FROM RABBI ZEMEL

FOR ISRAEL AND AMERICA, NATIONAL ASPIRATIONS ARE WORKS IN PROGRESS

DEAR FRIENDS,

The Israeli government is debating the



proposed nation-state bill, which, in its current form would give weighted preference to Israel as a Jewish state as opposed to a Jewish and democratic state. For me, the prospect of this bill passing is frightening: it challenges the very principles of the Zionist

dream and ideology on which the nation was founded.

Foundational myths articulate national aspirations. They are not factual statements of truth but instead offer touchstone guidance on direction, purpose and meaning. Foundational myths are revealed in such documents as our own Declaration of Independence, whose stirring words "all men are created equal" rooted our emerging nation in a principle that to this day it struggles to realize. When we read the words and review our history we can see how far we have come: our Constitution held slavery to be legal; women were not given the right to vote.

The Second Continental Congress, in adopting Jefferson's Declaration, created a foundational myth by which the nation was required to measure itself. We as a nation have worked, sometimes more effectively, sometimes less so, to bend our will and our practice to meet the standard of those words. At our best moments, which are all too rare, our nation even enters into a discussion as to whether we intend those words to apply universally – to everyone who lives in America – or only to

CONTINUED ON PAGE 5

Latest steps to include non-Jewish parents

BY SHELLEY GROSSMAN

AURIE HALL'S YOUNGER SON, Graham. will be called to the Torah for his bar mitzvah in May, an event she expects to be as beautiful and moving as the bar mitzvah two years ago of her older son, Ellis. But Graham's bar mitzvah will include a new feature that, she says, will make the occasion even more meaningful to her. When she and Graham's other mom, Marcy Wilder, go up to the bima to bless the Torah before and after a segment of Graham's portion, Hall will be able to recite a special new blessing written specifically for non-Jewish parents. At Ellis's bar mitzvah, she stood silently during the traditional blessing the Aliya prayer—as Wilder chanted.

"This new prayer recognizes me as part of his community. I won't feel like a bystander," Hall said. "This is something important I can give to him."

The new prayer, written by Rabbi Zemel and inaugurated in November at the bar mitzvah of Jack Muoio, is one recent development in Temple Micah's ongoing commitment to include and engage non-Jewish spouses. Another is the Mothers Circle, a school-year-long class in which non-Jewish moms learn about Judaism, ask questions, and share with each other the issues that come up as they raise children in the Jewish way of life when Judaism is not their own tradition.

As their child's bar or bat mitzvah had approached, Hall and other non-Jewish spouses at Micah learned that they would have to stand silently during the Aliya blessings. "I was shocked and upset," said Liz Miller, the mother of two

post-bat mitzvah girls. "It didn't make sense to me because I was a huge engine behind my kids' Jewish education."

However, when she learned the translation of the traditional prayer, Miller says she understood that it would be inappropriate for her to recite it. Nonetheless, "to be up on the bima and say nothing was really a loss," she said.

"This is a beautiful moment in the service," Rabbi Lederman said. "But it always felt really awkward. It just didn't sit well."

The traditional Aliya prayer before the reading of the Torah says, in English: "Bless Adonai who is blessed. Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Sovereign of the universe, who has chosen us from among the peoples, and given us the Torah. Blessed are You, Adonai, who gives the Torah." And after the reading: "Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Sovereign of the universe, who has given us a Torah of truth, implanting within us eternal life. Blessed are You, Adonai, who gives the Torah."

The new prayer is similar but tailored for a non-Jewish parent. Thus, before the reading: "Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Ruler of the universe, who has made it possible for us to draw our son/daughter near to the Torah. Blessed are you, Adonai, who gives the Torah." And after the reading: "Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Ruler of the universe, who has given humankind a Torah of truth. Blessed are You, Adonai, Sovereign for eternity." The parent recites it both in Hebrew and in English.

