



Class of 2024 Senior Tzedek & Judaic Studies Reflections

Tzedek Distinctions

Erika Ruin

Throughout my high school career at Denver Jewish Day School, I have taken certain Judaic classes that taught Tzedek's core values. We have studied the Tzedek values through different curricula by looking at Jewish texts. Depending on the depths of the class, we further developed these ideas to modern situations. I completed these classes with a humanitarian project and a greater understanding of embodying these values in creating a better society.

Beginning my freshman year, I took a Tzedek Seminar class. In this class, we studied Biblical texts that exemplified righteousness while learning about Tzedakah. Central themes in this class were the importance of kindness and justice, which we viewed through Jewish texts and connected to pop culture. The Torah states that the Jewish people have an obligation to be righteous. We must give Tzedakah and help all people, not just Jews. I love this because it's the true definition of being charitable, helping everyone and not just your own people. If everyone follows this, we will live in a better world. After understanding this from my Tzedek classes, I can be that one person who makes a difference and teaches others to do the same. Connecting Jewish texts to modern references helped me better understand the importance of Tzedek. It

motivated me to help out my community, whether with charity, actions or just being a kind, respectful person.

Similarly, during my junior year, I took Tzedek Capstone, where I learned how Judaism views poverty, homelessness, equality, and immigration, connecting it to current events and prosecuting a final project. Mainly, poverty, immigration, and equality have affiliated with me and directed me to help. Helping those in poverty is a mitzvah; the Torah teaches us that it is crucial to ensure that the less fortunate still keep their dignity from receiving help. Since Tzedakah has to be done with intent, for me that means helping the poor out of the goodness of your heart and not because it's a mitzvah.

Additionally, Judaism's views on immigration resonate with me because they state that we should not persecute immigrants because the Jewish people were once foreigners in Egypt. My family, being immigrants, have faced troubles, and it's important for me to make sure immigrants are treated better. Moreover, gender equality is not discussed a lot in the Torah. Men are mentioned more than women, and women only hold the role of a housewife. Jewish female leaders have discussed the nature of female leadership in Jewish communities today in Israel and abroad. Women are great and courageous leaders at home, work, or in a social setting. It comes naturally for women to get the crowd going and excited. I will take this idea with me to adulthood and accomplish great things as a Jewish woman. These classes have taught me the importance of bringing attention to causes that are not brought up as equally as others. Therefore, for my class project, a partner and I researched suicide among teens in Colorado, brought awareness to our class, and raised money for a suicide prevention organization. This cause is an important one that deserves more attention than it receives, which I was able to progress. This

class has taught me the importance of my role in educating myself on current issues and what Judaism says about them.

Furthermore, I continued my education on Tzedakah through my Jewish Nonprofits class. Instead of the traditional reading text and discussing class, we learned the different aspects required to start a nonprofit organization. We then looked at the history of Jewish nonprofits in Denver. A Jewish nonprofit is the central idea of social justice because it is charitable work, for there is no reward. The benefit of this is helping those in need. If I were in such a situation, I would want people to help, which is why I need to help people, too. To conclude the class, we created our own Jewish nonprofit mockup. Mine was designated to provide the less fortunate Jewish families with supplies to celebrate Jewish holidays and a center to do so. Just because they cannot afford wine, challah, or candles should not mean they cannot celebrate Shabbat weekly. This goes for all Jewish holidays.

The Tzedek Program has taught me to care for people going through a challenging situation and help them in any way I can. Throughout high school, I volunteered and helped out in my community. Some included babysitting and assisting the elderly and sick. In today's society, many face discrimination for their social status, gender, and so much more; it is unjust. My role is to guarantee they feel safe, accepted, and equal. I can do this through charity work, communication, or even bringing awareness to it. After graduation, I plan to continue volunteering and helping my community physically and emotionally.

Emi Asarch

Throughout middle school, as I saw seniors run the Think Pink volleyball game, food drives, and other various fundraisers, I found myself excited to embark on the Tzedek journey our school offers. Now, as a senior, I can proudly say I have participated in this program and have gained more than I could have imagined. I have been extremely fortunate to have a privileged upbringing that has shielded me from many of the challenges and issues others face. I wanted to be educated and to do my part in taking care of the community and Denver Jewish Day School's Tzedek program has allowed me to do so. I have learned the foundations of Tzedek, grown as a person, participated in several projects and volunteering, and plan to continue on this Tzedek journey.

Over the past four years, I have been able to learn more about myself and grow through becoming more educated in important matters. I have learned a variety of local issues such as homelessness, mental health, and the eight levels of tzedakah that, through the program, I was able to connect to Judaism and form a deeper understanding. For instance, the second highest level is to give to the poor without knowing the recipient of the charity. Through this act of charity, I have gotten the opportunity to participate in many volunteer activities where I have not known the receiver. When I was looking for ways to complete my yearly 18 hours of community service the summer into freshman year, I volunteered at Food Bank Over the Rockies for 15 of my 18 hours. Through this experience, along with many others, I have learned that I truly enjoy volunteering and helping others. With this found love of helping, I have based future opportunities around how I can help people the most including my gap year plans and choice of study for college.

