

ISJL E-NEWS

EDUCATION



WHEN YOU BUILD IT...



In 1989, Universal Pictures released a very successful film with one of the top movie quotes of all time. Kevin Costner starred as Ray Kinsella, an Iowa farmer who hears a voice speak to him. "If you build it, he will come." In the end, Ray builds a magical baseball field and gets to experience an emotional journey that connects him to his father, as well as gives insight into his own role as a Dad. Ray has a home to call his own, so a baseball field in the middle of nowhere feels superfluous. The phrasing of the famous quote says, "if you build it," reflects this as a conditional clause showing no obligation on the part of Ray.



Unlike this conditional phrase, the grammar for this month's newsletter sponsor, is not conditional. In fact, Tivnu is imperative. As their website shows, Tivnu means "Build!" in Hebrew. It is the second person plural, telling us "hey! All of you! Build!" It reflects an obligation for all of us to work toward justice in all of our communities. Tivnu just so happens to have a specific model for doing this sort of building. Located in Portland, Oregon, Tivnu offers an array of gap-year learning opportunities. Because of their mission, we've arranged the newsletter around different ways to build and engage with justice issues in your community. We hope you find some inspirational and informative articles contained within that will help you turn a place as special as the *Field of Dreams* into reality.

Rachel Stern, ISJL Director of Education
 Rabbi Matt Dreffin, ISJL Assistant Director of Education



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ALTERNATIVE SPRING BREAKS

by Bethany Berger, 1st Year ISJL Education Fellow

The phrase “spring break” brings to mind sunny beaches, bathing suits, and a week of care-free fun. But, a lot of students choose to do something different with their mid-semester breaks. Alternative spring breaks are becoming more and more popular in the Jewish world. These expeditions take young Jews to different parts of the world to experience Jewish life different from what they are used to. Some of these trips even combine Jewish learning with service learning. Service learning is defined as learning that occurs through critical thinking and personal reflection while encouraging a heightened sense of community, civic engagement, and personal responsibility.

Alternative spring break trips take a group of young Jews on an excursion to learn about Jewish history in other parts of the world. However, they also engage the groups in *tikun olam* (reparation of the world), making the experience more meaningful than just touring around a new city. These trips usually find partners, specifically local grassroots organizations with projects that need extra hands. Participants do anything from nailing

boards while building a home to making copies and filing paperwork in an office. Volunteers supply labor and, in return, they are lucky enough to learn about the work and goals of these establishments. They are also privileged to meet and learn from the people who established and run these organizations. After a day of hard work, participants meet with local Jews in the areas to learn from them about the history of their Jewish community.

A great example of a trip like this is what the ISJL has been doing by partnering with Hillels. We have been helping university groups come to the Mississippi Delta to learn about Southern Jewish History and to work with an organization called Mississippians Engaged in Greener Agriculture (MEGA). Last year, I was lucky enough to come on one of these trips and, on a recent visit to Greenville, Mississippi, I was able to connect with a group from the University of Virginia who had just completed a similar itinerary. While a trip to the Mississippi Delta is not as flashy as trips to places like Bulgaria, Argentina, and Israel, there was

something special about spending time in a part of the country I had never been to before. Domestic service learning made me feel more connected to the people I was meeting. Additionally, the American Southern Jewish narrative was something with which I was familiar. I felt connected to Southern Jews because, like them, I was the only Jew in my school growing up.

It is amazing how much growth and knowledge a person can acquire one week spent outside of their comfort zone. Alternative spring break trips are a great way to see if a gap year program is the right choice for you or your child. They give you a taste of what it might be like to dedicate your life to *tikun olam*.



AN ALTER-NATE VIEW: Building With Intention

by Leah Apothaker and Abby Klionsky, 1st Year ISJL Education Fellows

With all the talk of building in this issue, we want to give you a glimpse of where building appears in the *TaNakh*. Most of the instances of the word “build” are in reference to either building houses, like Tivnu does, or building altars. At first glance, it might seem that an altar serves only ritual purposes. But certain verses of *TaNakh* tell a different story.

