



SoCalJSS Newsletter

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January Events Provide Opportunities

Two events towards the end of January run by Southern California Jewish Student Services (SoCalJSS) provided opportunities for meeting other area students and other young Jews in the area and to enhance their Jewish identities.

The first of these two events was the inaugural Torah Winter Learning Event (TWLE), held 19-21 January, and generously sponsored by Deborah & Dr. Alan Gold. The TWLE was held towards the end of Winter Vacation for students at CSU-Long Beach & CSU-Fullerton, a good time for holding such a program. It was an opportunity for young Jews in the area to come together for over a day and a half to engage in serious discussion and text study of the Jewish tradition, primarily focusing on the Ten Commandments.



Student leaders from Hillel groups at universities in Long Beach and Orange County came together to build their groups on Sunday 23 January at the second SoCal Area-Wide Hillel Leadership Gathering

The second of these two events was the second SoCal Area-Wide Hillel Leadership Gathering, which was partly supported through a grant from the Rose Project of Jewish Federation & Family Services, Orange County and co-produced

and further supported by Orange County Hillel & Beach Hillel. Replicating the success of the first such area-wide Hillel leadership gathering in August, this one was held on Sunday 23 January at Chapman University, with sixteen student leaders from Hillel groups from four different universities. The students who attended were enriched through various sessions and activities to help them help their Hillel groups as well as being able to meet other Hillel student leaders in the area.

On the following pages inside, attendees at these events share their experiences.

THIS ISSUE OF THE SOCALJSS NEWSLETTER IS BEING SPONSORED BY RABBI MAURICE, REBECCA, HELEN & RAMI APPELBAUM IN HONOR OF RABBI DREW & RACHEL FOR ALL THE HARD WORK THEY ARE DOING FOR THE JEWISH COMMUNITY.



Rabbi Drew teaching students during the inaugural Torah Winter Learning Event in Long Beach

First Torah Winter Learning Event a Success

Laura Wiley

Whenever people ask me, “Wait, so you’re Jewish?” my response is always the same. “Oh, I’m super Jewish.” To which they laugh. And, of course, I have to explain myself because I’m not wearing a kippah or a talit or tzitzit. Not that I would be wearing the latter because I’m female, but regardless I’m wearing a low-cut V-neck and a pair of jeans, so clearly I’m not in the more religious sects. When I say ‘super Jewish’ I mean that I have spent my life immersed in the Jewish culture and community.

I went to Jewish summer camps as a young girl, then became involved in the Bureau of Jewish Education of Orange County and moved up through their programming. At my temple, I used to help out with Sunday School classes as well as play piano at services and to accompany the junior choir. In college, I became very involved with Beach Hillel as president and also began volunteering with the Alpert JCC. One of the things I’ve learned from being involved with Jews from so many walks of life is that it is really difficult to get young Jews to pay attention when the subject is Torah.

Jews in their twenties love going to Shabbat dinners or Shabbatons or any holiday party where there is drinking involved, but the second “learning” is mentioned, people sprint for the door. Of course, there are always those that love to talk about Torah all night, but that group is a tad smaller than those at the Shabbat table hoping they’ll find a potential candidate for schmoozing or dating.

So how do you get them interested in Torah? This is what Rabbi Drew Kaplan from Southern California Jewish Student Services (SoCalJSS) is working on. He created a new event, the Inaugural Torah Winter Learning Event (TWLE), to inspire students and young professionals to come out and socialize and learn about Torah. Starting on January 19th and finishing on the 21st, Rabbi Drew led a series of mini-events to bring in people who were interested in learning... and

interested in free food. It also didn’t hurt that one of the events was called “Beer, Bible, and Baked Goods.” I mean, if you can’t get people by putting

beer in the title I don’t know how else you get them somewhere! Events ranged from a Tu b’Shevat Seder to a road trip to LA for Jeff’s sausages. All the events were centered around a theme, the Ten Commandments.