Throughout this journey of learning and embracement of Tzedek, there have been many classes and several projects that impacted my perspective. Firstly, I took Tzedek Capstone in 11th grade where I had to complete a project of any sorts with Tzedak. My partner and I, decided to raise awareness for suicide. As we completed our project, we met with our school psychologist to help gain further knowledge on the topic. We learned many despondent and

dis-hopeful facts about the teens of today struggling immensely more than those from the past which inspired us to work harder on our project. We sold candy along with yellow ribbons for people to wear to show our support and educate others. From this project, I have obtained a greater perspective that helped me gain more empathy for those around me. Furthermore, I was finally able to run the Think Pink volleyball game just as seniors before me have. This experience reminded me of the generations before me and how far society has come from previous issues plus the new issues that have emerged. I am reminded that anything is possible and that there are steps I can take to help our generation today push past these new problems. Overall, these projects have made me reflect and increased my gratitude towards my life, expanding my perspective greatly.

As I reflect on my Tzedek journey, I realize one of my greatest memories and experiences has stemmed from my learning and enhancement of Tzedek principles. The summer before junior year, I joined a program where I traveled to Costa Rica for two weeks. Here I helped clean out and rebuild an elderly woman's home alongside the local community and taught elementary school kids sports. As I faced many challenges during it, namely, no phone in a foreign country with no familiar faces and a lot of cockroaches, I grew immensely. I widened my perspective while helping hands-on for someone in need. This was a life-changing experience that I would not have pushed myself to participate in if it weren't for previously finding that love of helping others during the Tzedek program. As the highest level of Tzedakah is giving a big gift to enable the other to not be dependent upon others, providing a new home for an elderly woman and her family has had lasting impacts on them as well as on me. I cannot describe in words the gratitude I gained and the sense of fulfillment I felt that would not have been possible without that extra push I received from understanding Tzedek.

With my time at DJDS and this Tzedek program coming to an end, I have made sure I will still be able to utilize my experiences in order to further help those in need. Next year, I am taking a gap year before attending New York University. As I planned out my year I knew part of

it would include some type of service work. I am very excited to spend half of my year in Southeast Asia working with local communities to help with education, sustainability, farming, and building homes. I will use what I have learned to fully embrace this opportunity and make a difference where I can. Additionally, at NYU, I plan to study psychology to further make an impact.

While I am sad for my time at DJDS and the Tzedek program to end, I am ecstatic to continue my personal journey with Tzedek and help others with the tools I have acquired. Gaining a wider perspective was the single greatest skill I think I have personally gained throughout my high school years. It has been enhanced through the Tzedek program by bringing issues to my attention that I had not previously known about along with diving deeper into prominent issues the world faces.

Levi Engbar

Since I was in middle school, I was always taught the importance of volunteering and communal responsibility. Through all different kinds of Tzedek classes, I learned the importance of understanding current events and taking action where I see fit. However, I quickly learned that a class does not need to be a “Tzedek class” for the values of Tzedek to be present and that the principles of Tzedek are present almost everywhere we look. In my “Ethics of Extinction” class taught by Ms. Knowles, I learned how different species have been able to avoid extinction solely because their protection receives more funding than other species. Additionally, through these classes, I have completed numerous projects that have positively impacted our school and state such as a fundraiser for conservation efforts, a school-wide initiative to recycle more efficiently, and presentations on homelessness in Denver and how we can help. This work

widely expanded my understanding of the real world while instilling a desire to help others beyond the classroom within myself. Specifically, I began volunteering by serving meals to the homeless community at the Denver Rescue Mission, a nonprofit that helps “restore the lives of people experiencing homelessness and addiction through emergency services, rehabilitation, transitional programs, and community outreach”. I very much have enjoyed this volunteer work, and have spent over 30 hours volunteering at the Denver Rescue Mission in the past year. Each time I serve food it provides me with joy, as I have learned that the happiness I get from giving back to the community is a more pure form of happiness than I experience day to day. I have also come to understand the importance of being pushed outside of my comfort zone through this volunteer work. The Tzedek program has provided me with a clear stance on many social justice issues along with how I can have an effect in impacting the world. I plan to continue carrying forward the principles of Tzedek through my continued volunteering with Denver Rescue Mission and by volunteering throughout my time in college.

Maya Friedlander

Having the opportunity to participate in the Tzedek program not only opened my eyes to the many classes, but experiences that would eventually help to shape my perspective of life; that being the importance of striving for change within the world. My Tzedek journey began in a class called Medical Ethics. This class not only forced me to think about the larger medical field but also made me truly realize the impact that decisions can have in all aspects of life. Living in a household that is largely influenced by medicine, taking this class not only made me more aware of the dinner conversations happening in my house but also made me see the value of helping others. Tzedek, this idea of pursuing justice is not just about striving for excellence and changing the world, but making a difference within the communities you are a part of. Thus, this

one class opened my eyes to what is happening in the world around me, pertaining to the larger medical field, and made me realize how critical it is for our generation to make a difference and be a part of that change.

