



**Temple Israel
Brotherhood Shabbat**

June 9, 2006

- Shabbat Shalom.

Rabbi Sherman, thank you for inviting Peggy and me to share this time with you and the congregation here at Temple Israel. We are always grateful for the opportunity to spend time with others in the community, and we are honored by your hospitality and by your interest in The University of Tulsa.

- With tonight's remarks approaching, it was interesting to me that two weeks ago, *The Chronicle of Higher Education* ran a story heralding – quote – a golden age of Jewishness on campuses – end quote. That was the assessment of Chaim Seidler-Feller, executive director of the Hillel chapter at UCLA. He made the statement in Washington at Hillel's first university summit, which drew participants from several Jewish organizations. (I note that TU's Dean Robert Butkin and Professor Joli Jensen attend the Hillel summit as Charles and Lynn Schusterman Scholars).

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- While recognizing that some Middle East studies programs have an anti-Israel bias, and that anti-Semitic incidents do still happen on America's campuses, Seidler-Feller nevertheless found encouragement in the rise of Jewish Studies programs, the professional advancement of Jewish academics, and student interest across the nation.

 - This is good news, and not entirely surprising. Why is it not surprising? Because the traditions of scholarship, mutual responsibility and philanthropy that run so deep within the Jewish community are natural allies of education. The traditional liberal-arts education is rooted in discovery, guided by conscience, enlightened by tradition, and fulfilled in service. I believe that these values form the basis for a fertile partnership between higher education and the Jewish community.

 - Here in Tulsa, that partnership has been a tremendous boon for TU. We have benefited greatly through the years from the active involvement and support of Jewish students, faculty members, administrators, and benefactors. Nurturing and developing the connections between TU and the Jewish community is an ongoing priority for the University.

 - We continue to mark the growth of this relationship with auspicious milestones, and the past year is no exception.

 - In March, TU opened Hillel House. Our students now have a dedicated space on campus at 6th and Gary, with dining and meeting rooms, an administrative office, and a vegetarian kitchen. Our students have been using the house since last fall, in fact. Their activities have included regular Shabbat dinners, a Hanukkah party, and a Passover Seder. In a somewhat less traditional vein, our students also held a TV marathon featuring the popular series, "Curb Your Enthusiasm"!!

 - TU's Hillel House was furnished with gifts from the Tulsa community, and I would like to take this opportunity to thank those of you who so generously supported

this project. Your gifts are enriching the college years and spiritual lives of our Jewish students.

- I particularly want to say, Yasher ko-ach! to Professors Estelle Levetin Avery and Martin Belsky for their service to TU Jewish life, and for their leadership in the Hillel House and other projects. Our students benefit both from their efforts and from their example. Thank you also to Professor Joli Jensen, who, as advisor to Hillel, has her hands increasingly full. We look forward to another lively year as our students return this fall.
- Beyond the activities at Hillel House, TU Hillel teamed with our United Campus Ministries and the Muslim Student Association to sponsor the recent “Stand Up for Peace” charity benefit.
- In other positive news, we are developing connections with Hillel at The University of Oklahoma. Professor Jensen and others are working with OU Hillel Director Jeremy Cassius to plan joint programs and events. It will be interesting to watch this collaboration grow, and we look forward to seeing what our advisors and students devise.
- Finally, this spring we were honored to celebrate a Shabbat service on campus. About 20 friends from the greater community joined 25 members of the campus community to observe the service in the Allen Chapman Activity Center before adjourning to Hillel House for dinner. Based on the success of this Shabbat, we hope to have more services on campus in the future, and more events of all types.
- We are excited about our ongoing partnership with the Tulsa Jewish community, and I invite you to call me or Joli any time you have an idea or interest to share with our students. Your leadership is always welcomed and highly valued.

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- Jewish student life at TU is thriving not only on the extracurricular side of things, but also in our curriculum.
 - As far as we can determine, this fall will mark the very first time in TU's 99-year history that modern Hebrew will be offered on campus. Ofira Shoham will teach the course; she is the wife of Ovadia Shoham, who is TU's Floyd M. Stevenson Distinguished Presidential Chair in Petroleum Engineering.
 - This auspicious step coincides with the creation of our Certificate Program in Judaic Studies, which our curriculum committee approved this spring. This is an 18-hour program that gives students the opportunity to tailor their studies with courses in literature and the arts, history, philosophy and religion. Course offerings include topics such as the Jewish experience in literature and film, contemporary Jewish thought, Shoah studies, and Jewish-Christian relations. Jay Geller, TU Assistant Professor of History, directs the certificate program, and has been instrumental in its development and implementation. I certainly want to take this opportunity to recognize and thank him for his ongoing work.
 - I'll also mention that Jay serves on the board of the Sherwin Miller Museum of Jewish Art, along with Jacob Howland, our McFarlin Endowed Professor of Philosophy. The Museum is and will continue to be an essential resource for our faculty and students, particularly as our Judaic Studies program solidifies and gains momentum.
 - This coming academic year, TU's College of Law will have a very strong focus on Jewish law. Thanks to a generous gift from the Lubell Family, TU will welcome Dr. Menachem Lorberbaum, a visiting professor of philosophy from Tel Aviv University. Through the good efforts of TU Professor Jacob Howland, Professor Lorberbaum will be teaching a course on Jewish law. The College of Law will also be hosting the Lillie Goldstein Collection of rare Jewish law texts in the spring of 2007. Dean Butkin is organizing public lectures with Professor Lorberbaum that focus on the Goldstein Collection and how these texts reveal Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform traditions of the law.

- When we look at the growth of Judaic scholarship and Jewish student life at TU, we can be pleased that the *Chronicle's* optimistic report bears out in our community. These are certainly steps in a promising and educationally fertile direction, but much more remains to be done.
- Our effort to enrich scholarly and cultural opportunities for those of or interested in the Jewish tradition speaks directly to an issue of increasing urgency – not just for TU, but for all of higher education. Namely, that issue is the imperative to “teach globally.” What I mean by this is the responsibility we have to equip our students with the historical, political, and cultural fluency they will need to lead successful lives in the 21st century.
- The growth and development of nations in the Middle East, Eastern Europe, Latin America, and Asia has already begun, shifting the worldwide economy, bringing cultures into new dialogue, sparking new political tensions, and escalating old tensions to new levels of risk. We see these changes and their consequences every day in our newspapers and on television.
- More than any other generation, today’s students will face vexing questions about the distribution of wealth and opportunity, the intersection of belief and power, the limits of diplomacy, and many other complex issues. We must be at the very height of our wisdom to prepare our young people for the challenges of their time.
- TU is addressing these educational opportunities with a renewed focus on international scholarship. In addition to our new Hebrew courses, we are implementing a plan to introduce courses in Chinese, Japanese, Arabic, Portuguese and Italian. We also are planning to offer more courses in global history, economics, and culture, and to promote study abroad as an indispensable part of the TU education.
- There are many steps ahead, but also some very significant ones behind. Our recent progress in supporting Jewish student life and in advancing Judaic studies has

already begun deepening dialogue on campus. TU is committed to incorporating the richness of the Jewish heritage into an educational experience that broadens the horizons of every TU student.

- I am equally pleased to be able to thank you for the strong support that you have shown – and continue to show – The University of Tulsa. That support comes in many forms, not only financial but also in the hospitality that you show our students by welcoming them into your congregation and into your homes. Your help is greatly valued and appreciated, and will continue to play a central role in making The University of Tulsa a favored destination for students seeking a dynamic college experience.

- Thank you again for inviting Peggy and me to join you this evening, and please accept our best wishes for a restful and reflective Shabbat.

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