Rabbi Drew discussing lying at the Beer, Bible, and Baked Goods event, as part of the inaugural TWLE

“The idea behind selecting the topic of the Ten Commandments for TWLE 2011 was simply that it occurred during that week’s Torah portion,” says Rabbi Drew. “As such a significant topic as the Ten Commandments is, there is seldom an opportunity to go through them in-depth for young Jewish adults.” At

the “Beer, Bible, and Baked Goods” event, I remember Rabbi Drew asked us what the Ten Commandments were in order and, after many confused looks and some debating, we finally got the list down. It’s surprising that something so elementary can still be foggy for many of us. Having an event like this is important because Torah can be overwhelming when you’ve been away from it for a while. It’s nice to have a refresher course in the basics.

“I learned a lot about the Ten Commandments and met a lot of interesting people,” says Reina Victoria, a CSUF alum, who went up to LA with Rabbi Drew for Jeff’s sausages. “I enjoyed good food and interesting conversation and, of course, a yummy pastrami burger.... Rabbi Drew and Rachel are warm and welcoming, and I felt very much at home.”

The goal is not just to put butts in the seats, but rather to inspire people to want to learn. The hope is that by making these events interesting, people will want to further their knowledge about their own heritage. Of course, it’s hard to get college students to learn about something when there’s no credit involved, which is why Rabbi Drew tries to make the discussion fun and casual. Another great way he incorporates this element is by having guest speakers who come and give stories of personal application to these topics.

I personally enjoyed the Friday morning event at the Alpert JCC where we ate Krispy Kremes and talked about the fourth commandment, keeping Shabbat. We had a wonderful speaker, Rabbi

Dov Fischer, who talked about his
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Students in the area got to engage seriously with Jewish texts at the TWLE



Rabbi Dov Fischer spoke twice at the inaugural TWLE

Hillel Leadership Gathering: Another Success

Jenna Scheier

At the SoCal Area Wide Hillel Leadership Gathering, students met at Chapman University to learn not only what it means to be a leader, but also how they as student board leaders can become better Hillel leaders. The program, run by Southern California Jewish Student Services (SoCalJSS) in partnership with Orange County Hillel and Long Beach Hillel, served to prepare each school's Hillel group for the upcoming semester while

simultaneously connecting all of the participating Hillels to create an opportunity to learn from each other. "You could see the students becoming empowered to make a change on their campuses as a result of the activities they participated in," said Sarah Austin, UCI Hillel's programming associate.

Received well by the students, the event proved beneficial as Fullerton student David Rosen describes, "I enjoyed discovering leadership styles and discovering which abilities I need to work on." Starting with a fun, hands-on activity, as the day progressed; students identified and tackled difficulties from the previous semesters.

Starting off with an activity called "Building a Future for Hillel", led by Megan Kanofsky and Sarah Austin of Orange County Hillel, the program got students involved meeting others and working together. The project allowed the students to begin thinking of the Hillel they would like



Students taking part in the "Building a Future for Hillel" activity

to see and the outcome resulted in an interesting view for the students. At the end of the first activity, it was very clear that each individual in the room had their own leadership qualities; however, it was not until the second activity that these qualities were identified.

Rabbi Shmuly Yanklowitz ran the second program, which consisted of reading an excerpt from the Talmud,



Rabbi Shmuly Yanklowitz led the Jewish text-study session at the leadership gathering, which included activities to think about different personalities



Students from Hillels at universities in Orange County and Long Beach came together at the second SoCal Area-Wide Hillel Leadership Gathering

activities throughout the day were enjoyable, this last activity seemed to really hit home for many of the students I interviewed. Separating the room into four

types of leadership qualities, which included empathy, analysis, vision and action, Rabbi Shmuly had the participants choose the quality that most described the individual as well as the one that the individual had most difficulty with. Rabbi Shmuly brought to light the idea that being a leader can be carried out differently

by different people and that a combination of these attributes within numerous people can describe a well-rounded team.