The next stop within this journey was a class called Mitzvot of Devarim, this class made me think in a way I have never had to before and made me have conversations with others that were completely different than anything I have been a part of, but this class allowed me to understand the importance of Judaism in all aspects of life. Mitzvot of Devarim, helped me see the value in not only continuing my Jewish education, but also helping others around me, and by doing that I helped the larger mainstream society. Being able to take this text and discussion based class exposed me to the many different types of classes, but more importantly how secular and religious fields are something that can merge together. This class truly helped me realize how important Judaism is in my life, but more how I want to help others.

Being a part of the Tzedek program you are instructed to create a final project, one which you give back to the community. This year, fellow classmates joined me in my goal to help donate food to JFS. But, as someone who comes from a very competitive background, I wanted this drive to actually be successful, and thus it was my goal to make it the largest fundraiser. By the end of the drive fellow classmates and I were able to collect over 600 lbs worth of food. This food drive not only made me understand the importance of giving back to the community but made me realize how much of the world around me is not fortunate enough to be able to have food on their table. It was truly eye-opening to see what impact our Denver JDS community could have within Denver.

This year on Wednesday a new club was created, Civic Spirit, a class at first I knew nothing about yet I was asked to join. Being a part of this club helped merge both my previous Tzedek and Judaic knowledge with my love for change and law. Within this club, we were asked to pick an area that we felt needed help and change. For me, this area was Holocaust education, but more specifically I wanted to help make the Holocaust Bill, which was passed in

Colorado in 2020, actually work within schools. Meaning, that I wanted to help create a board of individuals (multi-generational) that would help to advise school districts throughout the state of Colorado in implementing Holocaust education. I met with a lobbyist and the JCRC head at Jewish Colorado to help bring this plan to fruition. Working with other individuals within this larger field helped me to better understand the disparities that exist between the public and the government, but more importantly how if individuals stand up for what they believe and strive for excellence change can happen.

Tzedek, and the classes that I have taken helped lead me towards this goal of changing the Holocaust education curriculum within Colorado. I want to strive for a place in which people see the importance of learning about the past in order to prevent it from happening in the future, that is what Tzedek means; a concept where we strive for perfection, a place in which people feel welcomed, and a society that values justice.

As I go away to college next year at a time when our country is split and the state of Israel and the conversations happening around this country are terrifying, the lessons that I have learned throughout my time in the Tzedek program will enable me to become the best version of myself. A person who sees the value in listening to others, striving for excellence, and instilling perfection within the communities I am a part of, but more importantly someone who will never forget the values of Tzedek, this idea of justice and aiming for a better world. A concept first introduced to me within my classes at Denver JDS I will not only bring with me to college but wherever I go.

Ari Erlich

The Jewish community in Colorado has surrounded me for as long as I can remember. I have attended Jewish day school, participated in Jewish youth groups, and immersed myself in the tight-knit community. In Judaism, there is a concept called tzedakah. Tzedakah is defined as righteous behavior and comes from the root word of Tzedek, meaning justice. However, of everything I love most about the Jewish education I have received, the emphasis and passion for providing tzedakah have remained my favorite. Acts of tzedakah changed my entire life.

After undergoing major surgery, it was through tzedakah that I realized the reach of my Jewish community. Each day, friends delivered meals, an upperclassman picked my brother up and drove him to school, and strangers dropped by to wish me well and see how I was doing. I remember my initial astonishment at the random kindness of those around me.

The following year, I decided I wanted to graduate with distinction in Tzedek, and took a class solely focused on Tzedek. The class covered topics from modern-day justice to biblical commandments of charity. There, I learned that this concept was more than donating spare change. My favorite part of the class was the month we spent delving into the eight levels of righteousness relating to tzedakah. I learned that giving opportunities without monetary contributions was the most righteous path a donor could take. This concept deeply resonated with me and allowed me to put my Tzedek education into action.

This class led me to see that although I could not give donations like some of my classmates did, I could give tzedakah in a much more impactful way. I started to focus on my commitment to my community and finding others like me. I became more actively involved in my volunteer work with the organizations that had helped my family and pursued helping those in need. For my 11th-grade Tzedek class, I became a teen coordinator for Colorado's first Jewish

Climate Summit. This allowed me to see everything I had learned come to life, and see the first-hand impact a Tzedek education could have.

As I started my senior year I began the end of my journey through the Tzedek program. For my senior year project, I decided to do a food drive for Jewish Family Services. At the end of the food drive when we went to drop off the food we had collected, I felt proud and lucky to see the impact we had through a seemingly small charity project. Participating in the Tzedek program has led me to grow immeasurably as a leader and Jewish woman.

