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THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE BAR MITZVAH  
AS A  
RITE OF PASSAGE

Richard James Lehrman

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Arts in Hebrew Letters  
and Ordination.

Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion

May, 1965

Referee, Professor Robert L. Katz

DEDICATED TO MY PARENTS

שמע בני מוסר אביו  
אל תשכח תורת אמו  
כי תהיה כחן ופיראוס  
וענין מלכודת

Hear, my son, the instruction of thy father,  
And forsake not the teaching of thy mother;  
For they shall be a chaplet of grace unto thy head,  
And chains about thy neck.

Proverbs 1:8-9

## DIGEST

The intent of this thesis is to discover by interview-research the significance of the Bar Mitzvah as a rite of passage, i.e., to determine whether or not the Bar Mitzvah as practised today is a significant religious ceremony helping the young Jewish boy go from childhood to adolescence. Though much material has been written about the Bar Mitzvah, there have been few, if any, attempts to study the rite through interviews with post Bar Mitzvah youth. This thesis, then, attempts to analyze the rite phenomenologically, to study the data of concrete experience and to draw conclusions from this material. It was decided to limit the study to six specific areas: Bar Mitzvah and the Possibility of Change in Family Attitudes, Preparation and the Bar Mitzvah, The Bar Mitzvah Service and its deeper meaning, The Bar Mitzvah and Jewish Education, Attitudes of the Bar Mitzvah Boy toward Bar Mitzvah, Jews and Judaism, and the Relationship with the rabbi/tutor during the Bar Mitzvah experience. Under each heading, hypotheses were posited, to be tested through the interviews. To make the sampling manageable, twenty Reform and Conservative Jewish youth were selected to be interviewed, all post Bar Mitzvah students who had experienced the rite several months prior to being interviewed. In an effort to gauge parental attitudes toward the Bar Mitzvah, five sets of parents were interviewed. Their conclusions have timely relevance in assessing the significance of the Bar Mitzvah as a rite of passage.

Preliminary to the socio-psychological material is a discussion of the age of majority within Judaism, followed by an historical analysis

of the Bar Mitzvah, which appeared for the first time in fourteenth century Germany. Chapter two analyzes the puberty rite in primitive society, which, at a specified age, officially breaks all ties binding the adolescent to children and women and admits him to the society of men. This entrance into adult life is achieved during three specific periods of the rite, separation, transition and incorporation. Part two of the chapter compares and contrasts the Bar Mitzvah with the primitive puberty rite. It is shown that the Bar Mitzvah follows rather clearly the same threefold pattern as the primitive rite, though the "result" of the Bar Mitzvah is not full admittance into adult society. However, in each phase of the Bar Mitzvah there are distinct parallels with the primitive rite. The last part of chapter two presents the data from a psychiatric study of the Bar Mitzvah and discusses its conclusions in the light of this research.

What then is the significance of the Bar Mitzvah as a rite of passage? For twenty young American Jews, there are almost as many different ways of understanding the Bar Mitzvah. It is an emotion-packed, anxiety-laden rite, the only public trial within Judaism. It is an experience linking the youth intensely, but briefly, with his synagogue, his religion and his God. For many, it is a rite of passage from rather than to a furtherance of religious education. That there is little permanent attachment to the synagogue or to the rabbi as a result of the Bar Mitzvah is evident from the responses. These negative aspects are balanced by many positives. Youngsters eagerly look forward to Bar Mitzvah, enjoy the experience, feel more mature and grown-up as a result of it, and

are helped over the childhood-adolescent hurdle by it. If the bad can be erased, and the good increased, which can only be done by thoroughly re-assessing the ceremony, we will be able to speak of the lasting significance of the Bar Mitzvah as a rite of passage.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

This chapter is divided into three parts: a) the age of majority, which will trace this development in Jewish law and literature, as well as in representative cultures; b) a definition and explanation of the Hebrew-Aramaic term "Bar Mitzvah," tracing its development from Talmudic usage and understanding to present day usage of the term; c) the history of the Bar Mitzvah, which will trace its development and will discuss pertinent aspects of the ceremony.

### THE AGE OF MAJORITY

This section is divided into two parts:

1. a definition of the term 'age of majority,' and attendant discussion
2. the age of majority within Judaism, tracing its development from Biblical times to the Bar Mitzvah, leading to the Bar Mitzvah rite itself.

The age of majority, the period at which the child theoretically becomes a man, is not fixed in the same way in all societies. "In

primitive society the phenomenon of puberty marks the dividing line which indicated the attainment of social majority, the capacity to take part in the ceremonial and social activities of the group."<sup>1</sup> This phenomenon will be mentioned in chapter two where puberty and other initiation rites of primitive societies are thoroughly discussed.

"In mature legal systems the attainment of majority, marking the commencement of full legal capacity, is wholly legal in its nature. In these systems the child remains a minor until a fairly advanced age after physical maturity in order to protect him from the consequences of his presumed intellectual immaturity."<sup>2</sup>

There have been several methods among societies in determining the age of majority. Within early Roman law, which is of importance in considering the age of majority within Judaism, the age of majority was specifically fixed at a period approximating puberty. There it was twelve for females and fourteen for males. The difficulty in establishing a fixed period as the age of physical puberty is that not all children reach puberty at the normal age, if indeed a "normal" age can be posited at all. Some societies, aware of this difficulty, set a maximum limit for children who did not reach puberty at the fixed age. The test of puberty, however, was not the only method for determining the age of majority. In English law of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, economic motives brought about the choice of an age of majority. Military motives reflected the age choice in other areas (particularly, we will notice, did it do so in Biblical law). And lastly, a system of graduated majorities, as is found in Talmudic and

later Roman law, or a single age of majority, as found in modern legal systems, may be adopted.

Thus one notices that the age of majority is determined by different methods, depending upon the system or society involved. This information is of importance in considering the age of majority within Judaism.

#### THE AGE OF MAJORITY WITHIN JUDAISM

In Biblical times, a man attained his majority at the age of twenty. Numbers 1:2-3 states: "Take ye the sum of all the congregation of the children of Israel, by their families, by their father's houses, according to the number of names, every male, by their polls; from twenty years old and upward, all that are able to go forth to war in Israel: ye shall number them by their hosts, even thou and Aaron." Thus military motives prompted our Biblical forebearers, as this age of majority evolved from their own times, where their criterion of manhood depended upon physical prowess. In their warlike and wartime period, the age of majority was set at a later age from that which might be found in a differently structured society. The age of twenty is also the age at which Biblical man had to pay the annual tax of half a shekel for the sanctuary. Exodus 30:13-14 states: "this they shall give, every one that passeth among them that are numbered, half a shekel after the shekel of the sanctuary--the shekel is twenty gerahs--half a shekel for an offering to the Lord. Every one that passeth among them that are numbered, from twenty years and upward, shall give the offering of the

Lord." Here the inference surely is that a male under twenty was not eligible for military service and did not come within the category of a man ( *Q' 12 30:12*). Another economic motive concerned vows where Leviticus 27:2-3 states: "When a man shall clearly utter a vow of persons unto the Lord according to thy valuation, then thy valuation shall be for the male from twenty years old even unto sixty years old..." Thus one is obligated from the age he is liable to military service until old age. Thus the Bible, not concerned with puberty as the age of majority, utilizes military and economic motives in determining the age of majority. It is clear that for Biblical man, twenty was the age of majority.

With rabbinic literature, however, one notices a distinct change in determining the age of majority. The military and economic motives of earlier times became things of the past with the changed conditions in the life of the Jew. No longer a militaristically oriented society, the Jewish people assumed a religious character in a theocratic state. Within this new world-view, the age of majority was reckoned from the time when the first signs of puberty appeared. In Niddah 52a it is written ".....a boy, if he has grown two pubic hairs, is under an obligation to perform all the commandments enumerated in the Torah." It was estimated that these signs came about the beginning of the fourteenth year with boys, though Schauss attributed the age of thirteen as the attainment of one's majority to the fact that "thirteen was a sacred number among the Jews in ancient times."<sup>3</sup> This statement hardly seems plausible in light of the material herein noted, and because of the paucity of information favoring Schauss' view.

