

Touro Synagogue Confirmation Class of 2025

A Letter in the Scroll: Reflecting on What It Means to Be a Jewish Adult

As the culmination of our class journey, each student has the opportunity to create a reflection project and share it with the congregation during our Confirmation Ceremony on May 9. This reflection project is intended to encourage you to think about the discussions we've had this year, your own experiences as a young Jewish adult, and how these Jewish moments inform your commitment to your own Jewish practice and to the Jewish People.

Steps:

1. **Approach this as an opportunity** for growth, *not an assignment for school*.
2. **Look through the texts** in this document that we have studied this year and think about our conversations during class and what great questions they bring up for you.
3. **Respond to the prompt below** in written form, using 500-1000 words as a guidepost.
4. **Submit your reflection** to Rabbi Bauman [by uploading it here](#) no later than April 25th

Prompt: Being Torah: Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks

Several centuries of Western thought, beginning in the Enlightenment, have left us with the idea that when we choose how to live, we are on our own... We enter the world with a clean slate on which we can draw any self-portrait we wish... Against this whole complex of ideas, Jewish life is a sustained countervoice. To be a Jew is to know that this cannot be the full story of who I am. A melody is more than a sequence of disconnected notes. A painting is something other than a random set of brushstrokes. The part has meaning in terms of its place within the whole, so that if history has meaning, then the lives that make it up must be in some way joined to one another as characters in a narrative, figures in an unfolding drama. Without this it would be impossible to speak about meaning; and Judaism is the insistence that history *does* have a meaning. Therefore each of us has a significance precisely insofar as we are part of a story, an extraordinary and exemplary story of a people dedicated to certain ideas. We are not free-floating atoms in infinite space. We are letters in the scroll. *What does it mean to you to be a letter in the scroll?*

Please submit it to Rabbi Bauman by April 25, 2025.

If you have any questions or would like to discuss your project, please reach out.

I am here to help and delighted to work with you on this.

Texts from our Confirmation Class this year:

1. Judaism as an Interpretive Tradition: Babylonian Talmud, Menachot 29b

Rav Judah said in the name of Rav: “When Moses ascended on high, he found the Holy Blessed One, engaged in adding crowns to the letters [of the Torah]. Said Moses, ‘Lord of the Universe, who compels You to do that?’ God answered, ‘There will arise a man, at the end of many generations, Akiva ben Joseph by name, who will spin out of each tittle heaps and heaps of laws.’ ‘Lord of the Universe,’ said Moses, ‘permit me to see him.’ God replied, ‘Turn around.’ Moses went and sat down at the end of the eighth row [and listened to the discourses upon the law]. Not being able to follow their arguments, he was ill at ease, but when they came to a certain subject and the disciples said to the master, ‘From where do you know this?’ and the latter replied, ‘It is a law given to Moses at Sinai,’ [Moses] was comforted.

2. Faith as Letting Go of the Known: Aviva Gottlieb Zornberg

Here begins [Abraham’s journey] ...For the first time, a journey is undertaken not as an act of exile and diminution (Adam, Cain and the dispersed generation of Babel), but as a response to a divine imperative that articulates and emphasizes displacement as its crucial experience. For what is most striking here is the indeterminacy of the journey. What is left behind, canceled out, is defined, clearly circled on the map of Abram’s being; but his destination is merely “the land that I shall show you”: from “your land,” the landscape of your basic self-awareness, to a place that you will know only when the light falls on it with a difference...

3. Faith as Sacred Discontent with the World as it Is: Midrash Bereshit Rabbah 39:1

“The Lord said to Abram: Leave your land, your birthplace and your father’s house...” To what may this be compared? To the man who was traveling from place to place when he saw a palace in flames. He wondered, “Is it possible that the palace lacks an owner?” The owner of the palace looked out and said, “I am the owner of the palace.” So Abraham, our father said, “Is it possible that the world lacks a ruler?” The Holy One, blessed be He, looked out and said to him, “I am the ruler, the Sovereign of the universe.”

