

SPEECH - MAIA WEISSMAN - YOUTH OF THE YEAR - MARCH 2024

Good Afternoon! My name is Maia Weissman. Today, I represent Beth Hillel Bnai Emunah as their 2024, or 5784, Youth of the Year.

I am truly humbled to be nominated for this award. I have been connected to this synagogue and a part of the community at Beth Hillel for all 15 years of my life. It means so much to me to be recognized by our community. BHBE has always been a special place for me growing up, from when I was just three years old singing Ein Keloheinu with Tot Shabbat, holding the Rabbi's hand on the bimah, to my first day of Hebrew school at BHBE, and most recently to my Bat Mitzvah. During my years at BHBE, I have had opportunities to give back, such as leading Tot Shabbat services on zoom during COVID, volunteering at the Purim carnival, and helping with other special events. Now, I give back through my work as a madricha, assisting BHBE Academy students with art projects that connect artistic endeavors to Jewish topics and help enrich the education of kids who look up to me as a role model.

With the strong base BHBE has provided me, I have begun to get more involved in the Jewish community. For many years, I attended Jewish sleepaway camp where I was able to learn and embrace my Jewish identity away from home. During Spring of my eighth grade year, I had the privilege to visit Israel with the ISRAEL NOW program. Visiting Israel was truly enlightening and made me feel even more connected to the wider Jewish Community. Last year, I was involved in two full-year volunteer committees at the JCC, Seed613 and the Teen Mental Health Committee. When I was on Seed613, I learned how to start my own business and non-profit organization with other Jewish

teens, as well as important marketing, interviewing, and research strategies that will help me for the rest of my life, especially when I'm looking for real jobs when I'm older. I am also currently involved in the JCC teen mental health committee, which researches and develops various ways for Jewish teens struggling with mental health to be able to find help and also spread awareness throughout the wider community.

Another way I connect with other teenagers over mental health is by volunteering with a program called Teen Talk. The program is based in Los Angeles, and is sponsored by Jewish Big Brothers and Big Sisters. Twice a month, I am able to connect with kids my age all over the country who are struggling with their mental health or just need someone to talk to. My job is simply to be there for them and talk to them, offering my best words of understanding and encouragement. Through Teen Talk, I know I have made a real difference in these teenager's lives, and it is one of the most meaningful things I do.

There are many people who I would like to acknowledge and thank who helped me get to this moment. I thank my father and mother for continuously implementing positive Judaism in my family and pushing me to find and engage in activities about which I am passionate. I would like to thank my brothers, who have always gone with me to synagogue, and my aunts who also helped with my Jewish learning. I would also like to acknowledge my grandparents, Sue and Ed Weissman, who could not attend today, and my late grandparents, Caroline and Gordon Goldberg. Lastly, I wanted to thank everyone at BHBE, Rabbi Crane, Cantor Roytman, the Men's Club, Morah Hedva, BHBE President Cynthia Learner, Jessica Litman, and everyone from my BHBE community who is here today.

It was so special for me when I was informed of my nomination by Steve Bucksbaum, president of the BHBE Men's Club. This is meaningful to me, and it truly feels incredible to be recognized by my community as a youth representing my temple. Thank you for this fantastic honor. AM YISRAEL CHAI