It was noted previously that early Roman law specifically fixed the age of majority at a period approximating puberty, where it was twelve for females and fourteen for males. It is reasonable to assume that the rabbinic view towards an age of majority was influenced by this early Roman law - the literature on the age of majority notes that other groups at this time established puberty as the attainment of one's majority as well. Thus the rabbinic literature places puberty as the period from which one was regarded as an adult, responsible for his actions to the laws of the community. However, "If there were no signs of puberty at the age of majority (...the beginning of the fourteenth year in a male) the person retained the status of a minor until the age of twenty. If after that period signs of impotence developed, thus explaining the absence of the signs of puberty, the person was admitted to the status of an adult..."<sup>4</sup> Thus the prescribed age and the symptoms of puberty were necessary to establish the majority of a person.

Within the early rabbinic literature the terms used to distinguish the minor from the adult all refer to the period before and after puberty. For example, a nine year old boy who had intercourse with a woman forbidden to him was not punished until he reached the age of maturity, thirteen years and one day. Once the age of majority had been reached, the individual could make a binding vow, could consecrate property to holy purposes, was held accountable for his wrongs, and was held responsible in all ritual and criminal matters. He could also dispose of movable property, could have his testimony accepted, was obliged to observe the commandments of Judaism and was counted within the minyan.

Further, Moses Mielziner states that the legal age for contracting a valid marriage is the time of puberty, thirteen years for males, twelve for females. Thus puberty became the time for the assumption of many new responsibilities which earlier had been reserved for a later stage in one's life. The rabbis of the Midrash seemed very aware of the age of thirteen and of the traditions attached to it. In Avot de Rabbi Nathan 16, the rabbis stated that the *שנן י"ג* is thirteen years older than the *שנן י"ב* - that only at age thirteen does the good inclination become a part of one's character. Other midrashic collections (Sefer haBrit, Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer, Kohelet Rabba, Midrash Zutta, Yalkut) reiterate this principle in similar statements.

In conclusion, then, we have noticed that an age of majority within societies, cultures and religious groups is determined by different motives - legal, economic, militaristic, pubertal. These variations are due to many causes, among which are race, climate, diet, housing, clothing, occupation, temperament, mode of life and state of health. The age varies in consonance with the method used to determine it. Within Judaism, the age of majority was reached in Biblical times at the age of twenty, the time being determined by military motives. As the religion developed and emancipation was reached, the age of majority coincided with the time of puberty. Since puberty was reached earlier by some and later by others, the age of thirteen was established as the time of pubertal attainment, and also as the time of religious and legal responsibility. This assumption of religious responsibility took concrete form in the institution called Bar Mitzvah.







has now completed his training, and is ready at twenty to begin on the real task of his life."<sup>9</sup> It would appear, from this Mishnaic reference, that even though Bar Mitzvah, as a religious rite, was not practiced at that time, the age of thirteen was considered a proper time for preparing for life's duties. But there are other references to the age of thirteen as the age for assuming greater responsibilities. In commenting on Genesis 25:27, "And the boys grew; and Esau was a cunning hunter, a man of the field; and Jacob was a quiet man, dwelling in tents," the Midrash says: "So for thirteen years both went to school and came home from school. After this age, one went to the house of study and the other to idolatrous shrines. R. Eleazer b. R. Simeon said: A man is responsible for his son until the age of thirteen (to have him educated in Torah); thereafter he must say, "Blessed is he who has now freed me from the responsibility of this boy."<sup>10</sup> A thorough explanation of this blessing will be given later. Though there is no mention of the words "Bar Mitzvah," it does seem that age thirteen becomes predominant in discussions of adult assumption of responsibility.

Though the Bar Mitzvah rites as they are known today cannot be clearly traced earlier than the fourteenth century (this development will be traced in a later section), there are evidences that in the middle ages, "the boys had their rites in the synagogue long before they attained their thirteenth year, after which they were accounted, from a religious point of view, as adults...From early times young boys were encouraged to recite in synagogue the Hallel and the weekly lessons from the pro-

phets; boys sometimes lit the synagogue candles on the eve of the festivals;...when they were nine or ten years old, they fasted a few hours on the Day of Atonement, and some authorities included them among the ten adults requisite for a minyan, the ritual quorum for public worship. In such cases the boy might be given a copy of the Pentateuch to hold, to inculcate a sense of responsibility. The boys were even allowed to preach, and as some authorities assume, were admitted to administrative honors. An epitaph of the third century describes an eight year old Roman boy as an archon of the synagogue. But the title of archon seems to have been hereditary at Rome, and this particular boy may have borne the title in virtue of his descent. Boys were taught to show the greatest respect to their parents in synagogue; they carried their fathers prayer books for them; they never occupied their fathers seats; they stood while their fathers stood, and their fathers blessed them after the reading of the Law, or at the close of the Sabbath eve service."<sup>11</sup>

Solomon Schechter noted that even "in the times of the Temple, the participation of youth in religious actions began at the tenderest age. As soon as they were able to walk a certain distance with the support of their parents, the children had to accompany them in their pilgrimages to Jerusalem. In the Sabbatical year they were brought to the Temple, to be present at the reading of Deuteronomy by the King. The period at which the child's allegiance to the synagogue began is still more distinctly described...In allusion to Leviticus 19:23-24, concerning the prohibition of eating the fruits of a tree on the first three years, this Midrash goes on to say: "And this is also the case with the Jewish

child. In the first three years the child is unable to speak, and therefore is exempted from every religious duty, but in the fourth year all its fruits shall be holy to praise the Lord, and the father is obliged to initiate the child in religious works." Accordingly the religious life of the child began as soon as it was able to speak distinctly, or with the fourth year of its life. As to the character of this initiation we learn from the same Midrash and also from other Talmudical passages, that it consisted in teaching the child the verses "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, is one" and "Moses commanded us a Torah, the inheritance of the congregation of Jacob."<sup>12</sup>

Schechter speaks also of other rites associated with a boy's religious instruction in the period of the Middle Ages. In noting these rites, one will see readily that some of them precede the very rites of Bar Mitzvah, as it was established shortly after the period of which Schechter writes. Schechter speaks of "the rites performed on the day when the boy went to school for the first time. This day was celebrated by the Jews, especially in the Middle Ages, in such a way as to justify the high esteem in which they held the school. The school was looked upon as a second Mount Sinai; and the day on which the child entered it as the Feast of Revelation. Of the many different customs, I shall mention here that according to which this day was fixed for the Feast of Weeks. Early in the morning, while it was still dark, the child was washed and dressed carefully. In some places they dressed it in a "gown with fringes." As soon as day dawned, the boy was taken to the synagogue, either by his father or by some worthy member of the community. Arrived

at their destination, the boy was put on the Almenor, or reading-dais, before the Scroll of the Law, from which the narrative of the Revelation (Exodus 20:2-26) was read as the portion of the day. From the synagogue, the boy was taken to the house of the teacher, who took him into his arms. Thereupon, a slate was brought containing the alphabet in various combinations, the verse, "Moses has commanded" etc. in Deuteronomy 33:4, the first verse of the Book of Leviticus, and the words, "The Torah will be my calling." The teacher then read the names of the letters, which the boy repeated. After the reading, the slate was besmeared with honey, which the boy licked off. This was done in allusion to Ezekiel 3:3 where it is said: "And it (the roll) was in my mouth as honey for sweetness." The boy was also made to eat a sweet cake, on which were written passages from the Bible relating to the importance of the study of the Torah. The ceremony was concluded by invoking the names of certain angels, asking them to open the heart of the boy, and to strengthen his memory. By the way, I am very much afraid that this invocation was answerable for the abolition of this ceremony. The year in which this ceremony took place is uncertain, probably not before the fifth nor later than the seventh, according to the good or bad health of the child."<sup>13</sup>

Although the above reference refers to a rite that took place at a very early age, it is easily seen that parallels exist between the Bar Mitzvah as it has developed and the boy's first day of school as it was celebrated during the Middle Ages. The reading of the Torah, the "Seudah," the "Derasha," all of which were a part of the school ritual during the Middle Ages, are integral parts of the Bar Mitzvah rite as well.