Take, for instance, a verse from the Torah portion *mish'patim* (laws) in the book of Exodus. Earlier in the *parashah* (portion), we are given a collection of laws that are meant to supplement the Ten Commandments given in the previous week's portion. Included in *mish'patim* is a list of laws with the following specification: “And if you make for Me an altar of stones, do not build it of hewn stones; for by wielding your tool upon them you have profaned them” (Exodus 20:22).^a

The word “tool” is important for two reasons. One explanation for the choice of the Hebrew *char'b'chah* (tool) is that it shares a root with the word for sword. Why should we not build an altar using this specific kind of tool? An altar is intended as both a space to gather and a space to honor God, not a place to wield implements of war.

An alternate explanation comes from medieval commentator Rashbam. His understanding of the prohibition is as follows: “...I command you not to use metal tools which could make such engravings [used to represent other deities].”^b For Rashbam, the prohibition is meant as a protection against accidentally defying the second and third commandments-worshiping other deities and creating graven images of God.

These restrictions for building altars can serve as a model for the ways in which we approach other kinds of building, whether construction or community. Just as we are meant to be intentional with the tools that we use to build altars to God, so should we be thoughtful regarding the tools that we ask our communities to employ as we all work to build our modern altars. Our tools must not be violent, they must not be profane, and they must seek to fulfill the commandments entrusted to the Jewish people. Together, we can use those tools to sanctify our contemporary altars, whether they are religious or secular, public or private, social or personal.

Endnotes:

- a) Translation from *JPS Hebrew-English Tanakh*, 2001.
- b) Translation from www.sefaria.org.

THE WORLD WILL BE BUILT FROM LOVE

by Noah Westreich, 1st Year ISJL Education Fellow

Olam chesed yibaneh – the world will be built from love. This inspiring quote can be found in the 89th chapter of Psalms. *Chesed* can be translated many ways: love, grace, graciousness, benevolence. However we interpret the word, the key to the song is *yibaneh*, to build. Whatever you conceive the world to be, it doesn't simply exist without putting a bit of work into it. It must be built. First you individually must find your place. Together with friends and family, you also work to build this world. And if we – all of us – work to build a world

of *chesed*, then God is pleased and we can enjoy the world built from love and blessed by God.

Lex, Leah, and I recorded Rabbi Menachem Creditor's *Olam Chesed Y'baneh* so you can watch it, learn from it, and teach it in your community. The guitar and piano make it more musical, but the song sounds great a cappella, too. Find the words below, and check out the video on YouTube: <https://youtu.be/puYQbkdfR2g>. Leave us a comment!



Olam chesed yibaneh, yai nai nai nai nai nai nai (x4)

I will build this world from love - yai nai nai nai nai nai.

You must build this world from love - yai nai nai nai nai nai.

And, if we build this world from love - yai nai nai nai nai nai.

Then God will build this world from love - yai nai nai nai nai nai.

Olam chesed yibaneh...

TIVNU: BUILDING JUSTICE GAP YEAR PROGRAM in PORTLAND, OREGON

for 17-20 year olds

Tivnu GapYear is 9 months of hands-on, Jewish social justice engagement. Participants live together, create community, discover the Pacific Northwest, and explore connections between Jewish life and social justice with their heads, hands, and hearts.

Build affordable housing with Habitat for Humanity or work hands-on with grassroots groups that align with your interests.

Learn advocacy, leadership, and organizing skills.

Explore contemporary issues from Jewish perspectives.

Engage with local activists and community leaders.

\$1,000 off for participants affiliated with ISJL partnering organizations.
Additional need-based financial aid available.



Contact: info@tivnu.org or 503-232-1864
For more info visit www.tivnu.org

FROM GINGERBREAD HOUSES TO A MORE JUST WORLD

by Nomi Small, Tivnu Participant

The Tivnu Gap Year program opened my eyes beyond what I knew growing up in Newton, Massachusetts and spending all of my education through high school in day school. Before winter break, I went to three holiday parties that exemplify a lot of what I've learned this year outside the classroom.

Guest.

There is another religious gap year program in Portland, geared towards post-college Quakers. Tivnu met previously with the Quaker Voluntary Service for a homelessness awareness walk, and they were kind enough to invite us to their holiday party. They had a mistletoe hanging in a doorway, a Christmas tree they'd decorated together, and even Baby Jesus gingerbread cookies. I spent thirteen years of my life attending day school and not once had I ever been to a real Christmas party.

I ended up having a great conversation with two of a QVS participant's friends. The three of them had bonded over attending international schools in multiple countries and therefore struggling to have an affinity or allegiance to a particular culture. Tivnu has introduced me to the melting pot of Portland. I've met first generation immigrants from Latin America, a student from South Africa, and individuals seeking refuge from the law in other states.

