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Final Sinai Scholars Reflection

Being a part of the Sinai program has been an extremely positive experience and I'm grateful for the opportunity to partake in it. The unique program has enabled me with the capacity to surround myself with other Jewish teenagers of varying background and levels of Jewish identity to gain new perspectives and learn how I can intricate Judaism back into my life.

I grew up at a conservative temple, went to Hebrew School through high school, went to day care at our Jewish Community Center, a Jewish camp in the summer, and engaged in teenage activities such as BBYO. I still remember for my Hebrew School confirmation, our Rabbi had us write and read out loud our personal interpretation of Daniel Pearl's last words, "I am Jewish." My essay back then consisted of my social identity rather than the religious aspects. Partaking in the Sinai Program has enabled me to look at the religious side of Judaism and how I'm still able to relate it to my life. I know my morals, personality, and intentions will stay true to my identity as they align with my memories of my Jewish experiences and family, but there is a line between experience and acting. I believe I've experienced Judaism and have a secure interpretation, but the Sinai program has now shown me that I need to take the next step and act with Judaism. Whether that being making small choices such as grabbing the kosher brand item rather than the non-kosher at a grocery store, or maybe not buying the latest video camera to respect others' privacy, or larger ones like not using my phone on Shabbat or marrying another Jew, these choices require action. My instructor and peers have

creatively collaborated to explore the different options to intricate the religious aspects of Judaism into our chaotic lives to continue the generational lineage of what it means to be religious. Walking away from this program, I've realized what it means to be Jewish is more than a Jewish identity and choices, but they are intertwined. All of my actions, good or bad, are Jewish actions and who I am is the representation of my religion to the rest of the world. I am Jewish and Judaism is defined by me.

I had the unique experience that almost my entire Sinai classmates had just come back with me from Israel on Birthright. We had all just experienced being in the Holy Land on the life-changing event together and we decided we wanted to continue our journey with Judaism and the Sinai Scholars program was an excellent next step. We were able to come to class with the Holy land, sites, cities, people, and experiences fresh in our mind. It made the class extremely relatable and present in our lives. Personally, Birthright was a changing point in my life where I came back open and ready to absorb knowledge and question life. Our instructor definitely delivered what I was hoping to gain from this program. She continuously pushed our minds, fed us information, drew out questions we have never even considered before, and helped us form new perspectives. Although I learned a great deal from the program and different topics of each class, the most important thing I learned was probably that you can still make the world a better place. Promoting Judaism just meant by doing whatever you can offer at your time in life. We learned that some is better than none and our history, lifestyle, and relationships are making an impact on the world. We can still be a "good" Jew and not keep Shabbat or not keep

Kosher. When our instructor explained this aspect, I felt a burden of responsibility lift off my shoulder. I didn't have to disappoint my ancestors and G-d, because I couldn't disappoint them. I just had to do whatever I could in each stage of my life.

One of the underrated advantages that the Sinai program gave me, and my peers, was a supportive community and a place where I know I'll always be welcomed. School has many pros and cons, and when the cons get a little heavy and the stress takes a toll, I know I can always get away and have a talk with the Chabad house. The Sinai program brought me to a place where I wouldn't have gone on my own, as my friends and I usually go to instead Hillel. Before Sinai, I always thought I was choosing between Hillel and Chabad, but in reality it's most beneficial to gain perspectives from both and attend services and events at both locations. It's been a great way to meet new people, get to know our instructor outside of the classroom environment, and make it a part of my college experience.

Moving forward, I aim to continue taking steps to search for knowledge and enhance my life by adding important aspects, such as Judaism, into it. Whether it be by taking the next program offered by Sinai Scholars, or returning to Israel, I'm at a point in my life where I can still shape who I am, and the person I want to be definitely involves Judaism in some form. I'm grateful for the opportunities and especially Sinai Scholars for giving me the opportunity to take the first steps as it is always the hardest. I hope one day that I'll be able to raise my children with the same open mindedness, love, and pride that comes with being Jewish. Judaism is a life-long commitment and I've been fortunate enough to have a great foundation, but

now it's up to me to create my future. No matter what the definition, as I'm sure it will continuously change throughout my life, I know that I am Jewish.