There is yet another reference from antiquity which mentions preparing children for full participation in group life and the matter of having them blessed by the religious leaders of the community. In tractate Soferim, we find the following statement: "There was a good custom in Jerusalem to initiate the children into fasting the whole Day of Atonement at the beginning of the thirteenth year. During this year they took the boy to the priests and learned men that they might bless him and pray for him that God might think him worthy of a life devoted to the study of Torah and pious works. And whoever knew of a worthier person than himself would go to that person because their lives were exemplary and their hearts were directed heavenward; and they didn't try to lead their children themselves, but took them to the synagogue in order to awaken their emulation in religious matters."<sup>14</sup>

Another statement from Talmudic (rabbinic) Midrashic literature suggests a seed of the Bar Mitzvah: "When a heathen begets a son he consecrates him to idolatrous practices. The Israelite has his son circumcised and the rite of redemption of the first born performed, and as soon as he becomes of age he brings him into the synagogue and school in order that he may bless the name of God each day, and say the benediction over the Torah."<sup>15</sup>

In summary, then, one notices a distinct line of development leading to the initiation of the actual Bar Mitzvah in the fourteenth century. Though the term *בן מצוה* as it is first used in the Talmud applies to every grown Israelite and has nothing at all of the concept of a ceremony or an institution as we know it, there are several indications from rab-

binic literature of what might be forerunners of such an institution long before the fourteenth century. In considering the history and the customs of the Bar Mitzvah, one should remember that the idea of a boy formally assuming his religious responsibility is found earlier than the fourteenth century.

#### THE HISTORY OF THE BAR MITZVAH

Several scholars have shown through their researches that the Bar Mitzvah, that time in a boy's life when he is obliged to observe the precepts of the Jewish religion, had become a fixed custom only in the fourteenth century in Germany, though its origin was in antiquity, as has been shown. Prior to the fourteenth century, the great Jewish educational movement was already in progress, so the ceremony itself, as a separate rite, was in reality the natural "offspring" of a seed planted centuries before. As Solomon Schechter has said: "it will be easily seen that in olden times (he means the Middle Ages) the boy enjoyed almost all the rights of majority long before the day of his being "The Son of the Law" (Schechter's translation of *בן דא*). The condition of the novice is hardly distinguishable from that of the initiated priest. The Talmud, the Gaonim, and even R. Isaac Alfasi and Maimonides knew neither the term "The Son of the Law" (in our sense of the word) nor any ceremony connected with it.

One scholar, in discussing the background of Bar Mitzvah in Talmudic and early medieval times, correctly noted that there was no celebration marking the attainment of religious majority at that time because

the Talmud permitted the minor to participate in many religious observances, which have been mentioned earlier. "The distinction between a minor and one who had obtained his majority was theoretical. The latter did as a religious duty what a minor did optionally."<sup>17</sup> But things began to change during the later Middle Ages as the religious rites previously granted to the minor were now restricted. As these restrictions were enforced, the road was paved for the Bar Mitzvah to appear on the scene as a full-blown religious ceremony. Religious authorities resented the privileges indiscriminately granted to minors and sought to establish a rite which would grant these privileges to young boys upon attaining a specific age. "In the fourteenth century, notwithstanding the objections of some religious authorities, a minor was still usually taught by his father to put on t'filin as soon as he knew how to take care of them. However, the objections grew, and in the sixteenth century, among the Jews of Germany and Poland, it was the accepted custom that a boy could not begin to wear t'filin before the day following his thirteenth birthday. This custom was modified in the seventeenth century. The boy began wearing t'filin two or three months before he became Bar Mitzvah, so that by the time he reached his majority he was well acquainted with the practices and rules of laying t'filin.

The right of a minor to be called up to the bimah for the reading of the Torah underwent a similar development among the Ashkenazim (German and Polish Jews). As far back as the thirteenth century, among the Franco-German Jews, the privilege of being called up for the reading of the Torah was withdrawn from minors. Only on Simchas Torah, the last day of the Sukos festival, could minors enjoy this right. The attainment of



religious majority signified the attainment of the right to witness the reading of the Torah on the bimah and to recite the benedictions over it.

These two religious rights, laying t'filin and being called up to the Torah, became the most essential features of the Bar Mitzvah observance."<sup>18</sup> Other features, such as the Baruch Shepatarani, the Seudah, and the derasha will be discussed separately.

In summary then, one notices in the historical development of the Bar Mitzvah, that as the institution crystallized some of the prerogatives which the boy in an earlier age enjoyed as a minor, as part of the program of integration, were deferred to the time of the Bar Mitzvah and were given to him then for the first time.

Further consideration of the history of Bar Mitzvah as an institution involves an analysis and a history of the component parts of the ceremony.

#### THE BARUCH SHEPATARANI PRAYER

The Baruch Shepatarani prayer used to be an integral part of the Bar Mitzvah ceremony in most areas, but has since been excluded from several rites. In the sixteenth century it was discarded in many places, while the Sephardim give no place to the benediction in their liturgy. American Reform Judaism never included it; rather, it has been the custom of many American Reform synagogues to include a prayer said by the father, which reflects parental happiness at the son's attainment of greater religious responsibility.

The Baruch Shepatarani prayer is as follows:

ברוך אתה יהוה יי אלהינו  
הוא שפוטנו

for which there are various translations:

Praised be He who has freed me from being responsible for  
this young man's conduct.<sup>19</sup>

Blessed be He who has freed me from (bearing) the guilt of  
this one.<sup>20</sup>

It was said by the father at the time of his child's Bar Mitzvah, at which time the father was called to the Torah and pronounced this brief prayer as a benediction. The phraseology for the benediction is derived from the statement in the Midrash: "Rabbi Eleazar said: A man has to support and care for his son until he is thirteen years old; thenceforth he says 'Blessed be He who has relieved me of this obligation.'<sup>21</sup> Perhaps this was literally true. Solomon Maimon (1753-1800) writes in his autobiography: "In my fourteenth year my oldest son, David, was born to me. At my marriage I was only eleven years old....<sup>22</sup>

An halakic discussion took place concerning the form of the blessing and Freehof notes that "Moses Isserles as late as the sixteenth century had strong doubts as to whether it is proper for the father to recite this blessing. See Darke Moshe to Tur Orach Hayyim 225, where he said: "Mordecai ben Hillel said that a man when he makes his son Bar Mitzvah is in duty bound to recite the blessing: Praised be Thou O Lord, etc., who has freed me from the guilt of this one. This also is the custom of Jacob Moellin (Maharil) but I do not find this blessing mentioned in the Talmud and it seems difficult to me (to agree) that they should pronounce a blessing

that is not mentioned in the Talmud and in the Poskim." Hence Moses Isserles in his gloss to Sh. A. Orah Hayyim 225 #2 says that the blessing should not contain the name of God (i.e. since there is doubt whether the blessing is authorized or not); thus one does not say: Blessed be Thou O Lord, etc., as in all blessings, but merely: Praised be He who has freed me, etc.,<sup>23</sup>

This halakic discussion concerning the form of the benediction bodes of little importance within the totality of the Bar Mitzvah experience. The benediction has been dispensed with in many rituals and particularly in American ritual of the present day, where the boy of thirteen is hardly free from parent responsibility.