Now, looking forward to college I am confident in my knowledge of Tzedek, and my ability to create the societal change, I hope to see. I will always carry the lessons I have learned from my Tzedek classes and Tzedek programs. Going forward, I know that any help I can give to someone else, regardless of how small, can change someone's entire life, just like it did mine.

Megan Coughlan

Growing up in a Jewish day school and attending youth group I had created an amazing Jewish community for myself. Throughout the years I have gained an immense understanding of Tzedek, also known as righteous behavior and justice. As we have learned about Tzedek in the classroom setting, I truly did not understand what it meant until I experienced it myself.

In my junior year, I decided I wanted to graduate with distinction in Tzedek and took a class named Tzedek Capstone. Prior to joining this class, I always had heard of Tzedek throughout my community but truly did not know how to apply it to my life. I knew graduating with distinction in Tzedek would help me further perpetuate idealistic Jewish values throughout my community. As the semester went on, I learned that Tzedek was more than just the Hebrew word for justice, instead it was putting equality and understanding into the world. This class not

only furthered my knowledge of Tzedek but also taught me the importance of compassion and the worth of every individual who contributes to this world. It is also through this class that I am able to apply my Judaic knowledge to repairing the world as a whole.

The following summer my sister, Caley Coughlan, and I decided to hand out bags to the homeless; Full of toiletries, snacks, and water. I realized that one small act of kindness can go a long way. While we handed out the bags, many were appreciative and shared their gratitude towards us. As we continued to bring smiles to their faces, I received a feeling of satisfaction and empathy. It is moments like these that make me feel like change is possible within our community. Through these small acts of tzedaka, kindness, and tzedek I too felt like I could make a difference.

As I was going through mental health struggles, I saw light in the community around me. The constant love and support around me within the Jewish community was what got me through times like these. As people came together to check in on me I realized how much Tzedek had an impact on my life. As time moved on, I realized that I was driven to show people that getting through tough times is possible. This made me fall in love with the ideas of Tzedek. Showing kindness and giving back to the world is something that I will continue to do throughout life because of this experience.

Mia Wexler

Throughout my high school journey, I've had the privilege of understanding the meaning of 'Tzedek'. While its literal translation is "righteousness and justice," its essence is beyond that. Looking back on my experiences at Denver Jewish Day School, I've not only cultivated a deep

understanding of justice, community, and personal responsibility but have also addressed injustices. These actions have equipped me with invaluable skills that will impact me throughout my life.

Before taking any Tzedek courses, my understanding of Tzedek was rather simplistic: it entailed helping the less fortunate through acts of Tzedakah. From contributing to JNF boxes in elementary school, I associated Tzedek with this straightforward form of charity. However, my journey through Tzedek classes in high school revealed a deeper truth: Tzedek encompasses far more than mere charity.

In ninth grade, our discussions on injustice offered a new perspective on how individuals can be helped. These conversations shed light on the injustices in today's world, prompting me to recognize the importance of advocating for causes I believe in.

Further, understanding came during Tzedek Capstone in eleventh grade, where we dove deeper into the ways of embodying Tzedek principles. We learned about the most generous ways of giving, advocating for passionate causes, and the small deeds one can do to make a difference. Using these tools, I was empowered to raise awareness about Multiple Sclerosis (MS), a chronic illness my grandmother has battled for over three decades. She remains one of my greatest role models, her resilience creating my passion for easing the burdens of those living with MS.

Taking all that I had learned from these classes, I used this information to create a presentation on Multiple Sclerosis (MS). The presentation highlighted the critical need for affordable healthcare, specifically for those struggling with Multiple Sclerosis. While there is more work to be done, I was given an insight into challenges faced by individuals and am thankful for the opportunity to make a difference. From a series of events and discussions,

Tzedek not only broadened my perspective on social justice but also clarified my role in addressing these issues.

From a discussion we had in 11th grade, I was introduced to the concept of the Eight Degrees of Giving, which highlighted the significance of giving back indirectly, yet wholeheartedly. I struggled to comprehend why there existed varying degrees of generosity. However, through discussions, I came to appreciate the meaning behind it all. I realized that giving anonymously ensures the purpose of the donation. This invaluable lesson emphasized the importance of empathy and understanding in all philanthropic actions, restating the importance of giving from the heart without causing harm to others.

Learning about giving back to communities and advocating for social justice continued to inspire me throughout my senior year of high school. As a founding member of Civic Spirit, a club where students are able to advocate for their community and society, I worked with other students to advocate for Holocaust Education. My involvement in this project was driven by the aspiration to honor the memory of millions by ensuring their stories were being told. By working with the JCRC, we were able to assist the Holocaust Education Coalition and give feedback on how local school curriculums can be changed to make the biggest impact. This project truly showed me how important using my voice is, especially in social issues, as I am able to create meaningful change and impact those around me.

