

Notes from the Cantor - March, 2006

The Sacred Journey of Becoming a Bar/Bat Mitzvah

By
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Like looking at a text of Torah, there are many different levels of looking at the meaning of becoming a Bar/Bat Mitzvah. Simplistically, the Bar/Bat Mitzvah marks the day a child becomes a Jewish adult, and celebrates this rite of passage publicly in front of the congregation. Today, at Temple Sinai, the child recites the blessings before and after the Torah, chants some verses from the Torah, recites the Haftarah blessings, chant some verses of Haftarah, leads other prayers during the service and delivers a d'var Torah. On another level, the child is stating that he/she is now responsible for carrying out the Mitzvot, which is signified by the wearing of a Tallit. **BUT BAR/BAT IS MORE THAN THIS ONE DAY OF CELEBRATION. BECOMING A BAR/BAT MITZVAH IS A CONTINUOUS PROCESS ON THE SACRED JOURNEY OF JEWISH ADULTHOOD.** Participation in confirmation and Temple Sinai's Hebrew High School is one part of this journey

As the Bar/Bat Mitzvah teacher involved in the learning process (and later sees many of these students in the confirmation class) I personally witness a transformation process during this sacred journey. **EVERY CHILD MATURES IN HIS/HER OWN UNIQUE WAY AND EVERY CHILD "SUCCEEDS" IN BECOMING A BAR/BAT MITZVAH IN HIS/HER OWN WAY.** I work with students who are shy outgoing, disciplined, undisciplined, musical, unmusical, Hebrew reading proficient, positively motivated and..... **THE END RESULT IS THAT THE BAR/BAT MITZVAH DAY IS A CELEBRATION OF LOVE FOR THEM – JUST AS THEY ARE - SURROUNDED BY LOVE FROM THEIR FRIENDS AND FAMILY WHO HAVE COME TO CELEBRATE WITH THEM.** It is a celebration affirming their life. With this love, the child feels supported as an individual and a member of the larger temple community.

Becoming a Bar/Bat Mitzvah allows the child to feel the connection to the generations of Jews that have gone before him/her. Each child is a new link in the chain of our sacred Judaic tradition – in "shalshet hakabalah." In chanting from the Torah and explaining the meaning of their Torah portion, each child renews the covenant between God and the Jewish people. The gathering of extended family and friends calls forth floods of memories - memories of the parent's own Bar/Bat Mitzvah and memories of loved ones who have passed on.

As their teacher, I feel that I am part of this sacred journey and I too have been transformed by our study and celebration together. Each Bar/Bat Mitzvah reaffirms my own covenant with God and Judaism. It is the responsibility of parents, clergy, and teachers to guide the young adult on this journey. It is my responsibility to make becoming a Bar/Bat Mitzvah a positive experience for each student because it is a portal to his/her future as a responsible Jewish adult who will pass on the Torah his/her Judaic heritage from generation to generation.

(special note: For those who are interested in reading more about the history of Bar/Bat Mitzvah and reclaiming its spiritual significance, I strongly recommend Rabbi Jeffrey Salkin's "Putting God on the Guest List" which is available in Temple Sinai's library)