

During Rosh Hashanah last year, Rabbi Greenstein's sermon on 'Growing Older, Not Getting Older' talked about the challenges Judaism faces in remaining relevant to everyone. Specifically addressing Temple Israel's youth, he correctly pointed out that being a teenager is tough and finding meaningful time to engage in Judaism is even more difficult. "Our youth," he said "no longer go to one camp or a few high schools. We need to reach each and every one of them where they are and make Temple what it is supposed to be – their spiritual home."

My daughter was not even a year old when I heard this sermon. Rabbi Greenstein's words made me reflect upon the type of spiritual home in which I want my daughter, Tovah, to grow up. And then it came to me – why would I expect someone else to teach my child about the beauties and complexities of Judaism? I had been teaching for five years and was well aware of expectations parents put on educators and leaders. It did not seem right that I would expect Temple Israel to provide a certain type of education for Tovah without me being a key player.

I was at a very good place in my life – a beautiful and healthy daughter and an incredible husband. I was Chair of the Special Education Department at my high school and I was teaching Philosophy and Religious Study courses the University of Memphis. But something was missing, so I reached out to Rabbi Micah to see how I could be involved in Temple.

And here I am now - delighted to be the Director of Teen Engagement for Temple Israel. I have a deep passion for working with the youth and I believe that teenagers specifically play a unique role in building a community. My desire is to bring the programs and services that the teens and their parents want to see at Temple. This is our opportunity to build robust and meaningful connections across all ages and backgrounds at Temple, and I feel incredibly honored to be a part of this.

With Rosh Hashanah soon approaching I feel that Rabbi Micah's hope from last year has come to fruition. Soon we will be a community that is 'growing old,' as opposed to a congregation who is 'getting older.' We will develop programs that the youth and their families want to be a part of; teens will be excited to spend their Sundays at Temple. Most importantly though, we will help our youth become contributing Jews to our society. There is a phrase found in the Mishnah, *mip'nei tikkun ha-olam*; it translates as "for the sake of repairing the world." We cannot wait to heal our world and we must have our teens be a part of this.

Again, thank you for this wonderful opportunity to work with the teens. I cannot wait to meet each and every teenager and family who is affiliated with Temple Israel.

Shabbat Shalom,

Julie Fortune