of leadership. The people are selected to be a Kingdom of Priests and encamp on Mt. Sinai where God comes down in a dramatic scene of thunder and lightning to give them the 10 commandments through Moses.

Saturday, February 10: Mishpatim/Shabbat Shekalim – Laws
Lawyers’ favorite portion as a multitude of laws are given in the aftermath of the revelation at Sinai. Laws of damages, loans, how courts should operate, how to treat foreigners, and holiday observance are just some examples. The famous expression “we will do and we will listen” is the response of the Jewish people to God.

Saturday, February 17: Trumah – Donation
The Israelites are called upon to donate a myriad of items to help with the construction of the tabernacle. Moses receives very detailed instructions from God on how exactly this tabernacle should be constructed.

Saturday, February 24: Tetzaveh/Shabbat Zakhor – You Shall Command
Moses commands the Israelites to gather oil for the purposes of the everlasting flame in the tabernacle. We also learn of the intricacies of the garb of the high priests as well as the pomp and circumstance of their ordination ceremony where Aaron and his sons are prepared for the Priesthood.

Rhythm & Ruach
Led by our talented musical ensemble that encourages participation, Rhythm & Ruach is a soulful space and the perfect way to enter into Shabbat.
Friday, February 2 • 7:30pm: Instrumental Service

Simple & Soulful
Let your spirit soar as we journey through a focused 90-minute Shabbat morning service, featuring personal reflection, group prayer and singing accompanied by instruments.
Saturday, February 10 • 10:15-11:45am
Mazel Tov & Best Wishes to Rabbi Jef & Marla Segelman on the birth of a granddaughter Miryam Tziporah, to Yael Cohen & Uri Segelman…Adam Herz on his marriage to Danielle Zalaznick…Laura Chess & Family on the wedding of her daughter, Lila to Aron Kandel.

Our deepest sympathy is extended to Andrew Bauman & Family on the loss of his mother, Lillian Bauman…Marcie Berger & Family on the loss of her father, Martin Fields…Linda Schwartzreich & Family on the loss of her father, Manny Sher…Jay Fischer & Family on the loss of his brother, Marc Fischer…Dan Rosenbaum & Family on the loss of his father, Lester Rosenbaum…Bill Caslin & Family on the loss of his sister, Monica Montanaro.

Synagogue Family

World Wide Wrap XVII & “Olympic Performance” talk by Robert Herbst on Super Bowl Sunday
Sunday, February 4 • Minyan: 8:30am; Talk: 9:15am
Wear your favorite football jersey to Sunday morning minyan. Breakfast with WJC member and 19-time World Champion powerlifter and Hall of Famer, Robert Herbst who will talk at 9:15am about lessons from life in the Olympic Village that may help your own Olympian performance.

Blood and Taxes
Sunday, February 11
Blood Drive 9am-1:30pm
Your donation can save up to three lives. New donors needed and walk-ins welcomed. Schedule to donate at: www.redcrossblood.org • keyword: WJC

New Tax Law and You 10-11:30am
Breakfast with expert panel of WJC members, Cindy Golub, Cindy Goldstein, & Alan Dlugash, on how the new tax law affects you and learn new tax strategies.

In Memoriam
The Westchester Jewish Center mourns the passing of our friend and longtime member Alan Aron.
Our condolences are extended to his wife Sarah and to the entire family. May his memory be a blessing.

Please join us as Sisterhood members come together to lead this spiritual morning Saturday Morning, April 28
All WJC members invited to participate
If interested, please contact: Carol Fasman cgfasman@gmail.com Ileen Greenberg ileen@optonline.net

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Ladies’ Night Out: Bowling
Tuesday, February 13 • 7:30-9:30pm
Two hours of bowling, pizza, beverages and dessert in New Roc City. Try winning the now famous Trophies of Honor! Cost is $36 and payable that evening by cash or check. RSVP by 2/5 to Cathy Dobkins at 914-714-3322 or cathydobkins@gmail.com.

Mah Jongg & Canasta Evening
March 13 • 7:30-10:00pm
All welcome: $20 for members; $25 others. Wine & snacks will be served. Mah Jongg instruction for beginner tables of 4 or more. RSVP: Sisterhood10543@gmail.com
There we met with a nice woman, named Chava, who recently started a nonprofit where she makes and gathers donated mezuzahs and menorahs and Judaica items for people whose houses were destroyed. We made clay mezuzahs for people to hang on their doors. It was rewarding to know that our handiwork was also restoring faith in people’s homes.