As I move on to different chapters in my life, I am confident that I will carry forward these valuable lessons and put them into practice. Because of what I have learned, I now have the courage to speak up and fight against injustice. It is important for me to use my voice because I have the ability to make a difference. Whether in college, my career, or my community, I know that I have been given the tools to be kind, generous, and passionate due in large part to the

projects I worked on. Without these experiences, I would not have the confidence to advocate for change and help those around me, now and forever.

My involvement with Tzedek at Denver Jewish Day School has impacted my personal beliefs and identity. The classes offered me support from peers and staff and enabled me to be passionate and proud. My high school experience has allowed me to have an appreciation for the significance of Tzedek. While putting money into JNF boxes is important, I now have the skills necessary to create change and make an impact in the future.

Lavi Kay

My journey with Tzedek is one of the most profound and essential aspects of my Jewish education and will forever remain at the heart of my Jewish identity. I first learned Tzedek as a middle school student when I took the introductory course in Tzedek, and I remember instantly realizing that Tzedek is at the heart of being a good person. As a high school student, I learned more about Tzedek and dove deeper into the meaning. Tzedek means “justice,” but we can discover that it also refers to conveying righteousness, abiding by laws, or seeking the proper law. For instance, as a ninth grader in my Tzedek class, we had a whole unit on Tzedek in education. We learned about many countries in our world where female individuals are not educated and are removed from school for improper reasons. Here, we learned about the lack of education policies in certain countries. This learning allowed me to discover my favorite values in Tzedek, Tikkun Olam, or repairing the world.

Tikkun Olam is such an essential part of my life now, and it has allowed me to think of others instead of myself alone. After learning about Tikkun Olam, I began community service at

a local veterinary clinic to give to my world. I gave my time and found so much enjoyment in helping the veterinary community, and I am so grateful for the help I have gotten to provide and the learning I have received as a result. Later, I got a job at a veterinary clinic where I trained as a veterinary assistant. Then, after being trained, I followed my values of Tzedek and took my righteous self to understaffed veterinary clinics to support local teams and pets to ensure that despite staffing shortages, quality care was provided to patients treated by the veterinary Community.

My opinions of social justice have been forever changed due to my close learning of Tzedek throughout the years. I know more now about how profoundly grateful we who live the lives in our Jewish community in Denver, CO, ought to be. I know now that while many put in their time and effort to repair the world, much work still needs to be done. My role in creating a better society is to help others. I love helping, and I know that it will be my way to help make our world a better place. Through fulfilling the learning of Denver Jewish Day School's Tzedek program, I have learned much and gained so much insight. I have faced challenges, too, as not every bit of social justice is easy enough to come by. I have found that there are areas to which we cannot change for many reasons, whether it be noncompliance or political factors, to name a few. I've grown through learning Tzedek to be my best self, realizing the importance of giving back to create sustainable impacts in our world.

As I move beyond Denver Jewish Day School, I plan to continue learning and embrace my knowledge by continuing to help and make an impact. I have the knowledge it takes to create an impact on our world and help it be a better place. I look forward to entering my desirable career in veterinary medicine, where I intend to continue to help out understaffed or underserved veterinary communities in need. I will use the value of Tikkun Olam to bring my best self to help

veterinary professionals and pets alike. After all of my years of learning, I look forward to my future and all the impacts I can make. I wish to express my gratitude to Denver Jewish Day School, and specifically to Channa Schweid, who has shaped my learning more than anyone else and truly allowed me to shine as a person.

Judaic Studies Distinctions

Levi Engbar

Throughout my time at DJDS, I have been given the gift of being able to learn within an incredible community that uplifts and supports me. For as long as I can remember, my education has been intertwined with my community, allowing me to learn with respect to current events and awareness. This community can be highlighted through classes with Mr. Halper, where the emphasis can be on navigating a respectful disagreement with a classmate, rather than finding a true solution. Classes like those are the building blocks of positive figures within today's society, as they provoke insightful conversations and essential deep-thinking skills. Some of my earliest DJDS memories come from community events such as Chagigat Siddur, the Hanukkah Play, Kabbalat Shabbat, and so many more. Our DJDS community is brought together by so

many things from such an early time which all hold a core residency within my brain, and have contributed vastly to my personal development.

Additionally, my DJDS education has allowed me to form close relationships with teachers. These relationships provide me with an education that reaches beyond the classroom, as I have been taught the values that lead to a fulfilling life. I have come to specifically appreciate class trips because through them I have been able to get to know teachers on a more personal level, which not only made the trips more enjoyable but also provided me with extra motivation to succeed in class. I believe that as I have developed relationships with my teachers, I simultaneously learned networking skills and improved my ability to speak as an adult. These are skills that will allow me to excel in my ongoing education and will give me a jumpstart within many aspects of my adult life. I also feel a sense of security knowing that I could almost always reach out to one of my former teachers and receive guidance, no matter how abstract the situation may be.