CONTINUED NEXT PAGE

"Every person shall sit under his grapevine or fig tree with no one to make him afraid." MICAH, CHAPTER 4, VERSE 4

Vine

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TEMPLE MICAH—
A REFORM JEWISH CONGREGATION

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NEW TO MICAH: LIVE VIDEO BROADCASTS

By Dorian Friedman

Thanks to some spiffy new technology and the determination of Micah tech maven David Diskin, temple members can now watch Micah services, presentations (such as the recent talk by Diana Butler Bass), and other events live from the comfort of their own easy chair or computer screen. Recently, the temple inaugurated its live video streaming service, which is easily accessible through a few clicks on the Micah website. Content is grouped into two "channels"—one broadcasts Shabbat services and other events held in the temple sanctuary via a discrete camera mounted on the back wall, and another carries events held elsewhere in the temple, such as the monthly

Lunch & Learn lectures. In addition to watching livestream video feeds, members can access an expanding catalog of archived videos of religious services, events and classes from the recent past.

Already, the new video service is yielding dividends from the initial investment of installing the technology. Under-the-weather members have tuned in to participate virtually in Shabbat services. A grandparent wasn't able to travel to Washington for his grandson's recent bar mitzvah but was able to enjoy the milestone from afar. And John Hirschmann was pleased that his third cousin in England successfully live-streamed the broadcast of his recent Lunch & Learn talk on genealogy.

To try it yourself, start at the Temple Micah home page (www.templemicah. org.) Browse the column on the right for "Micah Sanctuary Broadcasts" and, just below that, "Micah iPhone Broadcasts". (You'll see two moving "countdown clocks" keeping time until the next live broadcast.) From there, click on "watch or view archives", take a look at the menu of options, and select the service or event of your choice. Diskin has created a helpful little primer with more detailed instructions, available at http://vimeo.com/114503754. A special "thank you" is due to the temple's Rachel Gross, who oversaw the electrical work needed to get the video system running smoothly.

Latest steps FROM PAGE 1

Rabbi Zemel drafted the prayer in consultation with Rabbi Lederman and others. He then invited several interfaith families, including Hall and Wilder, to a meeting to explain and discuss it. "We went through the prayer and it was really, really moving. I got kind of teary," Hall said. "It's part of what makes Micah a special place."

Rabbi Zemel has been working on drawing in non-Jewish spouses for at least a dozen years. His first act was a High Holy Day sermon praising non-Jewish spouses for their largely unsung support of the Jewish family. He then invited non-Jewish spouses up to the bima on Yom Kippur and delivered a special blessing on them. And he formed a group that met periodically for several years to share experiences and issues.

"But they still seemed to have second-degree citizenship" in the congregation, the rabbi said. So, next he invited them on the bima to be a part of the b'nai mitzvah service. But they still didn't say anything. Now, with the new prayer they will take an active part in the service.

"The next evolution in my thinking is how important they are for us {Jews}. That they support Jewish family life is obvious," Rabbi Zemel said. "But another very significant thing the non-Jews among us can do is open up a world of spirituality in Judaism." Jewish life "tends to be entrenched in our Adam 1," he said, referring to his metaphor of two Adams in the creation story, Adam 1 as the practical, intellectual side

of humanity and Adam 2, the spiritual side. "Non-Jews seem to have an easier time being Adam 2 and can help us learn about our Adam 2s."

Making non-Jewish spouses feel comfortable in the Micah community is an important step. But so is helping them to feel knowledgeable and confident around Jewish practices and approaches to life. This is where the Mothers Circle enters the scene. Founded several years ago in Atlanta, the Mothers Circle is a national educational program providing curricula and other resources to "explore the 'how-tos' and meaning behind raising Jewish children, empowering mothers through education and

CONTINUED ON PAGE 5

The President's Column will return as usual next issue.

MEMBER PROFILE

NICKY GOREN: HELPING NON-PROFITS WORK BETTER BY WORKING TOGETHER

By Dan Moskowitz

Last June, Micah member Nicky
Goren presented her "dangerous
idea" to the congregation as part
of the revamped Shavuot service.
Philanthropic organizations have to
get out of their blinkered approach to
solving societal problems, she argued.
If all the parties involved in the goal of
achieving social justice -- government,
philanthropies, religious institutions,
secular nonprofits -- would coordinate
their efforts instead of each group doing
its own thing (sometimes to cross purposes) they would be more effective.

This was no off-the-cuff idea of a dedicated but amateur volunteer. A few weeks later, Nicky -- short for "Nicola" - took over as CEO of the Meyer Foundation, a philanthropy set up by former owners of The Washington Post and dedicated to supporting community-based nonprofits throughout the DC region with roughly \$6 million a year in grants. In short order, Goren began forging the kind of cross-institution coordination she had advocated in her Shavuot challenge. Her chosen first topic: the impact on the metropolitan area of the surge in undocumented children crossing the border without their parents.

