

Multifaith Celebration of Spiritual Life at Stanford
University Public Worship
Sunday, September 29, 2013
Reflection by Debra Linfield '15

Welcome Class of 2017.

My name is Debra Linfield and I am so happy to be speaking to you today. I am a junior majoring in biology and minoring in math.

I grew up in a Jewish Modern Orthodox family. I went to a Jewish day school where we learned general studies for half the day and Jewish studies for half the day. My neighbors and friends were Jewish. I loved living in my Jewish bubble, but it was not until arriving at Stanford that I learned so much about living in the light of one's faith.

Jews just finished celebrating the holiday of Sukkot, or Tabernacles. Sukkot commemorates how we lived in temporary dwellings after the Exodus from Egypt, during forty years of wandering in the desert. Leviticus Chapter 23 commands us to take four species during Sukkot and shake them in our temporary dwelling. *{hold lulav and etrog and shake lulav}*. Among other Rabbinic metaphors, each species represents a different type of person. The palm *{point}* that grows dates has a good taste but no smell – corresponding to a person with knowledge but lacking good deeds. The myrtle *{point to three twigs}* has a beautiful aroma, but no taste - symbolizing one who does good deeds, but lacks knowledge. The willow *{point to two branches}* has no taste and no smell - suggesting one who, for now, lacks both knowledge and deeds. The citron offers a good aroma and taste good, which represents someone who is knowledgeable and performs good deeds. But it is only when all are together that we can take up and shake the four species and remember how God sheltered us with His love in the desert.

This unity defines the religious community at Stanford. Each individual is unique; each person – and each faith group -- brings a perspective, and together we thrive. Last year, the Jewish Student Association and Hillel organized several multi-faith Sabbath dinners. Catholics and Muslim communities come to our services and dinner, and we went to theirs. These were some of my favorite dinners, talking with fellow students of all faiths late into the night about the deepest existential questions.

I know IHUM is no more, but I took a fascinating IHUM course about religion. We explored Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, and Judaism and studied received texts in each religion. My PWR class was about eating animals and I wrote a fifteen page paper about Jewish views on vegetarianism.

It is incredible to be able to learn wisdom from other religions on the compelling challenges of our lives. This blessing of spiritual vitality comes with going to a diverse, intellectual institution and being able to participate in so many ways at a level you could not imagine in high school. I strongly

encourage you, Class of 2017, take the opportunity to learn about other cultures and beliefs – both inside and outside of the classroom.

And it's not all about pluralism. At Stanford, you can combine particularism with sacred breadth. Coming to Stanford and meeting people of all backgrounds has been eye-opening – and inspiring to me as a Jew. Yes, I appreciate more deeply my commitment formed under the rainbow with Noah to meet the universal demands placed upon me as a human being created in the Diving Image. Hillel's round-the-clock activities - learning and social action, prayer and reflection – simultaneously assure that I participate with my fellow Jews in deepening our relationships with one another and with God. I have always found it fulfilling to explain to my peers why I do not use electronics on my Sabbath or why I go to FloMo for kosher dining. Being in an environment where my traditions are different – and valued – makes me think about them in fresh ways, and makes me even prouder to be following in the ways of my parents and grandparents, even as I adapt those ways to my understanding and personality.

I hope each of you forms a spiritual home at Stanford. If you invest the time and energy, the Farm can be more than a temporary dwelling – you will be building the foundation to a life of meaning and purpose.

Let's grow together. You are always welcome to reach me through Stanford Hillel or by email: Linfield *{spell it out}* @ Stanford. Edu.

Meanwhile, in the words of the third part of the ancient priestly blessing, may God turn His face toward you and give you Shalom, grace and peace.

Thank you.