#### THE BAR MITZVAH DERASHA

During the Middle Ages, the public reading from the Torah was considered only symbolic. A bright child, if he had really received the elements of a full Jewish training should have gone beyond the Biblical text: he should have been introduced into the major body of Jewish lore and literature, the study of the Talmud. In order to demonstrate his prowess in this discipline, it became customary for him to give a public or semi-public discourse; not a speech of thanks, or an exhortation but a lecture revolving about some point of rabbinical learning. Thus the discourse, or derasha entered into the Bar Mitzvah ceremony. This would take place most often not in the synagogue but in the home, as the climax of a banquet which was given to celebrate the occasion.



tion of a Biblical difficulty). Boys on their thirteenth birthday delivered orations at table, but the custom does not present itself much earlier than the sixteenth century." <sup>25</sup> Loew, in his Lebensalter, likewise concludes that "the initiative in the matter of the derasha was taken by the Polish Jews where the most precocious Talmudists flourished in the sixteenth century. The derasha deals with a halakic theme, and was delivered before or during the Seudah by the little hero of the festival. In certain exceptional cases the derasha was also the author of his pilpulistic production. But even when this was the intellectual product of another, he had to become thoroughly familiar with its contents for only thus could he succeed in parrying the pseudo-logic wherewith the mature Talmudists interrupted him, so that he might have the opportunity in the presence of his parents and relatives to show off his knowledge and quick wittedness.

It is self-evident that such examinations could be employed with only the most gifted children. Less gifted ones could hardly find the thread of their dissertation after an interruption. Boys not fitted for the study of the Talmud or having no inclination for it had to remain quiet during the Bar Mitzvah meal. Their parents cast envious glances towards those whose sons on similar occasions already conducted themselves as promising Talmudists, or who were prepared to submit themselves to such an examination. It was because of this pilpulistic derasha that the Seudah had religious significance. The guests were regaled with halakic fare. The Hagadic lecture (in addition) was held by the rabbi, or where the rabbi seldom appeared at the domestic ceremony in larger

cities, they were held by other Talmudists. These concerned themselves partly with the Torah reading of the week or the Haftorah, but especially with the Bar Mitzvah ceremony itself. Seldom did he fail to mention that good impulses accompany the attaining of age, while evil inclinations are inextricably part of the Katan...Now he can point to the responsibility to which the Katan was not subjected.

The Bar Mitzvah derasha, halakic or agadio, is similar, as we can readily expect, both in content and in form, in its direction and in its sphere, to the vulgar and degenerate derash. As a classical example from the second half of the sixteenth century we mention the Bar Mitzvah derash of Efraim Lentschutz (died 1619). The senseless play of pictures and words was not only produced by confused minds but also were generally marveled at and praised. The most insipid allegory was considered the most scintillating style. Here we have a story of a war between the quadruple alliance and the pentapolitan in the thirteenth year, which belongs to the story of Abraham in Genesis 14:4, dragged by Rabbi Efraim into the circle of Bar Mitzvah reflections. The war described points to the struggle which passion has with the soul. The four kings represent the four elements, also the world of sense; the fifth represents the soul which is similar to the divine essence in five parts, and therefore also has five names. He was not familiar with the decree of excommunication of Solomon b. Adret and his associates which hung over the heads of preachers in the Provence who interpreted the war in question allegorically.

Most original is the allusion to marital opinions during the Bar Mitzvah ceremony. Rabbi Efraim says: When a man lives with his wife two

years in a childless marriage he is not only justified but duty bound to dissolve the marriage by a divorce, and to take steps for a new marriage. Now the boy lives up to his tenth year in childless marriage, i.e. in a marriage with evil instincts unfruitful of good deeds. This he does not recognize until his tenth year when his eyes are opened by the study of Mishnah, and he has to end the union with his unfruitful wife and marry the Torah. To this end he must allow three more years to pass in order to wait for the conception aptitude of his new helpmate.

We might think that the nonsense of the old derash would come to an end with this sort of reasoning. This however is not the case. Rabbi Efraim Lentschutz, its innovator, belonged to the solid darshanim. As a famous preacher he was called to the Prague community from Poland. The ordinary darshanim on various occasions, as well as on the Bar Mitzvah festival, delivered themselves of far more quaint and unrhymed ideas without coming any closer to the tastes of their listeners or discouraging the applause of the crowd."<sup>26</sup>

It is evident that the first derashot of which we are aware were based on Talmudic passages. This resulted largely because the major emphasis of one's religious study was Talmudic. As the years passed and secular education appeared, the derash of the Bar Mitzvah reflected this later emphasis, until today, where the derash, or "sermonette," or "speech," or "prayer" reflect the secularization of our society.

There are available several volumes of derashot, in English, German, Hebrew and Yiddish. There are speeches by Bar Mitzvah boys, and speeches for Bar Mitzvah boys, the former following a pattern similar to that

already described in this section, the latter following this pattern:

- a. an opening sentence which expresses the thought that the boy is now joining the congregation of Israel, will share in its privileges, participate in its prayer services, and assume its responsibilities.
- b. the exposition of a Biblical verse, taken either from the Torah or Haftarah portion of the week, and related to present day life.
- c. a paragraph of thanks to parents, teachers, relatives and friends.
- d. a concluding prayer in which is stated the youth's promise to be a faithful son of the household of Israel.

We have seen the growth of the derash from its origin as a Talmudic discourse to its present day status as a "speech," and in many present day ceremonies as the focus of the Bar Mitzvah celebration (this entire aspect will be discussed in a later chapter). The derash seems to have been a natural outgrowth of the practice of training boys very early in the technique of the Talmud. Its importance, then, as now, was to reflect well on the boy's knowledge of his religion and his faculty in communicating that knowledge to the assembled congregation.



THE BAR MITZVAH SEUDAH

W. Robertson Smith, in analyzing the sacrificial rite, wrote:  
 "A sacrifice was a public ceremony of a township; the law of the feast was open-handed hospitality; no sacrifice was complete without guests, and portions were freely distributed to rich and poor within the circle of a man's acquaintance; universal hilarity prevailed, men ate, drank, and were merry together, rejoicing before their God."<sup>27</sup> Thus one notes that banquets, festive meals on occasions of the celebration of domestic, communal and religious joy, originated in sacrificial feasts. If one were to trace the history of banquets from Biblical times one would become aware of their association with almost every life cycle rite, the Bar Mitzvah notwithstanding. Following is a list of references to a *seudah* (עֲשׂוּדָה), the religious banquet in which the student of the Law should participate:

*עֲשׂוּדָה הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה הָיְתָה לְבָרְכָהּ וְלִשְׂמֹחַתָּהּ וְלִשְׂכָּרָתָהּ וְלִשְׂתֵּנָתָהּ וְלִשְׂחִיכָתָהּ וְלִשְׂחִיכָתָהּ וְלִשְׂחִיכָתָהּ*  
 A.

And the child grew, and was weaned. And Abraham made  
 a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned.

Genesis 21:8  
*וַיִּגְדַּל יִצְחָק וַיִּנָּחֵם אַבְרָהָם וַיַּעַל עֲשׂוּדָה בְּיוֹם הַמָּוֶל וַיִּשְׂכַּר וַיִּשְׂתֵּן וַיִּשְׂחִיךְ וַיִּשְׂחִיךְ וַיִּשְׂחִיךְ*  
 B.

Rabbi Hoshiah the Elder said - he was weaned from the evil inclination (He was 13 years old, when the duties of manhood in the religious sense became incumbent upon him. This is probably the source of celebrating the 13th birthday with a feast). The rabbis said - he was weaned from

his mother's milk, that is to say, at the age of thirteen years, for at that time the good inclination came.

Genesis Rabbi 53:14

הור"א"ל מכתב שם הכותב בלחל מכתביו אינו מנהג  
לעשות ביום זה שמחה ושוב וכתב וכתב וכתב וכתב וכתב  
והוא מכתב הכותב וכתב וכתב וכתב וכתב וכתב  
מכתב הכותב וכתב וכתב וכתב וכתב וכתב

The reference explains: if the

הכותב בלחל מכתביו

it is not the custom to prepare a feast on this day, and again it is written, and the boy grew up, but at that hour he is not yet an adult.