"More than 7,000 children have arrived here to live with their families while their cases are handled by the court system," Goren says. "The long-term impact of this development on our region is only just starting to become clear. These young people are here in our community, attending our schools and living in our neighborhoods. Ensuring that they are healthy and safe, and that they receive a fair hearing under current immigration law is not a political issue. It's the right response to a humanitarian crisis and a moment for our region to come together to ensure the well-being of their children."

At Goren's direction, the Meyer Foundation opened its coffers to provide emergency grants to organizations helping the children. And she convened a meeting of 150 local nonprofits who were in some way addressing the problems of these undocumented kids. "We all have to get out of our silos," she told them, and the session provided an initial way for the groups to work together. Goren also used the Meyer Foundation auspices to call together other funders of social justice projects so they, too, could avoid overlap and get maximum efficiency from their grants.

"It's a tiny first step," she admits. But it is a bold signal of what she intends to do in the Meyer job.

Goren moved to the Meyer Foundation after four years as head of the Washington Area Women's Foundation, where from the beginning a major mentor was Julie Rogers, who had headed the Meyer Foundation since 1986. The WAWF supports about 50 community organizations that have programs to improve the economic condition of women and girls in our region. Of her initiatives there, perhaps the one she is most proud of is an undertaking that helps middle school girls and their mothers work together to improve their standard of living.

Goren hadn't always planned on nonprofit community work. That came after law school at Cornell, summer work in Boston, and government posts in DC. She began on the legal staff of the Congressional Budget Office, then moved on to the U.S. Congress's Office of Compliance, helping set up procedures implementing a new law giving Hill staffers some of the same employment rights as other civil servants.

Through what she calls "intense networking," she landed "the best law job in the country" as the counsel



Nicky Goren is the new CEO of the Meyer Foundation, which grants \$6 million a year to area community-based non-profit organizations.

for the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), the agency that pulls some 5 million Americans into volunteer service through the Senior Corps, Americorps, and the Social Innovation Fund. "It was a mission I could believe in," she says.

It was there that Goren's career shifted from law to administration, when she stepped in as acting CEO. The political process of selecting a permanent CNCS head and getting that person confirmed dragged on for 15 months, during which time she managed to persuade Congress to up the agency's budget by \$260 million despite the cuts being handed out across many other executive offices. When her agency finally got a confirmed CEO, Goren decided it was time to leave government, and the Women's Foundation job beckoned.

Goren was born in England in 1966 when her Israeli father and Egyptian mother (both US citizens) were students there. She still holds both US and British passports. When she was an infant, the family returned to the States but went back to England nine years later. Nicky lived in Britain for the next ten years but, unprepared for the immediate specialization that is a hallmark of English university education, she opted for college in the U.S. Her pick:

CONTINUED ON PAGE 8

COMING ATTRACTIONS

Here's a sampling of Micah activities on tap during the next two months. For a detailed schedule of all upcoming events, check out www.templemicah.org.

THURSDAY, JANUARY 15 • 7:30-9 PM

Looking for God in Washington, DC: A Priest and a Rabbi Search Together

Join us at The National Cathedral as we commence a four-week class cotaught by The Very Reverend Gary Hall, Dean of the National Cathedral, and Rabbi Zemel. The course will explore biblical texts, worship, beliefs, and engagement with modernity and feminism in the Christian and Jewish traditions.

THURSDAY, JANUARY 22 • 7:30–9 PM (at The National Cathedral)

The God of Jewish and Christian Prayer (Session 2) In this session, we will review the

In this session, we will review the theology of our respective worship traditions.

THURSDAY, JANUARY 29 • 7:30–9 PM (at Temple Micah)

The Feminist Critique (Session 3)
This session will open the door to
the challenges of modernity and
how feminist thought has impacted
contemporary theology and religious
practice.

SATURDAY, JANUARY 31 • 10:15 AM

Shabbat Shirah

Join us for the beautiful and musical Shabbat Shirah service and hear *Mi Chamocha* rendered a dozen different ways.