As I think about my adult life, and what next year looks like for me, I cannot do so without imagining how my DJDS skills will assist me. It will be a priority of mine to develop relationships with all my professors, just as I have with my teachers here at DJDS. I also look forward to the homecoming back to DJDS, which I have seen so many other alumni experience for themselves. There is a reason so many alumni pop in throughout the year just to see and converse with Ms. Knowles, Mr. Halper, or Jerry, which is a true testament to the bonds formed between students and teachers. The feeling of friendship and security that they provide within a conversation is a rare type of feeling that is unable to be replicated anywhere else.

Another value that cannot be understated is the sense of Jewish community that DJDS has provided me, all my life. As I continue my education at the third largest university in the United States next year, I know that there is a large Jewish community, which I will easily recognize and embrace, while also acknowledging that there will be countless people who do not care for Judaism one bit. This understanding allows me to appreciate DJDS and all that it's given me even more, as I am very grateful for my Jewish upbringing and education. I can recall some of my early and favorite Jewish experiences being our elementary field trips to make kosher matza and learning how it is made, learning how the Torah is written by a scribe, and the silly arts and crafts fair that always followed our Yom Ha'atzmaut field day. These early experiences formed my love for Judaism, and I now look back on them fondly, only wishing these experiences for other Jewish kids.

At my core, Denver JDS is a huge part of who I am. As a K-12 student, it has been all I have ever known, and in my understanding, it can be described as one big community that supports each other in all parts of life. I am incredibly appreciative of all the experiences I have been given from this school, and I will carry them with me throughout my life.

Maya Friedlander

From the moment I joined Denver JDS just three years ago to today in all aspects of this Jewish community, I have been welcomed with open arms by every faculty member and peer. The experiences that I have been a part of have contributed to my deeper understanding of the

importance of continuing my Jewish education. Most notably, given the opportunity to take such a wide array of Judaic classes throughout my time at Denver JDS has made me see the value in helping others, a critical skill that I will carry with me in my future endeavors.

I will be attending Case Western Reserve University in the fall on the pre-law track majoring in History and probably Environmental Studies and Religious Studies, as well. Each of these disciplines are areas of academic interest that I was able to discover throughout my time at Denver JDS, but more specifically within my Judaic classes. For example, being able to take a wide variety of Judaic classes ranging from text-based discussion with Jerry (Melachim) to learning how to make a business pitch with Mr. Z (Jewish non-profits) to uncovering the history of the Jewish people within America with Channa (American Jewish history) I was able to learn about values that carry over to my secular classes and into my next stage of life. Within these classes we learn not just about core Jewish values of tikkun olam or helping one's neighbor, but our role as citizens to help the world and bring kindness.

Today, society is moving towards a place of dysfunction either through a lack of communication or a lack of care for the environment. However, in order for society to move forward our generation must be able to not only bring solutions but be able to understand one another. Throughout my Judaic experience at Denver JDS, more specifically within my discussion-based classes, I have been able to see the importance of perspective, but more importantly, the impact that understanding different perspectives will have on the greater society. Being able to have open and honest conversations with peers is how our country will be able to become whole again, and this idea was first introduced to my fellow classmates and I through our Judaic classes. Not only is perspective and discussion critical for peace and openness, but also innovation.

If someone told me when I joined Denver JDS I would take a business class where I would have to create a Jewish non-profit and then present it in front of a panel of judges, I wouldn't have believed them. Yet, fast forward two years, and there I was in front of that group of Judges presenting a Jewish non-profit where I was the CEO. While it was an incredible opportunity to become the CEO of a program that the JCC wanted to implement, the lessons I was able to learn throughout the process of both creating a "company" and then managing a team (my peers) are truly indescribable. This class not only stressed the importance of cooperation, but more importantly the values of Judaism such as derek erez (making sure everyone is treated with respect), Tzedek (pursuing justice), and tikkun olam (repairing the world). These critical skills are not just values that the community at Denver JDS holds dear, but moral standards that can help the larger mainstream community- either in college, the workplace, or wherever life will take us.

History is not just the study of the past, but the way we will shape our future. Growing up with a mom who studied Near Eastern Judaic Studies in college I never truly understood what her draw was towards this discipline until I took American Jewish History. This class has not only shown me what it means to be Jewish today, but how incredible it is to study our past; not just to learn, but to make society and our communities we are a part of better. This class has given me a new perspective, one in which I value the merging of both secular and religious passions; displaying the importance of intersection either through secular and religious lenses or the idea that people who have differing views can come together and have conversations. Thus, this class is the start of a passion, one that recognizes the importance of merging ideas, but a passion that will continue to grow in order to uncover more within the Judaic and American

fields of study. Being able to take this class helped to inspire a deeper understanding of what it means to repair the world.