Thus ה"ח"א explains: on the day when Isaac was weaned from the evil inclination, for he is thirteen years old and one day.

Ayin Yaacov ( כ"ח )

D. והוא מכתב הכותב וכתב וכתב וכתב וכתב וכתב  
והוא מכתב הכותב וכתב וכתב וכתב וכתב וכתב

Greater is the reward of those who having been enjoined do good deeds than of those who not having been enjoined but merely out of free will do good deeds.

Baba Kama 87

E. והוא מכתב הכותב וכתב וכתב וכתב וכתב וכתב  
והוא מכתב הכותב וכתב וכתב וכתב וכתב וכתב

It is a mitzvah for man to prepare a seudah on the day when one becomes Bar Mitzvah just on the day when he enters into the hupah. (מאן אברהם ס"ח כ"ח ש"ס אברהם ס"ח כ"ח)

F.

והוא מכתב הכותב וכתב וכתב וכתב וכתב וכתב

If the boys gives a "drash," there is a "seudat mitzvah,"  
even if it isn't on that day.

on the table

These references from rabbinic and Biblical literature illustrate that the festive meal associated with the Bar Mitzvah was an important part of the Bar Mitzvah ceremony. The Biblical reference from Genesis 21:8 and its attendant Midrash, referring to the banquet given by Abraham on the day that Isaac was weaned from the evil spirit and became Bar Mitzvah, reflects the rabbinic imagination and is, of course, an attempt to interpolate later data into early material. The other rabbinic references are attempts to establish Halaka for the Bar Mitzvah Seudah.

For later interpretations of the Bar Mitzvah seudah, we are indebted to Solomon Luria and Israel Abrahams. Luria said: "concerning the feast of Bar Mitzvah which the German Jews make, there is no feast which is a greater mitzvah to make because thereby one praises God and makes known that the boy has merited to become Bar Mitzvah; and the mitzvah of the parents is great because they have reared a son and brought him into the covenant of the Torah."<sup>28</sup> Abrahams notes that "Boys on their thirteenth birthday delivered orations at table but the custom does not present itself much earlier than the sixteenth century... in Germany from the fifteenth century large parties were held at the Bar Mitzvah or confirmation of the thirteen year old boy. Thus though Jewish authorities set their focus against all banquets except those of a semi-religious character, it early became necessary to curb the hospitable excesses which occurred on the lawful occasions...The luxury and dimensions of these meals are seen from the sumptuous regulations which

were enacted throughout the Middle Ages....a tax was frequently levied... similar takanoth or regulations were very frequently enacted, partly in the interests of thrift, partly to prevent envy, and partly to protect the poorer Jews from the humiliating necessity of foregoing the banquet altogether."<sup>29</sup> There is an interesting account, which validates the above statement, of the communal regulations of Cracow, Poland, in 1595, where a tax was placed on the Bar Mitzvah seudah: "And so, if the father makes a seudah for the Bar Mitzvah of his son he shall also give a gift of 'Chai,' that is eighteen parutas, to the Hevrah."<sup>30</sup>

Thus the Bar Mitzvah seudah seems to have originated in the fifteenth century in Germany, a century after the Bar Mitzvah as a separate rite evolved. The Bar Mitzvah seudah may be classified in the same category as other seudot, namely: the feast of the redemption of the first born son, the circumcision feast, the betrothal and the wedding feast, and the siyyum (the feast celebrating the finishing of a Talmudical treatise, as a feast in celebration of a happy occasion). In many areas, it became nothing more than the setting for the derasha, while in other locations it assumed an importance of its own.

SUMMARY OF CHAPTER ONE

This chapter has noticed that the age of majority is determined by different methods, depending upon the system or society involved. It has been determined by both social and physical puberty, by economic and military motives, by a system of graduated majorities and by the establishing of a specific age. Within Judaism, several of the above mentioned methods were incorporated: military and economic motives in the Biblical period, physical puberty in the rabbinic period, a specific age in modern times. One's majority is attained within Judaism at age thirteen, in the religious institution called Bar Mitzvah.

The term <sup>13</sup>נָשָׂא was first used in the Talmud (Baba Metzia 96a) where it applied to every grown Israelite, but this had no connection with a modern understanding of the Bar Mitzvah. In later rabbinic literature, however (Pirke Avot, Midrash Rabba), and in Jewish histories of early medieval times, there are references to selected rituals and ceremonies which later were included in the Bar Mitzvah rite itself. These selected rituals and ceremonies which were granted in early medieval times became restricted during the later Middle Ages as religious authorities resented the privileges indiscriminately granted to minors. Instead they sought to establish a rite which would grant these privileges to young boys upon attaining a specific age. As these restrictions were enforced, the road was paved for the Bar Mitzvah to appear on the scene as a full-blown religious ceremony, which it did in fourteenth century Germany.

The Bar Mitzvah ceremony was studied by viewing its component parts separately: the Baruch Shepatarani prayer, the derasha and the seudah.

The Baruch Shepatarani prayer, now recited by the father only symbolically at the time of his son's Bar Mitzvah, suggested in former times that the Bar Mitzvah ceremony freed the father from any further responsibility for his son, who had reached the age of majority and was on his own. Since the meaning of the prayer does not apply in modern times, it has been dispensed with in many rituals, but its recitation and meaning in earlier ages merits an understanding of its place within the totality of the Bar Mitzvah ceremony.

The derasha, like the Baruch Shepatarani prayer, has gradually diminished in importance and in relevance. Originally a Talmudic discourse by a well schooled student (though admittedly often prepared by either tutor or rabbi), it has become today little more than a memorized speech of platitude and thanks. With its diminished importance today, the attitude of scholarship surrounding it has likewise decreased.

The seudah, which often served as the setting for the derasha, may be classified with other seudot such as the feast of the circumcision and the betrothal and wedding feast, all of which took place at the conclusion of a religious ceremony. These festive meals seem to have originated in sacrificial feasts and are now held at the conclusion of almost every life cycle rite, including death. There is both Biblical and rabbinic mention of ceremonial meals at the conclusion of specific rites - in the evolution of the Bar Mitzvah, the seudah entered as a significant ceremonial function in the fifteenth century.

## CHAPTER TWO

### INTRODUCTION

This chapter is divided into two major parts: part one discusses initiation rites in primitive societies, with particular attention to puberty rites. Emphasis is given to a definition of terms, the aims and ritual of initiation rites, and the effects of the initiation upon the individual and the group. Part two emphasizes these aspects with particular reference to the Bar Mitzvah as an initiation rite, or as a "rite of passage." Included in this section will be material on the psychiatric approach to Bar Mitzvah as an initiation rite.

#### PART ONE - A DEFINITION OF TERMS

Initiation rites, or transition rites as they are often called, have been understood in various forms. One source says that "initiation in its general sense is synonymous with 'beginning' (initium), 'training,' 'instructing.' The word is usually applied in a restricted sense to signify admission to ceremonies or traditions of a religious or magical order."<sup>1</sup> Another source makes the initiation rite synonymous with a rite of puberty: "the name given to ceremonies performed among primitive peoples when a boy or girl arrives at puberty and crosses the threshold into adult life as man or woman."<sup>2</sup> This definition excludes other rites of initiation, as if the time of puberty is the only time when one is initiated into a group. It also fails to distinguish the differences between social puberty and physical puberty, which certain anthropologists bewail. There are

