

My Views on Inclusive Scouting: A personal Statement  
By  
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I write this short statement in, and consistent with, my role in Scouting as Chartered Organization Representative for Temple Beth Hillel's Cub Scout and Boy Scout Units (Cub Scout Pack 311 and Boy Scout Troop 36). Temple Beth Hillel is the oldest Reform synagogue in the Eastern San Fernando Valley, in Valley Village, California.

I want to explore with you why I, a Reform Jew, have embraced the Scouting program notwithstanding a national BSA pronouncement that "avowed homosexuals are not role models for youth" and why I still promote scouting in the Reform Movement.

Very simply, I am in it for change. As a Reform Jew, I believe strongly in inclusiveness. It is a part of our tradition. Temple Beth Hillel, the Chartered Organization for Pack 311 and Troop 36, will not and does not tolerate intolerance. Neither will or do I. But for the continued outspokenness of our unit leadership (mostly me) in opposition to this National Policy, Beth Hillel would not charter the Cub Pack or Boy Scout Troop. Our Charter Agreement contains an amendment that "we select our leaders based upon values that we find important to our faith." We follow the Reform tradition of including everyone in our Scout program and do not question how people lead their private lives.

Change is slow but, as Jews, we have a tradition of determination, stubbornness and perseverance for justice, freedom, fairness and tolerance. We are obliged, too, never to forget the concept of *tikkun olam*: we are required to take steps to repair the world. In Reform Jewish Scouting, we teach this ethic by example.

This is not inconsistent with the Scout Law. The Scout Law suggests that "A Scout is brave" and defines it this way: "A Scout can face danger even if he is afraid. He has the courage to stand for what he thinks is right..."

Also, a Scout is "obedient." Among other things, A Scout follows the rules of his family and his community, but if he thinks a rule or law is unfair, he tries to change it in an orderly fashion.

At the end of each book of the Torah, we say, "*Hazak Hazak V'nithazek!*" "Be strong. Be strong. And let us strengthen each other." It is a blessing, a prayer and a rallying cry for us.

Navy Chaplain, Captain Irv Elson, suggested in May 2008 in his *d'var Torah* at the meeting of the National Jewish Committee on Scouting, that "hazak" also means "hard." The phrase, "*Hazak Hazak V'nithazek,*" Rabbi Elson said, therefore can also mean, "It's hard! It's hard! But from this we will be strengthened."

It is a difficult challenge to look past the perceived inconsistency of Reform Jewish Scouting, and it is harder still to be a catalyst for change. But from all of this we will in fact be strengthened.