Just a few months ago I had an idea to help raise money for Passover goods that would go towards the Ugandan Jewish community (Abayudaya). When I was doing some research I came across Masorti Olam the organization that helped me bring this idea to life. The inspiration behind this project was the idea of both tzedek and tikkun olam concepts stressed in every aspect of my Judaic classes. However, the more I thought about it, the more I realized how little connection we, the Jewish community of Colorado, have to the larger Jewish community, and the rest of the world, and I wanted to change that. And, thus the fundraising began and it ended just before the start of Pesach and the results were incredible. In the end we were able to raise thirteen hundred dollars that went towards supporting Passover for the Abayudya community. A small concept first introduced in my Judaic classes throughout the years at my time at Denver JDS led to a group of people in rural Africa being able to celebrate Passover.

The discussions, experiences, and opportunities I have been a part of throughout my Judaic classes are all moments I don't take for granted. These are all moments that have been critical to my understanding of what it means to be a citizen of the world, but more importantly a Jewish adult; someone who recognizes the importance of perspective, conversation, caring for one another, and repairing the world.

Erika Ruin

During my education at Denver Jewish Day School, I had the opportunity to study Judaism. From learning youthful stories from the Torah and the importance of holidays in the

Lower Division to studying Biblical writings and dissecting the details of Judaic texts in the Upper Division, I enjoyed learning about the history of *my* people. Each Judaic class has taught me parts of a whole story. The beginning of mankind with Adam and Eve up to today and the challenges the Jewish people face with anti-Semitism have enticed me to keep learning more and more. Therefore, throughout my high school education, I decided to progress my Judaic knowledge and took various courses, including honors classes, to receive a higher Judaic education, and my work ethic was exemplary enough to be in an honors class. My Jewish education has meant learning about my people's history, which makes me appreciate being Jewish. The challenges previous generations faced and the guidance they sought through G-d are inspiring and give me hope when I am going through my difficulties.

The Judaic classes offered at DJDS are unique to our school because their nature allows for close relationships with students and teachers. Even though classes are already small, the smaller Judaic classes are significant because they allow students to build the confidence to share what's on their minds and allow the class to study more material. During the first semester of my freshman year, my core class was Honors Five Megillot. In this class, we dove deep into the five Megillot in the Tanakh. My favorite book was The Song of Songs because we did a project with it, presenting our favorite Biblical songs. I chose "By the Grace of G-d" by Katy Perry. While it is a Christian song, I connected it to the 10 Commandments. A lyric references a Biblical quote about the truth setting people free. This relates to one of the 10 Commandments, אמת (Amet-Truth). This is an important commandment because in order to be an honorable person you have to be truthful.

I selected the Jewish Lifecycle for my options class, which has impacted me the most. It left an impression on me because we learned about the attributes and traditions performed in Jewish customs, beginning with the first mitzvah, of being fruitful and having many children. From there, we studied Brit Milah, adolescence, Bar/Bat Mitzvah, and marriage, including the Ketubah, and ended the semester with death. We discussed the Jewish customs with each topic and learned about specific aspects I had yet to learn of. It was fascinating for me. For instance, it is a Jewish custom that after someone passes away the body has to be put through Taharah, and we learned the steps of it. The most interesting part was learning that in Colorado, Jews are smeared with a raw egg, symbolizing the circle of life. Additionally, I learned customs performed at a wedding, such as a Tish and a Bedeken. Material from this class stuck with me because although I grew up in a Jewish family, we did not follow all of the customs. I want to change that. I wish to one day raise my kids with these Jewish customs. This class taught me the foundations for that. I am very grateful and appreciative of learning this. I wish to continue these traditions because my role is to pass them down to keep Judaism alive.

My Jewish education also taught me the correct history to differentiate propaganda from the truth. For instance, in my Israel Seminar class, I learned about wars I hadn't heard of before. I always heard of the conflicts between Jews and Muslims in the land of Israel; however, we explored the actual nuances. Now, I can correct those who say inaccurate information about the land of Israel, if necessary, in college. During my freshman year of high school, anti-Semitism

was around; sitting in the classroom learning about how to deal with intense hate, when never having experienced it, I found it pointless going to the Stand With Us programs at school. Looking back at this, now in my senior year, I see that it was necessary because history repeats itself, and with the current spike of anti-Semitism, this learning taught me the foundations that I need to succeed and be proud as a Jew in college and beyond. One person can make a difference, and I can create a generation that embodies the values of Judaism that DJDS offers.

At DJDS, the Divrei Chaim are incorporated into our education, and I will also take them into adulthood. These values are the foundation of living a righteous life. It is essential to understand the five principles. To succeed in life, I must have יושר (Yosher - Integrity); whether it's with school work, in my profession, or even in relationships, integrity builds trust. Although I grew up with my parents embodying חסד (Chesed - Kindness) in me, the Torah teachings I learned at school justified the importance of kindness, not because "if you're a kind person, G-d will love you," but because of the hurt caused to others by not being kind. In my Tzedek Seminar class, I learned that the Torah even says that acts of kindness are better than charity. Since charity can only be performed with money while acts of kindness can be from the actions of the person, kindness is for everyone, charity is just for the poor, and kindness can be done for the deceased, while charity is just for those alive.