Volunteer.

I intern at Portland Homeless Family Solutions. PHFS runs a day shelter and a night shelter where they offer food, shelter, and housing assistance to families. One Tuesday afternoon after school, PHFS hosted a holiday party for their guests and other homeless families in the community.

I arrived early and helped decorate the space.

The families started arriving, including a new family that had just joined the shelter (who I had met the previous day during my shift). Their two oldest girls, Khaleesiya and Azalea, ran over to me and gave me a big hug. "Nomi! We've missed you!" they exclaimed. They quickly dragged me over to their table so that I could start helping them with their gingerbread house.

Between their mother, her girlfriend, and me, we tried to build a gingerbread house for each of their daughters to decorate. As this was my first time building a gingerbread house, I reached for the easiest looking kit and was successfully able to piece it together after a little wobbling. The poor mother had a kit that just didn't want to fit. She spent a good forty-five minutes fighting the gingerbread house. Finally she turned to Khaleesiya and said, "Why don't you go and help your sister decorate hers?" Khaleesiya obliged, and together they worked on the house that I had built. After looking at her eldest daughters and smiling, the mother turned to me and said, "God bless you, Nomi. At least my daughters have one house to work on."

I didn't know what to say. How do you explain how you feel when you've given an edible house to children who don't have a real one?

Host.

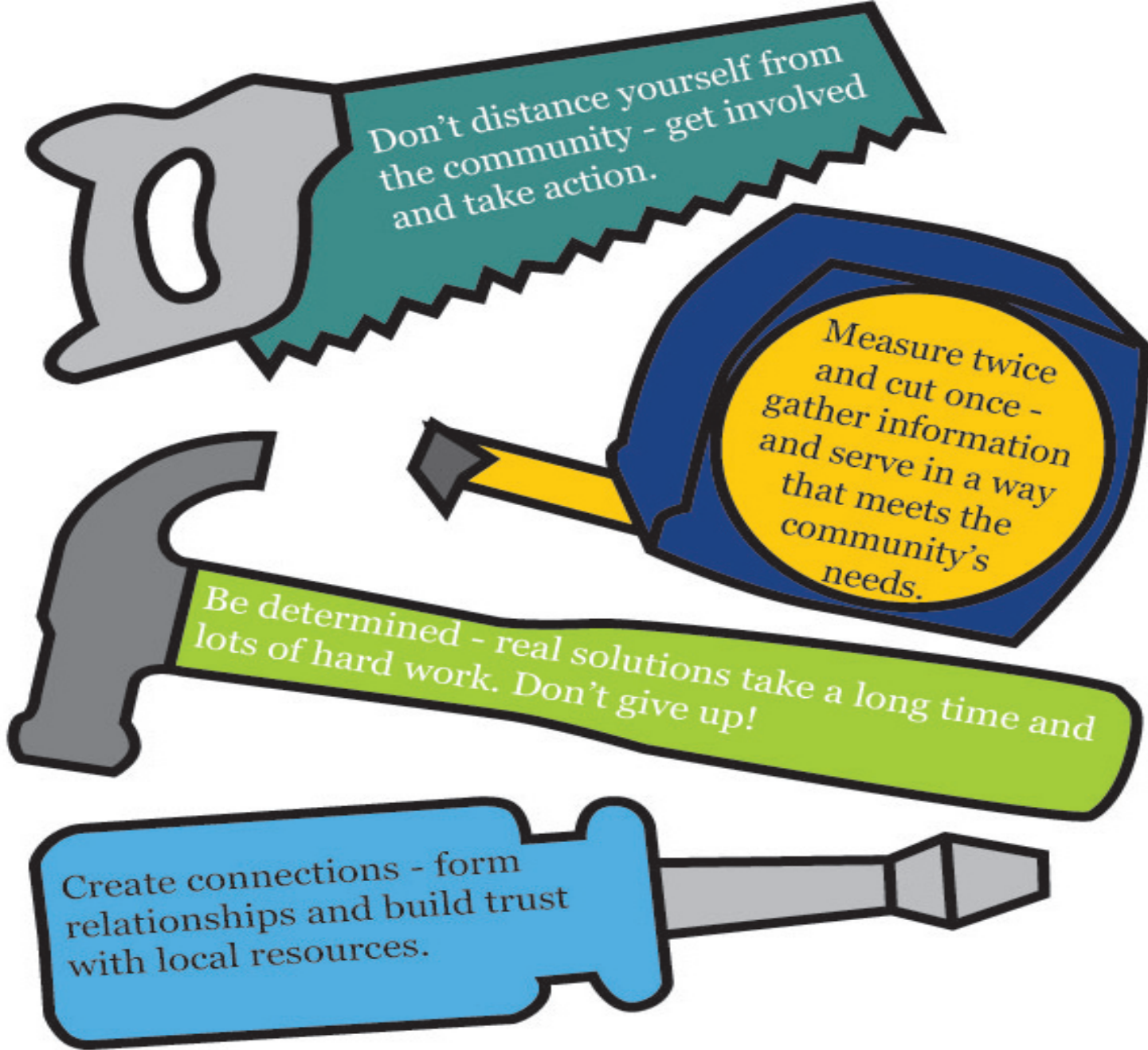
While on the Habitat for Humanity worksite, we were explaining to some AmeriCorps participants what a *Chanukah* celebration entails. I mentioned how sometimes we have *suf'ganiyot*, jelly donuts, but they were pretty expensive so we weren't going