other definitions, to be sure, but one must establish a working definition before he goes further. Therefore, following Van Gennep, the writer proposes the following understanding of the initiation rite, with particular emphasis upon that initiation rite known as the rite of puberty, though it should be understood that this definition applies to all initiation rites. Within any life crisis ceremony, one can establish the validity of a threefold classification: separation, transition, and incorporation. "These three sub-categories are not developed to the same extent by all peoples or in every ceremonial pattern. Rites of separation are prominent in funeral ceremonies, rites of incorporation at marriages. Transition rites may play an important part, for instance, in pregnancy, betrothal and initiation; or they may be reduced to a minimum in adoption, in the delivery of a second child, in remarriage, or in the passage from the second to the third age group. Thus, although a complete scheme of rites of passage theoretically includes preliminal rites (rites of separation), liminal rites (rites of transition), and post-liminal rites (rites of incorporation), in specific instances these three types are not always equally important or equally elaborated."<sup>3</sup> But while the ceremonies of these sub-categories differ among various peoples, the basic procedure is always the same for a company or for an individual: they must stop, wait, go through a transitional period, enter, and be incorporated. Or more specifically, at the time of separation, the individual (with whom we are primarily concerned) goes through a series of formalities which loosen the ties binding him to his former environment. At the time of transition there is another series of formalities when he may receive instruction regarding the new state he is about to enter. At the time



of transition there is another series of formalities when he may receive instruction regarding the new state he is about to enter. At the time of incorporation, there are the re-entry or re-integration rites, facilitating the return of the neophyte to the ordinary world. Thus the rite of puberty can be seen as the ceremony which at a specified age, officially breaks all ties binding the adolescent to children and women, and admits him into the society of men. To attain entrance into the society of men, one is required to observe certain customs and/or perform certain rites, which occur during the periods of separation, transition and incorporation.

#### THE AIMS OF INITIATION

"The ceremonies of initiation are divided into two categories. In the one, the ceremony has as object the granting of a certain power to the neophyte, who uses it exclusively in his own personal interest, or, in return for a remuneration, for the benefits of others...The second category includes initiation ceremonies forming an integral part of the social institutions of so-called primitive peoples; they are usually performed on behalf of the community by a natural or artificial group...the second is by far the more important, not only because it forms a necessary part of the life of individuals and communities in primitive society, but also because its development is parallel with the modifications taking place in the structure of the social body."<sup>4</sup> While it is important to note the above distinction, and to realize that initiation rites prevail in magical orders, we are more concerned here with the rites found among the primitive people, and with the aims of these rites.

Within primitive societies it was thought that those persons who passed into a new group might bring with them some of the infectious taints of their old milieu. It was thus necessary that these people, within their particular societies in the general society, be purified, assimilated and instructed, the three-fold aim of initiation. For the rite of puberty within the primitive society the specific aims were to:

- a. confer on the adolescent the rights and obligations of an active member of society
- b. enable him to take part in war
- c. lay the foundations of family life
- d. observe the customs and rites necessary for the well being of the tribe

All of the aims, which were achieved within primitive societies in one or another form, express the notion of severance from the past and entrance upon a new life. We will see that the examples of puberty rites, as well as some examples of other initiation rites, follow consistently the three-fold pattern of separation, transition and incorporation. In discussing the Bar Mitzvah as an initiation rite, it will be shown that it too follows the same pattern.

One should note, however, that the anthropological approach to initiation rites is not the only approach to the phenomenon, though until recent years it was. Psychoanalytic theory, emphasizing the libido, and the conflict between father and son expressed in the Oedipus complex, is keenly interested today in the import of initiation rites and has studied seriously the rite of puberty. "Freudian theorists have an intense desire

to establish the legitimacy of their position from primal behavior. If *Source?* it can be established that an aboriginal act has become imbedded in the "racial memory," not much opportunity for dissent is left. There is a double primacy if the act has been related to need and at the same time has left its ineradicable impress on future behavior. Freud.....posited the original patricide arising from the son's jealousy of their father because of his monopolization of the females. Subsequently, the act was commemorated by totemic rites which included taboos to prevent its recurrence.

The psychological interpretation of initiation ceremonies at the time of puberty gives support to the theory. Circumcision or other acts of violence imposed upon the initiates are interpreted as punishment inflicted by father figures to give meaning to the threat of castration if the sons continue in their sexual desire for the mothers. The rite is interpreted as a reinforcement of the incest taboo.

A recent re-examination of the theory and data by Bruno Bettelheim led him to a modified formulation. Although he continues to accept the primal castration anxiety, he adds to this an envy of the opposite sex, and a desire to acquire its sexual attributes. Initiation ceremonies should then be explained, he believes, as rites which minimize sexual envy and castration anxiety based upon "a conflict between man's instinctual desires and the role he wishes to play in society or which society expects him to fulfill." The rites are efforts to free oneself of these anxieties."<sup>5</sup>

This part of the chapter attempts to understand puberty rites and their aims anthropologically rather than psychologically. Though it is the writer's opinion that anxieties play an important part in the life of one approaching puberty, it is not his intent here to impose later theories on rites of primitive and savage peoples. These psychoanalytic theories will play a more important role in part two of this chapter, a discussion of the Bar Mitzvah as an initiatory rite.

### THE RITUAL OF INITIATION

It was suggested earlier that in all initiation rites, whether they occur at the time of pregnancy, childbirth, childhood, betrothal, marriage or death, three major phases can be distinguished:

separation

transition

incorporation

There are other terms for these phases (separation rites, admission rites, communication of the sacra, reintegration rites) but whatever the terms, the pattern is the same. Within this section the three phases will be examined in several initiation rites, followed by a discussion of the phases within the rite of puberty.

"In every initiation of any importance the neophyte has to leave his family, live in isolation, consent to all kinds of restrictions and taboos, and submit to purifications, aspersions, purgations, fasting, flagellation, even mutilation (and, more particularly, circumcision) and finally, assist at his own burial, or at least pretend to have left this

world."<sup>6</sup> This separation from the group, from the previous world, before passing to the next phase, has been observed in initiation rites in most primitive societies. "The life of an individual in any society is a series of passages from one age to another and from one occupation to another. Wherever there are fine distinctions among age or occupational groups, progression from one group to the next is accompanied by special acts, like those which make up apprenticeship in our trades. Among semi-civilized peoples such acts are enveloped in ceremonies, since to the semi-civilized mind no act is entirely free of the sacred. In such societies every change in a person's life involves actions and reactions between sacred and profane - actions and reactions to be regulated and guarded so that society as a whole will suffer no discomfort or injury. Transitions from group to group and from one social situation to the next are looked on as implicit in the very fact of existence, so that a man's life comes to be made up of a succession of stages with similar ends and beginnings: - birth, social puberty, marriage, fatherhood, advancement to a higher class, occupational specialization and death. For every one of these events there are ceremonies whose essential purpose is to enable the individual to pass from one defined position to another which is equally well defined. Since the goal is the same, it follows of necessity that the ways of attaining it should be at least analogous, if not identical in detail...

Thus we encounter a wide degree of general similarity among ceremonies of birth, childhood, social puberty, betrothal, marriage, pregnancy, fatherhood, initiation into religious societies and funerals. In this respect, man's life resembles nature, from which neither the individual

nor the society stands independent. The universe itself is governed by a periodicity which has repercussions on human life, with stages and transitions, movements forward, and periods of relative inactivity."<sup>7</sup> This concise statement of Van Gennep explains the reasons behind the rites. We now turn our attention to the rites themselves in order to understand more precisely the three phases of initiation.

