

Ben Adelman

Graduation Speech

2009

Good afternoon.....Dr. Davis, administrative staff, fellow classmates, friends and family. I appreciate the opportunity to address you today. Before going any further,



there are some very special people who are here today who deserve my thanks. My parents, who had the good sense to send me to the Jewish Academy and who have given me countless other opportunities; and for all the guidance over all these

years, thank you. My sister, Ali, who has been a loyal companion and friend to me during our time together at the Jewish Academy; she has shown me what this school can do to make even the best relationships grow stronger and more meaningful. For that, my thanks.

As my eighth and final year comes to an end, I cannot help but look back at my first day at San Diego Jewish Academy and what it has done **for** me over the years to make me the person I am today. After leaving public school as a ten year old and entering the Jewish Academy in fifth grade, my future could not have been any more *uncertain*. Few would have envisioned me standing before you today, or that I would be attending The George Washington University.

The San Diego Jewish Academy presented an entirely new environment, with a new student body and teachers who were completely unfamiliar to me. The challenges of changing to a new school were already difficult enough, but in my story, another large obstacle loomed over me. At the age of two, I was diagnosed with a neurological condition in which certain brain functions are enhanced, and other functions, such as communication and social interactions, are inhibited. This condition is known as autism. So making a change in my academic environment, with new teachers and meeting new people, brought fear to my countenance. But after ten minutes in my first class, I knew that there was something different about the Jewish Academy. My fears and expectations took an astonishing turn. That first day, my teachers received me warmly, and as the day progressed, the students welcomed me as one of their own, immediately inviting me into their community. By recess, I had already made my first friends. From then on, my trend of building new social networks amongst my friends expanded rapidly. The fears surrounding me quickly lifted, and I knew that there was no better, more nurturing environment that could be found.

I was introduced to an impressive number of ideals and values that aided my understanding, helped boost my confidence, and build my character *because* all the teachers and students follow the same morals that lie on the steps of our school, which include study, prayer, and *deeds of loving kindness*, all of which became essential parts of my being. By middle school, the SDJA community was truly my family. My worries and social fears disappeared, because people in the school act out through compassion and loving kindness. In turn, this gave me the courage to act out toward others with compassion and loving kindness. This school environment enabled me to overcome any obstacle in my path, and to become a better person and a better student.

The teachers here at the Jewish Academy also helped to define this nurturing environment. Teachers here not only teach us the content that we need to succeed, but also take the time to get to know each one of us. Every teacher is sympathetic to who each student is, and integrate all students naturally into each class. Our teachers not only teach us but help us to build better relationships, and through that, create a learning environment in which every student can prosper. By the time we reach our high school years, all students here know with confidence that they can go to the teachers for whatever they need, whether it is academic help or personal advice. Not only that, but teachers serve as role models for the values taught at the school.

In my time at SDJA, my eyes have been continually opened wide to one of the greatest values our school strives to teach, and that is promoting deeds of loving-kindness. One of the best ways in which such deeds become action is through community service. Our school's requirement of community service has taught us the power of action, because it has consistently allowed us to go beyond our sense of what we think we need and help other people who are in need. At SDJA, community service goes way beyond whatever hours are required. Who would have expected a small school like ours to fill an entire plane full of goods for Hurricane Katrina victims? Where else would we have learned how to build wheelchairs for underprivileged individuals in Mexico? These kinds of experiences helped us become stronger and more selfless individuals.

Some of my fellow graduates, sometimes called lifers, have attended the Jewish Academy since kindergarten, some, even preschool. Others, like me, came later. No matter when you entered the school, our class underwent a transformation during high school. Just before high school began, tragedy struck one of our own. Our good friend and fellow classmate Matthew Beaver was diagnosed with a rare form of bone cancer. When we heard this news, we knew what had to be done. Instead of allowing pain,

sorrow, and depression to rule our hearts, every classmate and the entire school inevitably came together to give Matthew a quality of life that few long term cancer patients ever receive. In *giving*, we learned more from his determination, selflessness, and loving attitude than we could have imagined. This transformed us into better and more compassionate people.

Our recent journey to Poland and Israel, again, showed us that no matter how different we are, we can still come together and build strong relationships that will last a lifetime. These kinds of experiences, possible only because of the environment here at SDJA, enabled us to develop the knowledge, hearts, and minds that are necessary to progress into the future.

Our class has experienced much together over the years. We have seen countless individuals come and go, we have experienced a number of class trips have both their upsides and their downsides too. We have lived together, met new people, and learned new things that expand far beyond the realm of the classroom. We have experienced joys and sorrows, and have built relationships, with not just the people who are in this room, but towards the community and the environment as a whole. As I look back on all the experiences and memories we have shared, I cannot help but smile and feel an indomitable sense of pride. There is neither an individual nor a group of people that could give me *greater memories* or make me more *proud* of everything we have accomplished than you, my brothers and sisters of the class of 2009.

It is my belief, and my absolute guarantee, that each and every one of us who now sit together here will become leaders and inspirations for all who cross our paths. Together, my fellow classmates, we can spread our hearts and minds across all who we have yet to meet, as well as the world we shall enter, and create a better and brighter future than we can possibly imagine.