4. Sincerity and Intention in Ritual: Mishnah Rosh Hashanah 3:7

One who blows shofar into a cistern, or into a cellar or into a barrel; if s/he heard the sound of the shofar, s/he has fulfilled [the obligation]; if s/he heard the sound of an echo, s/he has not fulfilled [the obligation]. And so [too], s/he who was passing behind a synagogue, or whose house was adjacent to a synagogue, and heard the sound of a shofar or the sound of [someone reading the] scroll [of Esther, on Purim]; if s/he [had intention for the commandment], s/he has fulfilled [the obligation], but if not, s/he has not fulfilled [the obligation]. Even though both people listened, only one of them had intention.

5. Creation Ethics, What We Owe Everyone: Genesis 1:27-28, 9:5-6

And God created the human being in God's own image, in the image of God did God create it; male and female created God them. And God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it, and reign over the fish of the sea and the fowl of the heavens and over every beast crawling upon the earth."

And surely your blood of your lives will I require; from every beast will I require it; and from the human being, even from every person's fellow, will I require the life of the human being. One who sheds a person's blood, by human being shall their blood be shed; for in the Divine Image did God make the human being.

6. Covenant Ethics, What We Owe those in our Community: Carol Gilligan

...our lives are embedded in a network of relationships, as humans we are interdependent. It's the understanding of the human condition that Martin Luther King articulates in his letter from the Birmingham jail: "We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. What affects one directly affects all indirectly." From this vantage point, the parameters of judgment and action shift. I have written at length about this paradigm shift, explaining that it does not mean choosing relationships over self or caring over justice. Instead, it signifies a change in the question. Rather than seeking to establish whose rights take precedence in a contest of rights, the question becomes how to act in a network of mutuality where what affects one directly affects all indirectly. Like walking on a trampoline.

7. The Bystander Effect: Exodus 23:4-5

If you encounter your enemy's ox or donkey wandering, you shall surely bring it back to your enemy. If you see the donkey of the person who hates you lying under its burden, you shall not leave without helping them; you shall surely release it with them

8. Judaism as a Faith Family by Birth: Michael Wyschogrod

The foundation of Judaism is the family identity of the Jewish people as the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Whatever else is added to this must be seen as growing out of and related to the basic identity of the Jewish people as the seed of Abraham elected by God through descent from Abraham... Seen through the eyes of man, a divine election of a group defined by some ideological criterion would be far more plausible. It would have been far more understandable had God elected all those who feed the hungry and clothe the naked... These are accomplishments of individuals and reflect unusual endowment or effort or both. But being born into a particular family is hardly an achievement for which anyone deserves either credit or blame... This is the crux of the mystery of Israel's election.

9. Auschwitz or Sinai by Rabbi David Hartman

Israel is not only a response to modern anti-Semitism, but is above all a modern expression of the eternal Sinai covenant that has shaped Jewish consciousness throughout the millennia. It was not Hitler who brought us back to Zion, but rather belief in the eternal validity of the Sinai covenant. One need not visit Yad Vashem in order to understand our love for Jerusalem. It is dangerous to our growth as a healthy people if the memory of Auschwitz becomes a substitute for Sinai.

The model of Sinai awakens the Jewish people to the awesome responsibility of becoming a holy people. At Sinai, we discover the absolute demand of God; we discover who we are by what we do. Sinai calls us to action, to moral awakening, to living constantly with challenges of building a moral and just society which mirrors the kingdom of God in history. Sinai creates humility and openness to the demands of self-transcendence. In this respect, it is the antithesis of the moral narcissism that can result from suffering and from viewing oneself as a victim...

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10. Rabbi Cantor Angela Warnick Buchdahl writes of her Jewish identity:

One year my mother put kimchee, a spicy, pickled cabbage condiment, on our seder plate. My Korean mother thought it was a reasonable substitution since both kimchee and horseradish elicit a similar sting in the mouth, the same clearing of the nostrils. She also liked kimchee on gefilte fish and matza. “Kimchee just like maror, but better,” she said. I resigned myself to the fact that we were never going to be a “normal” Jewish family.

I grew up part of the “mixed multitude” of our people: an Ashkenazi, Reform Jewish father, a Korean Buddhist mother. I was born in Seoul and moved to Tacoma, Washington, at the age of five. Growing up, I knew my family was atypical, yet we were made to feel quite at home in our synagogue and community. My Jewish education began in my synagogue preschool, extended through cantorial and rabbinical school at Hebrew Union College (HUC), and continues today. I was the first Asian American to graduate from the rabbinical program at HUC, but definitely not the last—a Chinese American rabbi graduated the very next year, and I am sure others will follow.