to have any. My AmeriCorps friends were disappointed, so on the way home I googled a *suf'ganiyot* recipe. This is Portland and you might as well "do it yourself!"

Before we could commit to the donuts, we needed to find a small baster with which we could inject the jelly filling. After searching every aisle in the grocery store, Danielle, a fellow Tivnu participant, walked up to the pharmacy and asked for an eyedropper. We started mixing the dough around 9pm. Around midnight, Danielle went to sleep and Baye, another participant, helped me start frying the donuts. Then Judah, a third participant, took a shift, and we finished at 2am. They were worth it.

Together, we made *Chanukah* sugar cookies, *suf'ganiyot*, potato *latkes*, sweet potato *latkes*, apple sauce, and a fruit salad for the party. We played *A Rugrats Chanukah* in the background with our guests coming from AmeriCorps, the Tivnu board, Moishe House, and anyone else we knew in Portland. All in attendance had a fun time and the food was a total success.

Never before had I been to a Christmas party. Never before had I built a gingerbread house with homeless children. Never before had I felt ownership over a *Chanukah* party. It's hard to add up how much I've learned on this program, but I can describe the feeling of satisfaction I've had each time I've talked to a new Portlander, played with a homeless child, or made something that I could've bought in a store. Tivnu is helping me to become an adult, a citizen, and a leader—a real upstanding member of my community.



TOOLBOX FOR SUCCESS

by Allison Poirier, 2nd

Year ISJL Education Fellow

**Lesson
from
Dreffin**



The Hebrew word *bin'yan* means both a physical “building,” as well as the grammatical term “verbal stem.” This highlights how the power of our words can build.

WHAT IS THE MEANING OF TZEDAKAH?

by Bill Deresiewicz, Tivnu: Building Justice Board of Directors

Every Friday morning, when I was a kid at yeshiva, my mother would send me off to school with a contribution for the *tzedakah* box. We'd pass the blue-and-white JNF container around from desk to desk, carefully dropping our dimes and nickels through the little slot. *Tzedakah*, our *morah* (teacher) would tell us, means charity.

And that was pretty much all I learned about the concept as a child.

More recently, as a former professor and someone who writes about higher education, I've encountered the idea under a different, secular name. Every high school student understands that if they want to get into a good college, they need to make sure their resume includes something called "service." Volunteer at a soup kitchen, tutor little kids, spend the summer helping build a school in Guatemala.

"Give back," these future leaders are told. "Give to others."

The sentiments sound good, and the impulses may be genuine, but the language, once again, is that of charity, and consciously or not, it reinforces ideas of debtorship, disempowerment, hierarchy, and social relations as economic exchange. You do for others—those poor, unfortunate others—what you've been taught to believe they cannot do for themselves. You swoop down and rescue them with your superior wisdom and virtue. "Service," like *tzedakah*, is us vs. them, rich vs. poor, white vs. black and brown, giver vs. receiver, server vs. served.

That is why for me, one of the most exciting things about being part of Tivnu: Building Justice is that the organization understands *tzedakah* in terms of its true meaning. It's right there in our title: justice. At Tivnu, our goal is not to "give" our time and energy to those who are "less fortunate," but to work together in solidarity and understanding for a larger good that embraces us all.