Group	Separation	Transition
Australian tribes	age 10 to 13 - init. into totem group separated from women and children secluded in the bush taboos of a dietary nature separated from mother boyhood games abandoned novice sometimes considered dead	instruction in tribal law gradual education as novice sees totem ceremonies recitations of myths
Congolese	negative rites and positive rites novice separated from previous environment, in relation to which he is dead taken into forest and subjected to seclusion, lustration, flagellation, intoxication	bodily mutilations, painting of the body since novices are considered dead during trial period, they go about naked they are instructed, speak special language and eat special foods
Duk-Duk of Solomon Islands	novice taken to sacred place beaten	participants in initiation dance and teach their dance and secrets of the society to the novices all share a meal
Masai of Australia	circumcision smeared with clay wander from place to place for three months heads shaved - physical prowess tested shut up for four days after ceremony	come out of seclusion tease girls

Group	Incorporation
Australian tribes	a religious ceremony- special mutilation(removal of tooth, incision of penis) making novice identical with members resurrected, taught how to live as an adult
Congolese	novices act as if they are newly born and have to relearn all the gestures of ordinary life bathe in a stream
Duk-Duk of Solomon Islands	novices given gifts of their costumes at a special ceremony on different day
Masai of Australia	when their hair grows back, then they are warriors
Christian adult baptism	administration of salt which was exorcised - water is blessed - initiates remove their clothing, dress in white, marked with a cross, admitted to communion, procession with candles
Conversion	acceptance as convert - examination
Sikhs	has to appear with a present for the chief - distributes cakes to fellow members
Roman Catholic affiliation with religious order	admission to religious order after series of years in study - elaborate religious ritual - wedding to Christ



Group	Separation	Transition
Christian adult baptism	exsufflation with a formula of exorcism sign of the cross on the forehead	permitted to attend religious assemblies and had a special place in the church but had to leave before part of service was over periodically submitted to exorcism and separated more and more from non-Christian world gradually instructed anointed with oil, renounce Satan, swear to ally themselves with Christ, recite credo
conversion	renouncing one's religion	period of study
Sikhs	anointment of body eating of special food	regeneration after eating the special food submits to examination
Roman Catholic affiliation with religious order	renounce secular life enter convent or monastery change of life habits change of dress ascetic life no marriage	period of religious instruction taking of vows at different times

These eight examples of initiation rites in primitive societies and in our own culture emphasize the three phases of initiation, stressing purification, instruction and assimilation into the new group. In all of these rites the new members are entitled to all the rights and privileges of their group and are expected to participate fully within the brotherhood.

#### THE RITE OF PUBERTY

Several anthropologists have noted the difference between social puberty and physical puberty and are very careful to distinguish between the two in their examinations of the puberty rite. Van Gennep has gone farther than most in his discussion of the differences involved, stating that physical, or physiological puberty and social puberty rarely converge. He was perhaps the first to notice that physical puberty is a difficult time to date and with this notice, to distinguish between it and social puberty. Among girls, for example, physical puberty is marked by swelling of the breasts, enlargement of the pelvis, appearance of pubic hair, and the first menstrual flow. One would, at first thought, think it relatively easy to date the transition from childhood to adolescence from the first appearance of the above signs. But this is not always easy to do. "First, sexual enjoyment is not dependent on puberty, but may be experienced earlier or later, depending on the individual; orgasm may even appear several years earlier, so that puberty is important only for the ability to conceive. Second, the first menstrual bleeding does not occur at the same age among the various races, or among individuals within the same race. The variations are so great that one cannot

conceive of any institution being founded on an element as undeterminable and as irregular as puberty..."<sup>8</sup>

The question of physical puberty is even more complicated for boys than for girls; its variability is increased by the fact that the first emission of sperm may be preceded by emissions of mucus, that it often passes unnoticed by the subject, and, finally, that in most individuals it occurs only as a result of an external shock whose date depends on circumstances impossible to foresee or direct. Therefore, a boy's puberty is established in the opinion of the public by the growth of a beard, pubic hair, etc. But in this respect, too, ethnic and individual variations are considerable."<sup>9</sup> Thus, Van Gennep sees social puberty preceding physiological puberty in some areas and following it in others. He is wary of naming as "puberty rites" all the rites, ceremonies, and practices marking the transition from childhood to adolescence; instead, he sees these as "rites of separation from the asexual world... followed by rites of incorporation into the world of sexuality."<sup>10</sup>

Before embarking, then, upon an examination of primitive "puberty" rites, it is necessary to determine, apropos the above discussion, just what is meant by the term.

It is a common practice to give the rites which mark separation from childhood and entrance upon manhood or womanhood the name of "rites of puberty." And yet it is only to certain of those rites that the name can be accurately applied; "for admissibility to the ranks of mature persons is, in many instances, determined not by arrival at puberty, but by something having no necessary connection with it, such as attainment

of a certain age, or possession of a certain capacity or quality."<sup>11</sup>  
Thus, the term herein shall be used when examining those rites whose celebration is determined in point of time by reference to puberty.

The following chart gives examples of representative rites of puberty in selected primitive societies. The rites shown here in their three stages have implications for and relevance to the Bar Mitzvah.

Group	Separation	Transition
Northern tribes of Central Australia	circumcision and subincision initiate is shown some of the sacred totemic ceremonies	
Larakia of Australia	novice is kicked and beaten	given tests of strength, endurance and courage
Yeun of Southeast Australia	tooth knocked out by medicine man, dances, pantomime representations, mock burial and resurrection of a tribesman, food restrictions, novice dusted with charcoal, painted, given belt of manhood, retires into bush	tooth knocked out by medicine instruction while in the bush - given totem names
Wonghi of New South Wales	novice has tooth knocked out bull-roarer used but novice does not see it - no women present - youths sent away, "killed"	and resurrection
Kakian association of Ceram	blindfolded, taken to forest for 5-9 days, "killed"	instruction by the chief warning by the chief to observe rules of society boys are resurrected

Group	Incorporation
Northern tribes of Central Australia	gives present to the operators operators touch the mouth with piece of meat, release him from ban of silence
Larakia of Australia	shown and given a sacred bullroarer which he cannot show to younger brothers or to women
Yeun of Southeast Australia	dust is wiped off - they take their place in the community when medicine men are satisfied with their fitness
Wonghi of New South Wales	tooth knocked out, brought into tribe
Kakian association of Ceram	taught the common acts of life

In understanding the preceding chart, one notes that the separation rites vary considerably among the groups, that they may include mutilations, taboos, painting, dusting, hair cutting and the like. The transition rites are usually constituted of instruction, tests of endurance, skill and courage, naming, a resurrection from a previous "dead" state to new life. Sometimes they are concerned with sacred mysteries or tribal legends, sometimes they deal with the duties of a tribesman toward the women of the tribe, the aged and the poor. And sometimes they embrace politics and government, economic regulations, or matters such as tribal etiquette and decorum, intercourse between the sexes (social and sexual). Usually the primitive educational system is climaxed in the didactic tactics of the initiation. "Very frequently the duties of implicit obedience during the ceremonies and of never divulging what he sees or hears are strongly impressed upon the novice."<sup>12</sup> Many of these transitional rites have become parts of contemporary puberty rites in modified forms. We shall see, in part two of this chapter, that the rite of Bar Mitzvah has appropriated some of these transitional rites.

The final ceremonies, or the incorporation phase, vary somewhat within primitive societies, but consistent patterns are noticed. The initiate is given new garments, ornaments, is ceremonially washed and often given gifts. In many instances the end of the ceremonies is marked by feasting and dancing, and often gets out of control. In some cases the final ceremony is a religious service.

The ceremonial induction of adolescent youths into the full participation in social life is seen as a common occurrence within the

primitive society. The induction marks an important change in the life of the novice, by which he is severed from the things of childhood and enters upon the rites and duties of manhood or womanhood. The practices noted in the three phases of initiation express clearly and forcefully a severance from the past and an entrance upon a new life. "In the tests of endurance, in some, at all events, of the mutilations inflicted, and in the instructions given, we see a preparation for this new life - an attempt to form the character and educate the novice for the duties of full membership of society; and we see in the feasting, dancing, and sexual intercourse which frequently take place as the final stages of the ritual his introduction into the corporate life of the community."<sup>13</sup> The youths are now tied securely to the ruling social order and are devices for the development of social cohesion. Their socialization is climactic and abrupt - they are now among the society of men.



## PART TWO - THE BAR MITZVAH AS AN INITIATORY RITE

This chapter division will show that the Bar Mitzvah is indeed an initiatory rite, a rite de passage in the technical sense, that it has assumed many of the characteristics of initiation rites from primitive societies, and that the same threefold division noticed in the primitive rites, namely, separation, transition and incorporation, is found in the Bar Mitzvah. Though these three categories may not be developed as thoroughly or as distinctly within the Bar Mitzvah rite, the ceremonial pattern does seem, it is suggested, to be the same. This section will also discuss the effects of the Bar Mitzvah on the initiate, noting the psychological and emotional changes which accompany this rite of puberty.