From a bus tour around the West Side of Houston, we could see and really understand how much damage was done. We saw a lot of for-sale signs, houses being put on stilts, and even houses being completely abandoned and ripped away from the original property. While these sights were disturbing, we were glad to be there to help these families in need and give them food and clean underwear.

The group we traveled with is what also helped to make this such a meaningful experience. There were only 14 of us, but we had the chance to get to know each other and bond in a way we usually do not get to on your average Tuesday night. I can speak for everyone in saying we feel much closer as a community after spending time together in Houston. The experience was unforgettable and I can’t wait to help another community in need next year.

The new year does not promise to be any easier. With the historically low ‘Presidential Determination’ of 45,000 for fiscal year 2018, Neighbors for Refugees (NFR), our partnership organization, will continue to fight to ensure that the U.S. actually meets its refugee admissions goal and that the U.S. refugee resettlement program is supported at the national, state and local levels. NFR looks forward to joining forces with their partners, HIAS and Catholic Charities, again this year as we collectively stand up and local levels. NFR looks forward to joining forces with their partners, HIAS and Catholic Charities, again this year as we collectively stand up for a Brotherhood Blood Drive, after having attended some events and serving on a committee for a Brotherhood educational event. As leadership looks to expand committees and bring in new faces, it won’t be long until you are asked to join a committee, if you are interested.

We have some successful programs to help our new leaders. We have the very innovative Sulam for Emerging Leaders, led by Larry Thaler. This program gives our young prospective leaders a chance to learn a bit of Torah and some leadership skills with peers and one of our rabbis. It helps prepare future Jewish leaders with the tools they need to be successful. A number of Trustees and Officers are Sulam graduates. We don’t stop the education and nurturing of our leaders there. We now have mentor and orientation programs for new Trustees and Officers. The goal is to make our new Officers and Trustees more comfortable, effective advocates in their roles and better synagogue ambassadors as they take on additional leadership responsibilities. The expression about getting back more than you give when you immerse yourself in this type of leadership is very true. We just try to help you find a way to start. Sometimes I have been asked to keep someone in mind to help in the future – which I frequently do. One of my first forays into leadership involved co-chairing the Brotherhood Blood Drive, after having attended some events and serving on a committee for a Brotherhood educational event. As leadership looks to expand committees and bring in new faces, it won’t be long until you are asked to join a committee, if you are interested.

Let me mention a few programs and happenings of note. As you already read, our young leaders travelled to Houston this month. Yasher koach to our teens for the great service work they did and thank you to Adam Bender and all those involved in making this happen. Thank you to Myra Glajchen and Karen Everett for a special Scholar-in-Residence with Rabbi Michael Paley. If you haven’t had the opportunity to study and learn with Rabbi Paley, you’ve missed a rare opportunity to feel uplifted and think on a higher plane. And if Game Night hasn’t already occurred by the time you read this, please join us for a fun filled evening of some games you may remember and some new ones! Special thanks to David Miller, Robin Nichinsky and the committee who created such a fun-filled event for all.
5th Grade and Slices from the Pie of Life

ALEZA KULP  EDUCATION DIRECTOR AND CONGREGATION PROGRAM COORDINATOR

Recently I had the opportunity to be part of a conversation our Kitah Hey (5th grade) students were having about the middah (value) Sameach B’Chelkoh, that one should be happy with one’s portion in life. Each student created a list of what they need in life versus what they want. Common items in the “need column” were water, shelter, food, family, friends and clothing. One student listed medicine as a need which led to a discussion about why people might need medicine to live.

What I found very interesting was the debate for the need for community amongst members of the class. Do we need community to help us be happy in life? I wanted the students to think of a pizza pie and each slice was a part of our lives. Does community fit into that pizza? Yes! For example, being counted in a minyan when a person is reciting Kaddish is community. In addition, helping to make sandwiches for members of those in need is community. And hearing the Megillah being read on Purim is community. Celebrating with friends and family at their Bar or Bat Mitzvah is definitely community for each of these students.

As the students in Kitah Hey begin to think about becoming a B’nei Mitzvah in the coming years, I hope each of them will value the portion given in their life and how community is an essential part of their individual pie.

Loose Parts in a Reggio-Inspired Curriculum

SABRINA LANDAU  EARLY CHILDHOOD CENTER DIRECTOR

On Tuesday, January 9th, our ECC had a wonderful program with play curator, Linda White. Each class visited her “imagination studio” and engaged with the materials she brought. Using loose parts, the children played, explored and began using terms for creation that are seldom heard in other classroom experiences. After school ended, our ECC teachers began to play and explore as well. In our continuing professional development, Linda facilitated a workshop where we all learned new ways to engage children in conversation (questions we can ask, comments we can use during moments of play) to help deepen the learning already going on in our classrooms.

