



Message from Dr. Schatz

November 1, 2022

As the fall *Hagim* are behind us, and religious school is in full swing, I wanted to update our families on all that has been happening in our award-winning religious school. Most exciting news – we were honored by *The Jewish Exponent* as “Best of Jewish Philly” religious school! That’s right, our Jane Fishman Grinberg Religious School is the best one around. Not a surprise to anyone here, but it is very nice to be acknowledged by the community. Tell your friends and spread the word!

In other news – we have been busy in the religious school with hands-on, active learning through the first months of the school year. Some highlights – The Eliana Light concert and family fun day; Rabbi Shawn leading *Tashlikh*, the casting of sin through breadcrumbs into the Schuylkill River; Gan, Aleph and Bet students learning about *Shofarot* and making their own with Rabbi Strasberg from Chabad Living Legacy; and Gimel students making *Hanukkiot* out of glass pieces, ready to be sent away to the Gary Rosenthal Hiddur Mitzvah Project and crafted into original artwork. All students visited the Maurice Kendall Sukkah to say *brachot*, wave lulav and etrog, and enjoy a snack to fulfill the mitzvah of dwelling in the sukkah with Dr. Schatz and Rabbi Shawn. Our younger students had a petting zoo come to visit, to learn about the Torah *parshiot* of *Beresheet* – creation, and *Noach* – saving the animals on the Ark.

Our Hay class has begun a year-long program called “Better Together”, a special funded intergenerational program that brings together students and “empty-nester” members of Har Zion for a series of programs to foster understanding and mutual respect between the generations. The children have been learning about various aspects of aging and respect in their class with Morah Wendy Lebofsky, and our first encounter was a conversation over a lovely breakfast as the children and adults got to know each other a little bit. We look forward to monthly gatherings, and to fostering a camaraderie between these groups of Har Zion members. We thank JFGRS alumnus Harvey Pennington for his invaluable help with this program.

A true highlight, that we know will be remembered by each child for many years, was our *Geniza* burial. Rabbi Shawn, Dr. Levine and Dr. Schatz have been saving *Shaimot*, unusable books, ritual items, and a *Sefer Torah* that is no longer fit for use. Our tradition commands that we bury these items in a respectful way rather than simply throw them in the trash. A grave was dug in the back field beyond our playground, and students, adult congregants, teachers and clergy gathered to bid a respectful farewell to these items that have served our community so well for many years. Each child carried out a book for burial, and students in our Zayin class carried the carefully wrapped Torah scroll through two lines of children, forming a corridor of Har Zion faces to see it to its resting place. Students in the Hay class led readings, Rabbi Haaz shared words of blessing, Dr. Levine recited the *El Moleh Rachamim* prayer and Hazzan Vogel led the *Kaddish DeRabbanan*, the rabbi’s kaddish. Cantor Silverberg taught us the melody of *Etz Hayim hee*, and led in the chanting of this melody that ends each Torah service in the

synagogue. As a conclusion, middle school students were able to throw a shovel-full of dirt into the grave to assure that each of us participated in this sacred service.

In the coming months, we are looking forward to the return of our Kids Shabbat Saturday morning activities, with a junior congregation service and games led by Rabbi Shawn and Norman; Family Friendly Fridays – a Friday night family service and dinner; and Parents Night Out, a series of Saturday evening activities for children to give the parents much needed adult time. And, of course, our classroom learning continues through our various curricula in Hebrew and Jewish studies.

Spread the word – let your friends and neighbors know that your child goes to Philly's Best and we, Rabbi Shawn, myself and the faculty, will do our best to live up to the title!