

Blog by J-Teen Leader, Chloe Beal

The Innocence of Judaism

Every Thursday, I eagerly await my job as an assistant teacher at my local temple. I get there 30 minutes early to go and set up the classroom alongside the teacher. When the children arrive, I wait by the door, making sure each boy has a kippah on before they enter the room. Sometimes they say, "Morah Chloe, I brought my own today!" When I see these children every week, my faith and respect for my religion increases exponentially. Making paper shofars, cardboard Torahs, and singing children's songs every week has shaped how I view my religion and has taught me the beauty and innocence of Judaism.

However, there is always an aspect of teaching these kids that saddens me. Right now, they are blissfully unaware and chronically positive as they eat their challah and drink their grape juice. They sing songs of love and siblinghood and, even as young children, seem to understand that Judaism is a beautiful thing. One little girl came up to me, telling me how lucky she felt to be making a paper Torah that week. I asked her why, and she told me that now she could have a little piece of Hebrew school to take home with her, to get her by until the next week. Hebrew school is an invaluable part of a young child's life that teaches them what a wonderful and strong community they have, and will continue to have for the rest of their lives.

But one day, these happy children will enter a world full of hatred. The religion that they had valued their whole life will be criticized by those who don't understand. They will be told that Jewish people are bad and that their traditions are silly. They will become victims of antisemitic speech as it becomes more and more common as social media usage grows. "Morah Chloe, why are there so many police cars outside of the temple?" How could you possibly explain to 5-year-olds that because of the conflict in Israel, a terrorist group has called for the elimination of all the Jews? How could you look them in the eyes and explain to them that they are in imminent danger, simply because of their religion? How could you explain to a child that people all around the world dislike Jews, and therefore we need several police cars surrounding us at all times? It's despicable that we even have to ask ourselves these questions, and that we have to imagine the looks on their faces when they discover the truth. When they discover that not everyone sees the beauty in Judaism like they do.

But when that day comes, when they learn about what is happening in the world, I know that they will be O.K. My students are resilient, strong, and can fight the hatred ahead of them. I know that they will be standing with me, using their loud voices to scream against the evils of our world. I have full confidence that the community created by Hebrew school is one that will save us from the vileness of the world.

Chloe Beal is an 11th grade student living in Rye Brook, New York. In her free time, she enjoys doing Model UN with her school.