It is necessary to have סקרנות (Sakranut - Curiosity) in life because once curiosity stops, life ends. I am curious not just in my core classes but also in my Judaic classes. For me, the curiosity about Judaism originated around customs and traditions. Especially in my Hassidut class, we discovered Jewish thought by looking at the Torah's text, dissecting its meaning, and then applying it to our lives. Torah portions and Rashi's commentary on them did not always make sense. But my curiosity in learning more helped me to seek out answers so I could better understand. Additionally, we discussed Jewish laws and how they would apply to legal situations. Writing weekly D'verei Torah helped me reflect on myself and my week. This class impacted me because often, we discussed heavy topics about the true meaning of life, religion, and G-d. Emotionally, it was not easy; however, it did get me to think, and even today, when making tough life choices, I go back to think about life and my purpose on earth. DJDS is unique because of the Jewish קהילה (Kehilah - Community) it creates. This has been my only source of a significant, welcoming Jewish association, and I will forever remember to be grateful for this community.

Being part of this larger, welcoming Jewish community has solidified my decision to continue being Jewish and to make sure that my children and my family have both Jewishness and Jewish community in their lives. These values combined create a תכלית (Tachlit - Purpose) in life. I still haven't found my life purpose; however, I have realized that I must educate myself on Judaism and Israel to spread awareness and protect the Jewish community. My Denver Jewish Day School education has taught me a lot; one person can make a difference, and especially today, that is necessary. So, as I embark on my journey to college, I will take my teachings from Judaic classes, the Divrei Chaim vales, and the beautiful relationships I have built with the teachers into adulthood as I expand and preserve my Jewish community.

Mia Wexler

As I reflect on my time at Denver Jewish Day School from being a shy kindergartner to becoming a confident high schooler, it has become apparent that the education I received has been more than academics, rather it has been an exploration of my Jewish identity, values, and community, shaping me into the person I am today and influencing my future.

During my time at DJDS, the importance of a Jewish identity has been deeply instilled in me. While I have always been proud to be Jewish, it wasn't until I advanced through the Upper Division that I truly understood what my personal Jewish identity meant. This understanding was enriched by classes such as Mitzvot of Devarim and the Book of Kings, which provided a deep understanding of the Torah, Jewish laws, and stories passed down through generations. These courses not only connected me to my family's history but also helped me appreciate the historical depths of our traditions. The foundation of my Jewish identity lies in the history of my past which I would not be so passionate about without these courses. These classes have allowed me to connect with both my family's history and the history of the Jewish people and have become an important factor in my identity.

From the simple mitzvot to the complex commentaries of scholars, my education has equipped me with valuable skills. Understanding the mitzvot helped me distinguish right from wrong. Although some mitzvot may seem less relevant today, they taught me the importance of careful learning and fueled my curiosity. This intricate study of texts, while essential in class, also created a lifelong skill of interpretation and understanding of our religious narratives.

The importance of traditions in Judaism was another significant theme throughout my education. From learning about why we eat Matzah on Passover in elementary school to learning the proper ways to mourn in "Jewish Ethical Philosophy," the use of traditions is alive

within Denver Jewish Day School. Participating in traditions like the Jenga competition during Color War or the song circle at a Shabbaton not only makes me proud to be a part of these experiences but has also emphasized the role traditions have in fostering a strong, welcoming community. I now am excited for all traditions, honored to be Jewish and to participate in special moments.

The classes I have taken throughout high school have profoundly shaped my interactions with others and influenced my decisions. I strive to embody kindness, curiosity, and passion. Each class has taught me useful skills on how to treat people and be a part of something greater. Denver Jewish Day School has a flourishing community because its students understand that being Jewish provides a unique opportunity to cultivate an environment rooted in Judaism. This community has supported me, made me laugh, challenged me, and will continue to do so as I explore new chapters of my life. When I participated in the Rose Youth Foundation this year, I was able to apply the Jewish values I find most important such as L'dor V'dor (From Generation to Generation), Lo ta'amod al dam rei'echa (Do Not Stand Idly By), and Chesed (Lovingkindness) to address issues within our community.

My education at Denver Jewish Day School has fundamentally shaped who I am today. It has not only allowed me to learn about the history of the Jewish people and connect to my family but has also created an appreciation for traditions. Additionally, I actively incorporate Jewish values into my daily life and am inspired to learn. None of this growth would have been possible without the amazing community that is formed by these experiences. This Jewish community is always ready to lend a helping hand, directly showing what each individual learns in the classroom. I am grateful for the Jewish education I received at Denver Jewish Day School and am committed to applying these experiences in all aspects of my life.

