

**“Tools for Tomorrow”**  
**Graduation Shabbat Service**  
**Rabbi Adam B. Grossman, Temple Israel**  
**May 1, 2009**

Over the course of this past year school year, Sunday evenings would come and go. They were a bridge from the weekend to the rest of the week. Many of you would attend, for whatever reason, an hour and a half at Temple Israel to engage in a discussion with each other and me. Sometimes the conversations were stimulating and other undoubtedly bored you. Yet, as many of you would suggest, the constant of these courses was that I would always play the devil’s advocate, who one might say, argues for the sake of arguing!

A devil’s advocate, however, is more than a habitual arguer. He or she is a person, who forces you to clarify your beliefs and to strengthen your own argument. So now, as you graduate, let me share a little secret, I did not care if you agreed with me or not! Rather, whether you were right or wrong, I hoped that through our conversations you would be better able to articulate what you believe and why you believe it. My goal was to dare you to explore more deeply questions concerning your Judaism such as “what is the meaning of life,” “what role does Israel play in your life,” and “why is Judaism important to you.”

The university will provide you with various tools to solve problems by finding sensible solutions. When you study medicine, you will be taught how to evaluate symptoms to diagnosis someone. When you study law, you examine case studies and legal codes to determine the accuracy of an argument. When you study the arts such as painting or writing, you study the classics, their patterns and ideas, in order to gain a more complete artistic repertoire. Yet, no matter how well prepared students are, when they leave the classroom, solutions to problems are not always straightforward. For example, as a doctor what will you do with the first patient who comes to you with perplexing symptoms? As a lawyer what will you do when a case is more complicated than the previously studied precedent? And as an artist, what happens when creating a new classic becomes more difficult than envisioned? In the same regards, when answers to life’s questions are not so clear-cut, what will you do and where will you turn?

Over the last four years of high school, we at Temple have striven to provide you with the means to aid in this endeavor. By becoming teachers in our religious school, you modeled to the younger students your desire to be at Temple, even when you did not have to be. As leaders of MeFTY and BBYO, you gained self-confidence and leadership experience that is apparent not only to us, but also to those congressman and aides in Washington D.C., who commented on each of your poise. The confirmation trip to New York, the junior and senior class trip to D.C., a trip to Israel, or a summer at camp each provided a different perspective of what Judaism can be beyond the walls of Temple Israel. All of these Jewish experiences have no doubt laid a firm foundation for you. However, no matter what we have provided, facing the difficult questions about life and Judaism are completely up to you.

Commencement is not an ending, but rather a beginning. It starts a new chapter in your life in which parents play a more distant part and each of you takes a much more active role in your decision-making process and the repercussions of your decisions. You choose when and if to attend class, when and if to study, when and if you will come home at night, and when and if you will engage in Jewish experiences outside this place, your Jewish home.

So as you look back at our Sunday evening discussions, I hope the “arguments” challenged you to become more confident to express your Jewish beliefs. For example, this past Sunday’s class, as we discussed whether a person needed to believe in God to be Jewish, one of you powerfully stated, “Just because I do not believe in God it does not take away from my Judaism. Judaism is the source for my social justice work.” The strength in this statement is not the ability to cause a clash of opinions, but rather the clarity and self-assurance of these convictions.

So as you move forward to college and beyond, may the tools from Temple Israel provide comfort to you in being a Reform Jew. May you always find Temple Israel a home and each of us a resource for you as questions arise in your continued journey. And may you continue to seek the answer to the question - what do I believe!