

PASJE Press

SPRING ISSUE

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A Passover tradition stirred
the imaginations of our
first and second graders...



From Beth Marer-Garcia

Congratulations to all PASJE parents for providing your child with a full school year of Jewish education at the Palo Alto School for Jewish Education (PASJE)! I am Beth Marer-Garcia, a PASJE parent and board member, and I speak from experience (because like you, I am the parent of two kids currently in Sunday school, and like many of you, my spouse is not Jewish), when I say that, with your continued commitment to ensuring your child's Jewish education at PASJE, by the time your child graduates from PASJE in the 8th grade, he or she will have a solid basic Jewish education and a positive Jewish identity that will last a LIFETIME. That being said, this is the perfect moment for me to mention a very important issue that I imagine most of us parents can relate to, which is what is commonly referred to as the "whining factor." Let's be honest. We poor parents are the ones having to schlep our kids to and from Sunday school every week, and having to occasionally (or regularly) endure our children's whining, which is no fun for anyone! This is no small issue, I know! So let me share with all of you some successes that I've had in dealing with this problem! I've found that once my kids made friends at Sunday school, the whining stopped (okay...so I exaggerate...the whining was reduced to slight whimpers!). And fortunately, there are a lot of things that you parents can do to help! Here are my suggestions for a fresh start next year.

- A. Plan to "hang out more after Sunday school" on campus for informal play on the playground where your kids and you can connect with other PASJE kids and parents easily. Once parents/kids notice that you are a "regular hanger out" they will be more inclined to hang out with you! You can bring sand toys and games from home to add to the fun!
- B. Carpool (one of my favorite words!) your kids with other kids to and from Sunday school! Offer to schlep each other's kids and make the car ride to and from school more FUN!
- C. Plan extracurricular/entertaining activities/luncheons with your kids' classmate(s) either after Sunday school or on a different day!

Seriously folks, I found that once my kids felt **CONNECTED TO THEIR CLASSMATES** in friendship, Sunday school became a much happier and fulfilling experience for them, and for US!

And, finally, I want to share with all of you that with three of us board members having children who started at PASJE in kindergarten, and who all stuck it out and are now in the 8th grade, we want you all to know that it has definitely been worth it!

We look forward to seeing you next year at PASJE!

Sincerely,

Beth Marer-Garcia, at-large PASJE board member and parent of Lauren (5th grade) and Jason (8th grade)

Pre-Bar/Bat Mitzvah informational session

REPORT FROM
CATHY TAYLOR

On Tuesday, May 3, parents, students and presenters gathered from 7:00 pm to 8:30 pm at the JCC for PASJE's annual Pre-Bar/Bat Mitzvah informational session. Although we made this an evening event rather than having it during class time on Sunday, a sizable group of people attended. We heard wonderful presentations by our guest speakers, who included our own wonderful students Noah Johnson (Bar Mitzvah student of Rabbi Charles Familant) and Adam Yefet (Bar Mitzvah student of Jan Courte). Rabbi Familant, a non-affiliated rabbi; Jan Courte, a teacher who prepares students for their Bar/Bat Mitzvah and presides over the ceremony; and Rabbi David Levinsky, the rabbinical affiliate of Keddem Congregation, all gave their ideas and views on the requirements for a Bar/Bat Mitzvah. Charles and Jan are able to work with students' families to create a ceremony that fits each

student's and family's specific needs. David is also very willing to work with the student and family in conjunction with Keddem.

Many questions were asked about specific requirements that may have to be met to have a Bar/Bat Mitzvah, and many different answers were offered. In summary, I think it is safe to say it is up to your family to determine if you want a very small, intimate family event or a larger, more formal gathering. Do you want a secular service or traditional service? Do you want an outdoor event, weather permitting, or an indoor event? Is the Bar or Bat Mitzvah student willing to learn a little, a lot, or no Hebrew?

Both Charles and Jan concurred that it is beneficial for a student to have some knowledge of Hebrew before starting to study with them. This can be as rudimentary as knowing how to read the Hebrew alphabet. They both agreed that the students they have worked with from PASJE who did have Hebrew training, caught on quite fast and were able to

move along well in learning their parts, some longer or shorter than others.

Another very important message that was conveyed was that the Bar/Bat Mitzvah is a family event, and all parties — including non-Jewish family members and friends — should feel involved and have a part in making it a comfortable and enriching experience.

We ended the evening with a short discussion on tzedakah projects for Bar/Bat Mitzvah students.

I would love to be of help to any family that may be contemplating the idea of a Bar/Bat Mitzvah. Please let me know when you are considering having the event, and I can help guide you to the right fit with a teacher, tutor or place for your family.

We look forward to seeing any of you who may be interested in joining us at next year's pre-Bar/Bat Mitzvah informational session.



MEMBERS OF THE PASJE COMMUNITY REFLECT...