Jordan Fruchtman, executive director of Orange County Hillel, led a discussion of difficulties Hillel leaders in the area had been encountering so far in the year. This program was found to be very helpful as one student in a



Jordan Fruchtman leading a discussion on issues area Hillels were having. This was appreciated as a helpful session since, as one student put it, "we were discussing issues that we had chosen and figuring out how to remedy them."

follow-up survey put it, "we got a chance to discuss the problems we are having at our various Hillels. It

was nice to know that we're not the only Hillel that has some problems! Also, we were able to

bounce ideas off each other which is always helpful."

The program finished with a "Jewish Life After College" discussion led a by Parker Weinthal, a Moishe House resident, who spoke on not only social options for Jewish



Parker Weinthal leading a discussion on "Jewish Life After College"

young adults after college, but also on how Moishe House plans out their programming.

Leaving with a better understanding of what it means to be a leader and semester goals of the different university Hillels working together as well as programs for individual Hillel's, the students agreed that the program had been helpful. As Rachel Kaplan, Beach Hillel's director said, "It gave students the opportunity to work and think together with students from other areas and to build relationships throughout the semester."

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relationship with his family and how it was strengthened through Shabbat. He also allowed us to share our background with the event and what it meant to us. Being one of those people who are resistant to learn about Torah, I enjoyed the fact that he cleverly made Torah the subtext. It's always fun to learn when you don't know you're doing it!

Rabbi Fischer also spoke on Thursday afternoon on American & Jewish Law, as he is a lawyer and a rabbi. Another speaker was Chaya Leah Sufrin, who lead a discussion on the first three commandments and the fifth, honoring one's mother and father.

Rabbi Drew also brought in Rabbi Shmuly Yanklowitz to lead a discussion on Judaism & Vegetarianism over lunch on Thursday. "It was a really good lecture and, as a vegetarian, I really enjoyed learning about the place of vegetarianism in Judaism," says CSULB student Nitzan Harel who attended the Judaism & Vegetarianism event. "I think Rabbi Shmuly is a fantastic speaker and I like how he fit vegetarianism and Judaism together. It was interesting for me to meet a Rabbi who is vegetarian, since I had never met one before (I didn't know they existed ☺)."

The best part of having an event like this with so many mini-events mixed in is that there's something for everyone. Through incorporating so many different approaches Rabbi Drew was able to attract a variety of college students and young professionals, including some non-Jews! "The idea of having TWLE 2011," says Rabbi Drew, "was meeting more and more students who were earnestly interested in studying our Jewish heritage and holding it during winter break while nothing much else is going on for them." After a successful run, he will no doubt see an even bigger turnout for the next Torah Learning event.

Ten Commandments at Poly



Squeezed between winter vacation and final exams, Rabbi Drew spoke about the Ten Commandments to the Jewish Club at Long Beach Polytechnic High School on January 19th.

Tu b'Shevat Seder & Planting



On January 19th, a Tu b'Shevat Seder & planting evening were held. A joint program between Beach Hillel and SoCalJSS, the program launched Beach Hillel's programming for the spring semester and also served as the kick-off event for SoCalJSS' inaugural Torah Winter Learning Event.



Rabbi Shmuly Yanklowitz leading a lunchtime discussion on Judaism and Vegetarianism as part of the inaugural TWLE

The SoCalJSS Newsletter is a monthly publication of Southern California Jewish Student Services (SoCalJSS), an enterprise of Beth El Synagogue, a synagogue without walls, generously funded by Allen & Deanna Alevy. SoCalJSS's mission is to facilitate Jewish living and learning, and engaging with Jewish students in Southern California. SoCalJSS provides the only rabbi for Jewish students at California State University (CSU), Long Beach and for Long Beach Polytechnic High School's Jewish Club, as well as the primary rabbi with the Hillel at CSU-Fullerton. Other universities in Southern California served by SoCalJSS, as well, include (Chapman University, CSU-San Bernardino, UC-Irvine, UC-Riverside, and University of Redlands) and students at many area community colleges. Tax-deductible donations to support the work of SoCalJSS can be made out to 'Beth El Synagogue' and mailed to Rabbi Drew, 3801 E. Willow Street, Long Beach, CA 90815. Rabbi Drew Kaplan can be emailed at RabbiDrew@SoCalJSS.org.