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 5 • 7:30–9 PM (at Temple Micah)

What Do We Really Believe? (Session 4)

In our final session, we will begin to address the many challenges of being a person of faith in a secular world.

INTERESTING SPEAKERS!

Temple Micah features two monthly lecture series—on Sunday morning and Wednesday noon. For more details, go online to www.templemicah.org.

SUNDAY SPEAKER SERIES

Sundays from 10:15 to 11:45 am



January 11 – Jackson Diehl, the deputy editorial page editor of *The Washington Post*, writes editorials on foreign affairs and a bi-weekly column that appears on Mondays. Since joining the *Post* in 1978, he has worked in three foreign bureaus—Buenos Aires, Warsaw and Jerusalem—in addition to Washington and has won many prestigious awards. He is a graduate of Yale University.



February 8 – Ghaith Al-Omari is Executive Director of the American Task Force on Palestine, which aims to articulate America's national interest in helping create a Palestinian state living alongside Israel in peace, security and dignity. Previously, Al-Omari served in various positions within the Palestinian Authority and he has extensive experience in the Palestinian-Israeli peace process.

Al-Omari is a graduate of Georgetown and Oxford universities.

LUNCH & LEARN

Wednesdays from noon to 2 pm

A monthly program sponsored by the Aging Together Team of Temple Micah. Reserve online at www.templemicah.org. Please contact Nancy Raskin, lunchandlearn@templemicah.org, or call the temple office, 202-342-9175, for details.

January 14 – Alan Kraut, on "Ellis Island and the Immigrant Body." Kraut, a temple member, is a University Professor and Professor of History at American University and chairs the Statue of Liberty-Ellis Island Foundation's History Advisory Committee. He will discuss Ellis Island's historic public health role and report on a new museum currently being planned for Liberty Island.

February 11 – Claire Rubin, on "Disasters Past and Future." Rubin, a long-standing Micah member, has 36 years of experience in emergency management and homeland security. Since 1990, her firm (Claire B. Rubin & Associates, LLC) has served clients in the public, private, and non-profit sectors and has produced a variety of educational products and services.

Goren FROM PAGE 3

Brandeis, largely because it had a women's volleyball team on which she played all four years, serving as cocaptain for two and being named to various all-conference teams. Afterwards, she went to Cornell Law School. Following law school and the bar exam, Goren took a biking vacation through northern Italy. In Paris before the bike trip started, she met her future husband, Andy Cohen. It turned out that they had taken the bar exam at the same time in the

same room-but didn't meet.

Now they live in Tenleytown with their two sons, Jacob, 14, and Jared, 11. The family joined Micah in 2008 after sampling other congregations that seemed not to be the right fit for them.

Back at Cornell, Goren

had a professor who advised students to look for three things in a job: 1) a challenge every day, 2) good people to work with, and 3) waking up daily feeling that you are making a difference in the world. The Meyer job fits that prescription to a T. \bullet

Latest steps FROM PAGE 2

support, and reminding them that the Jewish community is there behind their choice to raise Jewish children," as its website explains.

Hall and her friend Amy McLaughlin—both of whom headed up the High Holy Day Committee several years ago—are active members of the Circle. Several years ago, as a result of Rabbi Lederman's listening campaign to discover issues of concern to members, they convened several meetings of people interested in issues of interfaith marriage and helped set up a listsery on the subject. The Mothers Circle was one of many resources mentioned on the listsery.

Rabbi Lederman brought the program to Micah and serves as the resource person for its meetings two Tuesday evenings a month. The course began in October and will continue throughout the school year. "I'm very excited about it," she said. In addition to the educational component the Circle "gives the participants space to grapple with a lot of the issues they have to deal with. It's an opportunity to be in a room with other moms and share their experiences." Each class is a complete unit, so newcomers can join at any time. For more information, be in touch with Rabbi

Lederman, rabbilederman@ templemicah.org, or Liz Miller at Mothers_Circle@ templemicah.org.

Liz Miller, a social worker by profession, is the facilitator. The class, which currently has about 10 regular attendees, "a healthy enough group to support lively discussions," she noted, "is developing into a nice community. I wish I had a class like this when my children were small."

Rabbi's Message FROM PAGE 1

those lucky enough to be citizens. We are currently enmeshed in a struggle to find a way to apply those words to immigrants who enter our borders seeking both economic opportunity as well as refuge from oppression.