“Loose parts” are just that – a collection of various materials ranging from plastic pieces to recycled items, things found in nature to materials generally used for art activities. There is no set way to play with these items and using them fosters creativity and imagination.

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In 1972, an architect named Simon Nicholas developed “The Theory of Loose Parts.” He said: “In any environment, both the degree of inventiveness and creativity, and the possibility of discovery, are directly proportional to the number and kind of variables in it.”

Creating environments in which children can explore open ended materials allows for deep meaningful learning opportunities. It allows children to engage and construct their own knowledge, a principle of our Reggio-inspired curriculum.

Our classrooms reflect the fundamental beliefs of the Reggio Emilia preschools founded by Loris Malaguzzi where the child is viewed as “competent and capable” with inner creativity. Using loose parts helps foster these important skills.

At an event hosted by the B’nei Mitzvah Committee, 5th grade students made over 160 brown bag meals for the Bronx JCC Food Pantry
That’s Entertainment – Jewish Style!

HOLLY ROSEN FINK

George Gershwin. Louis B. Mayer. Woody Allen. Bob Dylan. George Burns. Barbara Streisand. What do these entertainers have in common? Jewishness! For years they have been honing their skills in front of microphones and behind the camera. About 50 years ago, Jewish entertainers suddenly became encouraged to tell everyone what they really thought, as well as who they really were. Jewish stories became an important part of mainstream culture with all their intelligence, outrage, self-deprecation, and incredible sense of humor.

The World Jewry Committee has teamed up with three authors who have written extensively about Jewish characters or shows/films largely centered around Jewish characters. Jennifer Armstrong, the author of Seinfeldia, will talk about the history and legendary status a TV show has had on mainstream culture. Erin Carlson, the author of I’ll Have What She’s Having, takes readers behind the scenes of the late writer/director’s big three: When Harry Met Sally, Sleepless in Seattle and You’ve Got Mail. Lastly, Isaac Butler, co-author of The World Only Spins Forward: The Ascent of Angels in America, will discuss one of the most Jewish shows ever made: Transparent on Amazon Prime.

Here are the dates:
Seinfeld Wednesday, March 7th, 2018, 7:45-9:15pm
Nora Ephron Sunday, March 18th, 2018, 1 - 2:30pm
Transparent Wednesday, April 11th, 2018, 7:45 - 9:15pm

All events will take place in the Activity Room and food and beverages will be served. There will also be book signings and books will be sold.

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A Welcoming Journey Makes the Day for Project Ezra Senior

In December, SoJAC organized a Peoplehood intergenerational luncheon for senior members of the Lower East Side’s Project Ezra. The welcoming gestures of one of our younger members made a lasting impression and elicited the following handwritten thank you note.

December 16, 2017
Ms. Janice Malett
Westchester Jewish Center
Dear Ms. Malett,

On Dec. 10 I rode on a van from the lower east side of Manhattan to your Jewish Center as a guest from Project Ezra. The ride was long and I needed a rest room. You asked a young lady to help me and she took me to a rest room, holding my coat, waited for me, and then helped me and my walker to the beautiful dining hall. I knew this was going to be a lovely day.

The food was delicious, plentiful and served by the young folk. The whole attitude was being in a dining room with family and friends. You and the members of the Center did a really great job of making everyone feel welcome.

I personally thank you for inviting Project Ezra for a lovely afternoon to welcome Chanukah.

Sincerely,
Eleanor Rosenthal
Sherry and Larry Thaler have sponsored an Ethiopian student. That makes seventy WJC Scholars! Most people have gotten information about and pictures of their students by now. If you haven’t, please call Ruth Obernbreit. Sondra and Irving Zapson have contributed to stave off famine in Ethiopia. Thank you all for your generosity.

Cindy Heller is chairing the new Bikkur Cholim meal program. Please call Cindy if you know anyone who needs a meal delivered because of illness, bereavement, or a new baby. Glatt kosher food is available; otherwise, home cooking will be provided.

Thank you, Cindy, for providing this service to our community.
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the WJC Renewal Service
From Sarah Becker & Robert Zimmerman

In appreciation
From Beverly Cannold
Deborah Sherman & Mark Rubin
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With thanks to Rabbi Segelman for his
help after Lillian Bauman's death
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With thanks & appreciation
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