

A Letter for Parents

By Dr. Kimberly Axelrod Schwartz

Dear Parents,

As a parent, I spend a lot of time thinking about what I want for my children, both now and in the future. In the general sense, I know that I want them to belong to something greater than themselves, to feel the powerful comfort of knowing they are not alone in the world because they have family, friends, and communities they can rely on, and to feel the sense of awe and obligation that comes from belonging to something beyond themselves, knowing that it is their responsibility to give support to their community in return. I know too that I want my kids to be happy, and even when they can't be happy to be good. I want them to have the best of what my husband and I had growing up, the best of what nurtured, embraced, and challenged us.

These are big things that we want for our kids and we know that we alone cannot give them all of the experiences, knowledge, and belonging that they need. This is one of the many reasons that we include a Jewish education and synagogue communities in our family's lives. Teaching our kids the value of belonging to something greater than themselves, and greater than our family, is something that takes meaningful connection and commitment to community on a regular basis. We have also chosen to commit to a Jewish education for our children because of the difference it made for me, growing up at Temple Judea.

One of the most important classes I ever took was a confirmation and post-confirmation course taught by Richard Weintraub at Temple Judea. I'll admit that I hated it at first. Richard really challenged us with difficult topics and hard to answer questions, and it made me really uncomfortable. The class didn't seem to be about Judaism at all and I didn't understand what it had to do with our upcoming Confirmation. I had to visit Rabbi Raff's office twice that year as a result of this class. The first time, it was to complain about this new teacher and this class that wasn't about anything important. And the second time, it was to insist that Richard be hired to teach us a second year, after our confirmation. A lot of things happened in that first year that I studied with Richard, and a lot of those were hard things that I had to face as a budding adult, including the death of a peer and of a young family member, and changing friendships and romantic relationships. It turned out that all those difficult topics and hard to answer questions that Richard posed were exactly what I needed at that point in my life and my Jewish education, and that the class was about my identity and my values and my community, so of course it was a class about my Judaism.

When I think about what I want for my kids, I know that I would want them to know Richard Weintraub, and to be challenged and supported by the learning and growing that takes place in his classroom.

Best,

Kimberly Axelrod Schwartz

A Letter for Teens (9th -12th graders)

By Rachel Tichauer (formerly Rachel Twersky)

Dear TJ High Schoolers,

Have you ever wanted to be in a class with all of your friends with built in time to hang out and talk about things that are actually important in your life? That's what class with Richard Weintraub is like. Not only will you have time to vent and chat about what is happening to you at school with friends and with parents and siblings, but Richard also designs activities to help you better understand yourself and your place in this world.

While it is not directly a class about Judaism (you aren't going to learn prayers or Jewish history) you will learn about a different side of Judaism – your Jewish identity and Jewish values. Richard's class helped me to see what values were really important to me, who I was as a young adult, and more importantly what kind of person I wanted to be as I grew up.

I highly recommend you take this class! It became one of the main reasons I kept coming to Judea all throughout high school. I was able to get to know my friends and myself on a deeper level which was really beneficial right before I went to college.

Best,

Rachel Tichauer