Similarly, Israel's Declaration of Independence formulates national aspirations. The opening words proudly and unabashedly stake a Jewish claim to the land itself: "In the Land of Israel. the Jewish People was born...." Israel's Declaration continues to state its obligations and aspirations as a new nation state: "The State of Israel...will foster the development of the country for the benefit of all its inhabitants; it will be based on freedom, justice and peace as envisaged by the prophets of Israel; it will ensure complete equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants irrespective of religion, race or sex; it will guarantee freedom of religion, conscience, language, education and culture...."

These words comprise the heart of the Zionist vision that rescued our people from the shadow of the Shoah. Foundational myths are not translated into reality overnight, and Israel, like America, has its share of people who despise the vision and seek to overturn it. In our own country, I remember the 1968 presidential election when Governor George Wallace of Alabama, a segregationist, carried five states. Unlike Israel today, the United States of 1968 faced no life-threatening foreign enemy on its border.

The recent Micah Israel trip included a trip to the Golan Heights. From our perch, we looked across the Syrian border and saw where ISIS has displaced what had been the United Nations observer post. Yes, the Islamic State is now Israel's neighbor. We watched as an Israel Air Force jet flew overhead to monitor the ISIS position, and were told that the surveillance is constant. Israel protects the UN monitors. It was chilling and reassuring all at once.

The debate over the nation-state bill, preparations for the upcoming election (declared after we left) and the military activity stand in sharp contrast to daily life in Tel Aviv. There, cafes are bustling, street life is vibrant, movie and concert houses overflowing. The country is a place of amazing—and confounding—contradictions.

During our visit we were privileged to meet with two very different thought leaders: Naomi Chazan and Sallai Meridor. Chazan is a political scientist from the Hebrew University who has served as president of the New Israel Fund. Meridor is past-president of the Jewish Agency for Israel and was Israel's ambassador to the United States from 2005 to 2009. Each is articulate, knowledgeable and steeped in Jewish sources. They share a profound love for their country and its people. Though they have very different opinions on many matters including security needs and the peace process, both expressed deep trust in the wisdom of the people to remain committed to the founders' vision. They remain people of deep hope.

We visited Givat Haviva, a leading center for Jewish-Arab dialogue, and two thriving Reform synagogues. There are inspiring examples of hope and what I call true Zionism all over the country.

As always, I came back from Israel feeling refreshed and eager to support the realization of dreams and aspirations of the founding myth of a country to which I feel bound – a place I always love. No matter how much I might disagree with some of the things the government of Israel does, like Yehuda Ha-Levi, the great poet and philosopher of Spanish Jewry in the Middle Ages, part of my "heart is always in the east."

Shalom, Rabbi Daniel G. Zemel

TZEDAKAH

50TH ANNIVERSARY FUND

IN HONOR OF Jana Warner becoming Bat Mitzvah, by Helene and Gene Granof

ASSOCIATE RABBI'S DISCRETIONARY

IN MEMORY OF Gloria Broide, by Mace Broide Evelyn Fingerman, by Marlyn Socolar Lillian Lehmann, by Rich Lehmann

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IN HONOR OF Judy and Jim Miller, by Karen Elkin; Harold Sharlin's work for Temple Micah, by Gregory Staple

Laurel Bergold, by James M. Carr, Suzanne Griffith and Ed Lazere Freda From, by Alvin From Miriam Goldeen, by Livia Bardin Fran Karp, by Judith and Howard Tolkan Bertha Levenson, by Brenda Levenson Jane Morningstar, by Jennifer Iscol and Josh Katz, Kate Kiggins and Jared Blum Rhea Rockower, Simon Rockower, and Esther Goldberg, by Steve Rockower and Ann Sablosky Bessie and Sidney Tucker, by Robert Walker Joseph Weiss, by Martha Weiss and Joshua Rosenthal Harry Zoltick, by Martin Zoltick

HINENI FUND

IN HONOR OF Dorothy Kirby's 94th birthday, by the Salon

KALLEK ADULT EDUCATION FUND

IN HONOR OF Carol and Arthur Freeman's 45th wedding anniversary, by Sid and Elka Booth

Robert Lewis, by Sid and Elka Booth Alice Hirschmann, by Carole and John Hirschmann