Why I am a Jew

BY JOE PEARLMAN, PARENT

I think that the proper interpretation of this question is why I remain a Jew and why I am proud to be a Jew and why I want my children to identify as Jews. Like most people in any religion, I am a Jew because my family raised me to identify as a Jew. In the days I was born, religiously-mixed marriages were rare and, in accord with the times, both of my parents and all of my ancestors to my knowledge were Jewish. To the larger question, I remain a Jew and am proud to identify as a Jew because I see myself and

my values as being part of a great and old tradition whose core values I admire and respect. To me, these core values include learning and knowledge and curiosity, empathy and compassion, acceptance of people with a variety of different beliefs without judgment, the ability to bear burdens with courage and with grace and without defeat. In each society, any set of traditional values gets transmogrified to correspond to the society, but the preceding values are, I believe, a core set that can be honored in any society. In my heart, I believe humans benefit from having roots and seeing themselves as part of a tradition; this is part

of our identity. I believe that for most of us, our specific tradition is an “accident” of our birth. I believe we are fortunate if our tradition happens to be one we can feel proud of, but also, because it is an accident, being proud should not imply that our tradition is superior to any other. I feel fortunate that my wife, who is of a different tradition, supports that it is important to me to pass my tradition on to our children. I feel fortunate that my tradition is Jewish and that it is one whose values, as I see them, are humane and positive values which I am proud to have and to be able to pass to our children.

Being a Jew

BY NOAH JOHNSON, STUDENT

To be a Jew, to me, means that you believe that you are a Jew. Even if you are not born Jewish,

and you think that you are a Jew, then you are a Jew. For me, being a Jew means to keep traditions as much as you can but also to find new techniques to accommodate the old traditions. In my opinion, there

should be no restrictions on what kind of people can be Jewish. To me, being a Jew is more a state of mind.

WHAT IT MEANS TO ME

To be a Jew

BY CATHY TAYLOR, DIRECTOR

My parents are first generation Jews, born in New York; that makes me the second generation born in the United States. I was born in New York City and moved to a small town in Massachusetts as a young child. My parents joined a Reformed/Conservative synagogue (the only one that existed in our area). I went to Hebrew School and Sunday school, and just like many children, complained about it a lot. My parents were

giving me the formal lessons in Jewish learning that they never had. Their parents came from the generation that kept Kosher in the home but were not observant. Their parents were busy struggling to get ahead and be Americans. My great grandparents did not speak English; Yiddish was their spoken language, and Hebrew was only for prayer. They were traditional Jews from the old country. As a child, I remember being very proud at holidays when I could perform for my family all the things I had learned at Hebrew school and Sunday school.

My family moved to Southern California during my middle school years and we never joined a synagogue again. We did celebrate Jewish holidays and holy days, Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Hannukah, Purim, Passover, and Sukkot. We definitely knew we were Jewish. My parents read a lot about Jewish issues and particularly Israel.

In 1982, I married my husband, Lasana Taylor. A short time before we married I had started going to High Holy Day services at Stanford and taking some courses at Stanford that were

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To be a Jew, continued from page 3

open to the public. My husband and I were both very involved with issues in the African American community and Civil Rights, and now I was becoming more in touch with my own heritage and culture. You can almost say, I was beginning to know my heritage anew, as a long time had passed since junior high school. I decided to make the journey in 1996; I had an adult B'nei Mitzvah (there were seven of us that studied together). I was learning a great deal and the more I learned, the more I found I wanted to learn. We had a

daughter, who was also learning about her Jewish identity at PASJE and at home. The more we both learned, I felt it was like watching petals on a flower unfold, a lovely sight. We are fortunate that Lasana has been such a supportive husband and father, as we continue as a family learning about ourselves, and each other's heritage.

Being Jewish is not always easy. The Jewish people have faced anti-Semitism through the ages; they are a small population with a strength and determination to survive as Jews. I am very proud of our ancestors and

their ability to overcome many difficult obstacles in order to keep their Judaism alive. I feel it is an honor to be part of the Jewish people and it is my responsibility to keep our heritage alive by continuing to learn and teach. Because we come from a people that have struggled to stay alive for 5765 years, it is incumbent upon us to help other human beings that we see struggling to stay alive. Tzedakah or justice is a key element in Jewish life. Judaism is a spiritual and edifying challenge that brings fulfillment to my life.

FOR ANY MEMBER OF THE PASJE COMMUNITY INTERESTED IN ADDING THEIR THOUGHTS ABOUT WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A JEW, PLEASE EMAIL YOUR SUBMISSION TO CATALSJCC@HOTMAIL.COM FOR INCLUSION IN OUR FALL PUBLICATION.

From Cathy Taylor, PASJE Director

Dear PASJE families:

This year PASJE family holiday events were particularly exciting. The most thrilling thing for me was to see our students express what they had learned in their own words, in the form of skits, poetry, prose, and even music.

PASJE students challenge us to keep our program moving and vibrant. This is a wonderful thing for both students and educators. As we prepare for the coming year, we will focus on new and creative ways to nurture our students' Jewish learning with some of the newest state-of-the-art forms. In some of the classes, we will be introducing the Heritage Program, "The History of Jewish Civilization." This program is an interactive DVD program that incorporates timelines, narrated texts, and videos to teach Jewish history and truly make it come alive in the classroom when integrated with our textbooks and teacher-led discussions.

In the past year, parents have requested that we start Hebrew classes sooner. We are going to accommodate these requests and start Hebrew the second week of PASJE. If you are not sure whether to enroll your child in Hebrew, please come to the first session and give it a taste. We have great teachers, and it is a wonderful opportunity for your child to learn Hebrew in a fun and non-threatening environment.

I wish you all a wonderful summer. I look forward to seeing everyone refreshed and ready for another exciting year in September.

Respectfully,
Cathy Taylor

I will be available all summer. If you have any questions or concerns, or would like to talk about a Bar/Bat Mitzvah, please do not hesitate to call.

