

I feel very grateful for the opportunities I have had and feel thankful for what I have achieved. Some days more so than others.

On Sunday I learned that one of our tenth graders, Aiden Lewy is taking a course at Hunterdon Central called Leadership and Philanthropy---which is very similar to the Teen Philanthropy program, under the direction of the URJ's Youth Engagement Initiative we are piloting with our 8th, 9th and 10th grade classes. Aiden thought this was totally cool. Me too. It turns out Central's curriculum is completely aligned with what we are doing at Or Chadash.

Educator Joel Westheimer writes, acts of kindness and of charity are important, but citizenship in a democratic society requires more than civic decency. To repair the world, students have to learn how to create, evaluate, criticize, and change public norms, institutions, and programs. Students need to learn to contribute cans to a food drive, but they also need to learn to question why people are hungry and explore ways to solve structural causes of hunger and homelessness. "It's like a rowboat," "one oar is compassion and the other is justice. If you don't keep both going, you move in a circle." Judaism and Jewish ideals of social action can help to reinvigorate the quest among service learning educators for both compassion and justice and ensure that neither is ignored on the road to a better society.

I think it is so powerful and meaningful when the secular and religious programming is integrated.

I was speaking with one of our Religious School Mom's last month and casually asked how her husband's travel schedule was going. He works for himself and has some flexibility in creating his work week. She shared with me that at one of our Religious School family education programs (the 2008 building dedication) we asked everyone to create their own "klaf" -- the parchment found inside a mezzuzah, and to have their family write their wishes, hopes and dreams on this "klaf." Their child's wish was that their Dad spend less time away from the home and adjust his travel schedule. As a result of that activity, the Dad has switched his work/life priorities and is home more.

On November 5th, Jordan Strauss became a Bar Mitzvah. Jordan's Mom passed away three years ago, after battling breast cancer for six years. At his Shabbat morning service when he was called to the Torah as a Bar Mitzvah, his sixteen year old sister Rachel, one of our tenth graders shared these words with her brother: "When I saw you were nervous and stressed about this big day, I realized this is real, you're going through what I did three years ago. Yes it is a little

stressful of an experience, but one you will learn to love and cherish because you've come so far, and it's the greatest feeling when you can say, hey I can read that Hebrew, and I understand the Jewish values I've learned. Those values, whether you believe me or not, will be close to your heart."

Rutgers Professors Jeffrey Kress and Maurice Elias write, "It takes a "kehillah" (a community) to make a mensch."

Megan Kahle, another tenth grader worked at Federation's Super Sunday last week for two and a half hours---all by herself. She stuffed envelopes and stayed to help clean up. You cannot mandate Jewish identity but you can be inspired by it.

There is an old Bill Cosby story that I would like to share with you. Bill Cosby was telling his mother about a debate in his philosophy class about whether a glass is half full or half empty. They debated for hours without a decision. His mother, without hesitating, said, "The glass is half empty when you are drinking from it, but half full when you are pouring it. When you are drinking, the glass and its contents are only about you. When you are pouring, you are doing for someone else, and when you do for others, you feel fulfilled."

This weekend, we will be celebrating Hanukkah at Or Chadash. The holiday has many themes. It is about giving and dedication. This is the eighth year Or Chadash has promoted Ner Shel Tzeddakah (candle of righteousness), a project in which we devote the sixth night of Hanukkah to learning about the problems of poverty. After asking Jeff and Jacob Berg to deliver the winter clothing we collected from our fall Mitten Mitzvah to the food pantry, Jeff told me that every Hanukkah his family goes food shopping on the sixth night of Hanukkah and delivers all of his family's grocery purchases to a food pantry, his family's commitment to the sixth night of righteousness.

I wish you and your families a happy and fulfilled Hanukkah.

Shalom,
Betsy Zalaznick