

Eliza Ruder Sep 2015:

I wouldn't be who I am today, a work in progress, without Mishkan and I know that I have a small part in Mishkan being what it is today. That's because we climbed the ladder of life together. There's a give and take in the relationship I have with Mishkan, it's as if we mirror each other, I honestly mean this with humility; we are who we are because of one another.

I came to Mishkan as a biracial baby in a family formed by adoption with two moms. In turn, Mishkan grew to welcome and take in all of my legacies, nurtured and honored all of who I am and then helped me grow further.

One experience in which Mishkan helped me grow was my Bat Mitzvah. My Jewish soul and my African American identity were reflected on the bima that day. It was as if the bima got larger. My African American G-D parents helped lead the service along with Rabbi Brian and Rabbi Yael. For my Bat Mitzvah I wrote a play about Lilith, the first feminist, and Adam and Eve. In the play, I assumed the role of G-D, because, naturally, is a biracial girl with curly hair.

I grew up with values of justice and Judaism, as well as with the principles of Kwanzaa. It was these values from my two core cultures that helped me grow to be the woman I am today.

Imagine, in your mind, a step-ladder. My life connects the two sides. One side is Mishkan's statement of principles: prayer, study, repair of the world and acts of caring. The other side is the Nguza Saba, the principles of Kwanzaa, which are, in Swahili and will translated into English; Umoja (unity), Kujichagulia (Self-Determination), Ujima (Collective Work and Responsibility), Ujamaa (Cooperative Economics), Nia (Purpose), Kuumba (Creativity), and Imani (Faith). These pillars and principles together support my life.

And now, Mishkan respects, includes and raises up what is special in everybody and we are all enriched by it.

A longtime dream of mine has been to become a special education teacher. Partly, that comes from my own experience as someone who learns differently, and from my experience of Mishkan's religious school where I felt valued. This past May I achieved my dream, earning

my M.Ed. in Special Education, and now as a teacher at a Quaker school for children with special needs.

Mishkan was born on Rosh Hashanah. My birthday is right around Rosh Hashanah, on Thursday this year and my Bat Mitzvah Torah portion is Beresheit. I was born in 1986, a year before Mishkan was born. I was born a seeker. My life is full of beginnings. Last year at Rosh Hashanah, I was challenged to develop a spiritual practice. I began by coming home to Mishkan. Now I attend weekly Torah study and services and I continue to climb the ladder towards discovering something...whatever the next rung is, because I am confident in the strong scaffolding Mishkan has helped me to build. If you are a seeker, come join me in growing here.

G'Mar Tov, have a good and meaningful fast, L'Shanah Tova Umetukah, and a sweet and happy year. May we go into this new year of 5776 with an open mind and loving heart, a thirst for discovery and zest for life, and a yearning for justice to make a better world we can all live in together. And may we all be inscribed into The Book of Life. Thank you.