MACHON MICAH FUND

Aaron Torop, by Rabbi Betsy and Michael Torop

MICAH HOUSE

David and Lucy Asher, Jack Berman, Arthur and Sandra Brown, Todd Goren, Kirsten Goldberg, Julie Granof, Ed and Shelley Grossman, Sarah and Jay Grusin, Jeffrey Hayes, Carole and John Hirschmann, Rhoda Hyde, Eva and Fred Jacob, Helen and David Kenney, Dorothy Kirby, Myra and Mark Kovey, Susan Landfield, Mark Levine, Morton and Barbara Libarkin, Mary Mahle, Jonathan Moreno, Robin Peck, Nancy Raskin, Carla and David Rosenbloom, Mary Beth Schiffman and David Tochen, Theodor Schuchat (z"l), Joseph Schwarz, Clark and Marcia Silcox, Kevin and Susan Weidenbaum, Beverly and Dan Yett, Rachel Moon & Steve Zeichner, Karen Zizmor and Bruce Rinaldi

Micah House's 25th anniversary, by Janet Gordon Rhoda Hyde's birthday, by Thomas Hyde and Paul Meyers Suzanne Griffith and Ed Lazere, by Harriet and Randy Tritell Martha Replane's recovery from stroke, by Eugene Bialek and Arlene Brown Louise Zemel, by Rabbi Lawrence Hoffman and Dr. Gayle Hoover

IN MEMORY OF Kirby Capen, by Ken and Nancy Schwartz Sari Glasser Erlanger, by Wendy Erlanger Grace Fitz, by Richard Fitz Jerry Gerson, by Craig Gerson and Nancy Copeland Gary Jones, by Mark and Libby Gitenstein Ben Rigberg, by Jeanne Welsh

MUSIC FUND

Carole and John Hirschmann

IN HONOR OF Rachel Diskin, daughter of Barbara and David Diskin, on her marriage, by Ellen Sommer Arnold Schneider's birthday, by Sheila Platoff Meryl Weiner, by Suzanne Fuchs

Laurel Bergold, by Zachary Lynch and John Andrew Lynch

IN MEMORY OF

Ingrid Carlson, by Martha Weiss and Joshua Rosenthal Dr. Frieda Hirschmann, Dr. Hans Hirschmann, by Carole and John Hirschmann Jane Morningstar, by Susie Blumenthal

NEXT DOR FUND

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THE RABBI DANIEL GOLDMAN ZEMEL **FUND FOR ISRAEL**

Tina Laver Coplan

IN HONOR OF Rabbi Zemel, in thanks for the Israel trip, by Debra Berke

IN MEMORY OF Rolly Mulitz, by David and Barbara Diskin, Deborah and Alan Kraut

CONDOLENCES

The Temple Micah community extends its deepest condolences to:

Andrew Freedman, on the passing of his uncle, Reuben Freedman JAN GREENBERG, on the passing of her stepfather, Bill Kupferberg RUTH SIMON, on the passing of her mother, Temple Micah member Josie J. Lipman

May their memories be for a blessing.

MAZAL TOV! The congregation wishes a hearty mazal tov to Ruth Wattenberg on her election to the District of Columbia School Board.

WITH GRATITUDE TO A MICAH PIONEER

Ted Schuchat, who died on December 5, was the founding president of Temple Micah (then called the Southwest Hebrew Congregation) in 1963. He was instrumental in securing the Wisconsin Avenue property and constructing our building in 1995, and its expansion in 2008-09. A journalist and book author, he spent his last years living in Seattle.

BERAHA'S BLACKBOARD

TIME FOR REFLECTION IN OUR **OVER-SCHEDULED LIVES**

By Rabbi Josh Beraha

Tuesday 4:00 pm. Temple Micah lobby. A few middle school students lounge on the chairs outside the glass windows of the Micah office. Others scatter themselves, their coats and their overloaded backpacks on the blue carpet. Some, headphones atop their heads, play games on their iPhones. Or check sports scores on iPads and watch re-runs of a spectacular touchdown. Some read graphic novels on e-books. A few stare intently at their evening homework and attempt to finish worksheets on ratios. They arrived at Micah today via creative carpooling arrangements from public, private and charter schools across the Washington area. By 4:30 pm, when mid-week Machon Micah begins, the lobby is full of middle schoolers. We usher them into the sanctuary, offer a few announcements and quickly dismiss them to skills class where they will learn Hebrew prayers. Yesterday they had Skype tutoring. Tomorrow they have soccer. Thursday they

learn to play an instrument.