That is why all of our programs—from the one-day events we conduct in our home base of Portland, Oregon; to our multi-week summer programs, which bring in high school students from around the country in partnership with national organizations like USY and the Union for Reform Judaism; to our capstone program, the Tivnu Gap Year, an immersive residential program for high school graduates ages 17-20 from across North America (the first Jewish gap year that takes place in the United States)—emphasize collaboration and experiential engagement with

members of other communities. We believe that it is essential for Jews to engage in social justice work not just as individuals, but

as representatives of the Jewish community in partnership with other communities.

Whether we are joining forces with PCUN (Pineros y Campesinos Unidos del Noroeste, the Oregon farmworkers union), with Quaker Voluntary Service, or with grassroots direct-service organizations, we make sure to create an atmosphere of mutual learning and

respect by not only working together, but also studying, eating, and celebrating together. Above all, we listen to each other stories. As a participant said about one of our week-long programs:

The last day, making food with Carmen [a PCUN leader], having Shabbat all together and meeting Carmen's children, really created a sense of having been part of something. The preparation for the event, the chance to share Shabbat with a community that had shared so much with us, this was incredibly powerful for me.

Another participant summed up our philosophy like this:

Tivnu really hit home that solidarity work is a struggle in which all parties have something to gain for themselves, beyond the benefits of a larger voting mass or more monetary support or more able-bodied workers. Ramon [a PCUN leader] said this so well, that solidarity is about our differences, but that we come to the table as equals, ready to fight for each other. Mutual allyship carries more power than any charity ever could. It is the 11 blessings of conversation, a mutual gain and exchange, rather than the 6 blessings of an anonymous donation.

These are the kinds of values--and the kind of deeper understanding--that we are instilling in the members of the Tivnu Gap Year program. This is how we aim to train these future leaders of the Jewish community.

KNOW BEFORE WHOM YOU BUILD

by Malkie Schwartz, ISJL Director of Community Engagement

Each department of the ISJL strives to serve as a model for Jewish institutions on how to ensure that all aspects of Jewish life are accessible to all Jews. Our department is driven by the Jewish imperative to advance justice and is committed to continuing a long legacy of Jewish involvement in efforts that advance racial, economic, and educational justice. We are building a program model that envisions service as a cornerstone of Jewish life. The department helps build ongoing and cooperative relationships so that, together, Jewish community members and local organizations can make an impact locally.

The ISJL provides opportunities for Jews engaging in service to examine the wisdom that can be found in many facets of Jewish life. Through texts, rituals, holidays, history, literature, and Southern Jewish life, Jews can have a more meaningful service experience.

The contemporary Southern Jewish experience includes service-learning opportunities. Undoubtedly, many Jews in the South have been approached by

a missionary who thought that another form of religious practice was the “right” way. Could there be a connection between the missionary to service? Sure! Tremendous amounts of literature talks about the affect this approach has on the quality of the service experience for both individuals involved. Building upon this experience encourages learners to find alternative approaches that may be more mutually beneficial.

Jewish history in the South provides a wealth of content, demonstrating the many approaches individuals and communities take working on social issues. This year, inspired by the commemoration of the 50th anniversary of Freedom Summer, we worked on educational resources that examine Freedom Summer and factors that contributed to its success. Freedom Summer that can enrich service today through some pertinent questions: Do we wait until we are invited to participate in social justice efforts or do we seek out invitations (and how)?

Passover’s approach shows how holidays are a perfect opportunity. When we

look at *dayeinu*, analyzing the relationship between God and the Israelites, we see a nation of indebted and vulnerable Israelites at the mercy of an all-powerful God. The refrain in the song expresses gratitude that can seem unreasonable. Really? We would be grateful to a God that rescues us from Egypt and then let’s us drown in the Red Sea?! Similarly, when participating in service, we don’t always hold ourselves accountable and reflect on whether we really made an impact. The assumption is that our mere effort made the project a success and is therefore deserving of gratitude on the part of the people who we assume benefited. How can we hold ourselves accountable?

We continue to build resources for partnering congregations to use so that they can have a full and region-specific Jewish-service learning experience. This year, we are so pleased to be able to make these lessons and more available to your seventh graders in the 7th Grade Curriculum. Stay tuned!

Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life



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