

Kol THE VOICE OF Barrack

Tevet: G-d Meets Us Where We Are

בראשית כא:יז

אֶל־תִּירָאִי כִּי־שָׁמַע אֱלֹהִים אֶל־קוֹל הַנֶּעַר בְּאֶשֶׁר הוּא־שָׂם:

GENESIS 21:17

Fear not, for G-d has heeded the cry of the [child] where he is.

In Genesis, Chapter 21, an angel tells Hagar not to fear, that even though her son, Yishmael is struggling, G-d will meet him and take care of his needs.

The idea that G-d meets each of us בְּאֶשֶׁר הוּא־שָׂם - where we are as individuals, is the essence of our Shaharit (morning prayer) program and has shaped much of our thinking, especially during this challenging year. Prayer is a mechanism to reach out when we are fearful or in need of comfort and we are proud of the ways we make tfillah accessible to our students.

At Barrack we recognize that our vast tradition allows for many entry points to meaningful spiritual practice; from regular ritual prayer to more creative approaches to spiritual life. Our Shaharit program focuses on validating our students' spiritual needs and giving them tools to deepen their experience with their community, the larger world, and themselves.

As the Shaharit coordinator I have the pleasure of visiting each group and in doing so, I have the opportunity to share happenings in each prayer space. I have been particularly impressed with how our staff and students are using the lessons and skills from their spiritual practice to inform and improve their daily lives, especially during this global pandemic.

This past week in the Spiritual Journaling Group, students used the symbolism of a fallen podium to consider how we feel when we are down and how we pick each other up when we have fallen. Students discussed who they turn to when they themselves have "fallen," how they ask for help and how we can all be a resource for others in their time of need. It was an inspiring conversation to witness!

Our Mehitza Minyan continues to grow with many students finding comfort in modern orthodox settings. Other students have joined a new student-led Active Spirituality Group that begins each morning with physically distant activity that connects in some way to the weekly Torah reading or a spiritual matter that is important to the group.

Communal prayer in pluralistic schools can be challenging but also immensely rewarding. Providing many spiritual paths allows our students to find authentic connection through a spectrum of Jewish practice.

We believe that a combination of tradition and innovation is the key to a well rounded spiritual life and have seen our students use these offerings to their advantage to cope with hardships of the pandemic.

Kol Barrack (The Voice of Barrack) is a periodic publication that recognizes the new month in the Jewish calendar. In this edition, Rav Will Keller, Director of Jewish Life, shares his thoughts with our school community.



Rav Will Keller

DIRECTOR OF JEWISH LIFE

Rav Will is in his fifth year as the Director of Jewish Life at Barrack, where he organizes Shaharit groups, coordinates holiday and hesed programming, and teaches the seniors participating in Barrack's Jewish Leadership Initiative. Rav Will holds a Masters in Jewish Education from Hebrew College, Rabbinic ordination (Semicha) from Yeshivat Chovevei Torah and is currently completing the DSLTI (Day School Leadership Training Institute) through JTS. An excited Jewish educator, Rav Will works with students to find meaningful entry points into Jewish life through which Jewish connection and values will elevate our collective experience.

wkeller@jbha.org

Later on in Genesis the Torah twice tells us that Yishmael **וַיֵּשֶׁב בְּמִדְבָּר** - that he dwells/settles in the desert. This is significant because desert life demands a degree of durability and grit which is mirrored in the challenges we face today. Yishmael's cry was answered as G-d's promise to "hold him by the hand, for I will make a great nation of him" was realized. We too are calling out for G-d to take us in G-d's grasp and find comfort in that closeness.

Even with the coming news of the vaccine, these moments of the pandemic have been difficult for all of us to bear and at times we must search for inspiration. The resilience our students are developing as we navigate these unprecedented times has been a source of great inspiration. It is clear that the skills they are developing today will serve them as they continue forward into the new month of Tevet and the new world to come!

Hodesh Tov,

Rav Will