That our children (and adults, too!) are over-scheduled is by now a truism, an empty platitude that everyone can utter while shaking their heads mournfully for days long past when children had more leisure time. To live in an urban environment like ours in 2014 is to be busy. A quieter, simpler day-to-day life seems far from possible. A less programmed week for our children, too, is simply infeasible. One can debate the merits and deficiencies of such a world and wonder. "How much is too much when scheduling our lives?" But that, in my view, is asking the wrong question.

In a New York Times article from October 2013. Bruce Feiler, author of The Secret of Happy Families, asked, "Over Scheduled Children: How Big a Problem?" Feiler showed that whereas once the conventional wisdom was that over-scheduling creates too much pressure on our children, there has been a backlash against this notion.

Now, some argue, perhaps our children will thrive exactly because of their busy-ness. And what will follow, no doubt, is a backlash to the backlash. And parents will go on debating the issue until their children are grown and have kids of their own. Trying to sort through how busy is too busy feels mind numbing and only adds to the busy-ness!

While I hardly know the right question to ask, my formula for addressing the hectic pace of our technology-crazed, over-scheduled life is simple. Prayer. "For some," writes Rabbi Reuven Hammer, "prayer reflects a sense of duty... for others, it comes from a sense of gratitude... sometimes it stems from a sense of despair... Prayer can also reflect a sense of wonder." But most importantly I believe for us and for our children, prayer is simply about temporarily leaving this world and stepping into a moment outside of time. Hammer quotes the great 20th-century German rabbi Leo



Baeck: "If our life is to be filled with devoutness, we must from time to time abandon the ways of the world so that we may enjoy the peace of God."

Tuesday 6:15 pm. After an hour and half of Hebrew and creative, prayer based electives, the middle schoolers make their way to the sanctuary. Their iPhones and graphic novels, their homework and conversations are placed on pause. A sweet niggun ushers them into prayer and they sing together: "Am I awake/Am I prepared/Are you listening to my song?/Can you hear my voice?/Can you understand?/ Am I awake?/Am I prepared?" Together we sing the Shema and V'ahavta and end with a moment of quiet reflection. Over-scheduled? Maybe. But for now, these 60 kids abandon the ways of the world and enjoy the peace—of God, of silence, of time to just be.

B'NAI MITZVAH



MOLLY ROTHSCHILD JANUARY 24 / 4 SHEVAT

PARENTS: Gregg and Stefanie Rothschild TORAH PORTION: BO

MITZVAH PROJECT: Molly is volunteering at a variety of local road races to give back to the running community while also supporting organizations that benefit sick children. Molly has combined her passion for running with the opportunity to support races like Cure Search Walk to fight childhood cancer and Hope for Henry 5K to bring smiles to children in the hospital.



IUDAH CHAMBERS

FEBRUARY 7 / 18 SHEVAT

PARENTS: Jonathan Chambers and Dana Hyde

TORAH PORTION: Yitro

MITZVAH PROJECT: To be decided



SARAH SCHWARTZ

FEBRUARY 21 / 2 ADAR

PARENTS: Andrea LaRue and Matthew Schwartz

TORAH PORTION: Terumah

MITZVAH PROJECT: Sarah is volunteering at and building support for A Wider Circle, a local non-profit that furnishes the homes of more than 4,000 low-income families a year.



MARA LURIE

FEBRUARY 28 / 9 ADAR

PARENTS: Dorian Friedman and Sander Lurie

TORAH PORTION: Tetzaveh-Zachor

MITZVAH PROJECT: Mara will be assisting preschoolers in the Child Development Center at Martha's Table. The program uses a "learn through play" approach to teach children from disadvantaged families about nature, reading, different cultures, science, art and computers.





The 2014 Micah mission to Israel in November visited its vibrant cities, historic places, sites that make headlines, Givat Haviva, two Reform synagogues, and more in a jampacked 10 days.



ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

DATED MATERIAL

TIME-SENSITIVE MATERIAL

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