### THE AIMS OF THE BAR MITZVAH AS AN INITIATORY RITE

It was observed in part one of this chapter that four specific aims could be found for the primitive initiation rite of puberty:

- a) to confer on the adolescent the rights and obligations of an active member of society
- b) to enable him to take part in war
- c) to lay the foundations of family life
- d) to observe the customs and rites necessary for the well being of the tribe

Certainly the aims of Bar Mitzvah do not coincide exactly with those of its primitive counterpart. The two rites are centuries apart in time (in some cases) and worlds apart in regard to cultural differences. But these differences do not erase the similarities that exist between

the two rites. The Bar Mitzvah confers on the adolescent Jew specific rights and more particularly, specific obligations within his own milieu. Where the youth from the primitive society, for example, may have been, and often was entitled to wear new garments signifying his admission into the society of men, the new Bar Mitzvah is entitled for the first time to wear the talis, the ritual prayer shawl. Just as the anthropologist observing the primitive society is able to notice the different age groups by their particular apparel, habits, and the like, the observer within the traditional synagogue today can at first glance distinguish those post Bar Mitzvah age men from their younger counterparts by their ritual apparel. The laying of tefillin is also a distinguishing rite. Further, as the new initiate within the primitive society now had access to the tribal chief, to tribal symbols and ritual objects, and to geographical areas previously forbidden him, so the new Bar Mitzvah now has freer access to the "holy of holies," is permitted to handle the ritual objects, to read from the Torah, and to be called to the pulpit for other honors, duties and responsibilities. Thus there are definite relationships between these aims of the primitive rite and those of the Bar Mitzvah.

\* The Bar Mitzvah rite does not allow the new initiate to participate in war. But one must remember that where the Bar Mitzvah is a rite confined to a religious group within the general society, and taking place at a specific age (thirteen), the primitive initiation ceremony is a rite of broader scope, unconfined to a religious group, but encompassing the entire society, taking place at an age determined by the tribe as being anywhere from twelve to twenty. The primitive rite thus served as a rite of conscription of the youths into military service. The

Bar Mitzvah "drafts" as it were, the youths into religious service.

The primitive initiation rite laid the foundations of family life. Van Gennep says that the rite can be seen as the transfer from the asexual to the sexual world, and it was often the privilege of the new initiate to marry after initiation. In other tribes part of the incorporation rites included having sexual intercourse. Thus the new initiate assumed a role the Bar Mitzvah does not assume, but there remains yet an analogy between these aims of the two rites. The Bar Mitzvah ceremony does not lay the foundations of family life - it strengthens them. The new Bar Mitzvah, an adolescent now, is seen as more mature, capable of new and greater responsibilities within home and family life. It is almost as if the youth in the primitive society did not exist before his initiation into tribal life. The initiation serves almost as a birth, or at least, as has been noted, a rebirth into the community, giving him at this time rights and privileges he never had before. The Bar Mitzvah, though analogous to the primitive rite in a number of ways, has as one of its aims the solidification and intensification of previously existing privileges and obligations. For us, though the Bar Mitzvah is important as a rite of initiation, it is not nearly so well noted, so clearly defined as is the primitive rite. In our society this change is just as difficult to make, but with less applause, less public acclaim, and less feeling of accomplishment than its primitive counterpart.

#### THE RITUAL OF INITIATION

Several rabbis, writing today of the Bar Mitzvah and its place in

American Judaism, have noticed the kinship between the rite of puberty in the primitive society and the rite of Bar Mitzvah in our own society. Their comparisons, however, have concerned themselves more with the psychological implications than with the mechanics of the rite. It is the intention here to illustrate the very close relationship existing between the mechanics of the primitive puberty rite and the Bar Mitzvah rite; in fact, to show by example that the Bar Mitzvah rite follows the same pattern of the primitive puberty rite, separation, transition, and incorporation, and that the Bar Mitzvah is a "rite de passage."

Thirteen rites of initiation of various kinds have been charted within this paper, each one following the pattern of separation, transition, and incorporation. Within each phase of the rite, certain procedures were noted which had to be carried out before passing into the next phase. Though these procedures varied in their details, they were similar in their general structure. Once all three stages were completed, to the satisfaction of those conducting the ceremony, as well as those witnessing it, the neophyte became a full member of adult society. That there are close similarities between these rites and the Bar Mitzvah will now be shown.

The separation period in the primitive initiation rite was marked by a number of characteristic features. Aside from actual physical separation, from either both parents or one, it was common for mutilations of various kinds to occur. We know of circumcision, knocking out teeth, filing the teeth, perforating the lips or ears, scarification, and tattooing. Other separation rites included taboos of a dietary nature, the abandoning

of boyhood games, mock burial and resurrection. One could describe thousands of separation rites, as each tribe had its own special and significant means of separating the novice from his previous social group. These are the major forms, however, and are adequate for a general understanding.

The rite of Bar Mitzvah has its separation period as well, though the constituent parts vary considerably from those of the primitive society. A physical separation takes place in the form of lessons which are held in preparation for the ceremony. These lessons may begin a year in advance of the Bar Mitzvah, or as late as several weeks prior to the ceremony. This practice varies within individual congregations. These lessons are usually held at the conclusion of the public school session, taught by the congregational rabbi or an accredited tutor, and held in the synagogue. The separation is significant in that it takes away from the youngster's play time, forcing him to abandon this activity when he often wishes the opposite were the case. In interviews with Bar Mitzvah age boys, this physical separation from their friends was mentioned by a minority of the respondents. Anxiety arises often during this time, just as it does within the primitive society, and for a number of different reasons. The Bar Mitzvah students worry that they are unprepared for their lessons and will incur the wrath of the rabbi or tutor. The youth in the primitive society apparently had similar fears; that he would not pass the tests of strength and endurance, that he would not be worthy of admittance to the society of men.

Though there are no physical stigmata attached to the Bar Mitzvah, as there are in primitive societies, youngsters are threatened and

rebuked if they are not attending to their preparation. This is yet another anxiety-provoking situation which injects fear of failure into the student in this separation phase of the rite.

In the separation phase, then, there are distinct relationships between primitive puberty rites and the Bar Mitzvah. This initial period of separation from friends and hobbies corresponds to the primitive separation from family. Both rites produce fears, tensions and anxieties, all of which are intensified at the transition phase of the rite.

The middle phase of the primitive puberty rite, that of transition, was marked in different tribes by a variety of habits, though distinct patterns are noticed. The phase is largely one of instruction and testing, in conduct, strength, endurance, courage and religion. "Sometimes the instructions are concerned with the sacred mysteries or tribal legends; sometimes they deal with the duties of the tribesman towards the women of the tribe, the aged and the poor, or towards the community, and sometimes they embrace politics and government, economic regulations, or matters such as tribal etiquette and decorum, intercourse between the sexes, or domestic duties; or they inculcate such lessons as that pain must be endured, and that selfishness and greediness must be avoided. Very frequently the duties of implicit obedience during the ceremonies and of never divulging what he sees or hears are strongly impressed upon the novice."<sup>14</sup> Other phenomena occur as well: the giving of a new name, the "resurrection" of the neophyte from the dead, and the taking of vows. Thus the transition phase of the primitive puberty rite is an important "weight station" between separation and incorporation. It is here that

the neophyte obtains all the information necessary for his ultimate incorporation into the society of men.

The transition phase of the Bar Mitzvah rite has many of the accoutrements of its counterpart. Its primary emphasis is also centered on instruction, in ethical conduct, in the Hebrew language and in religious precepts. Though the content of instruction varies within the three major branches, and varies considerably within the individual synagogues, it is safe to say that emphasis is placed on the Torah blessings, the youth's Torah portion, and the Haftarah and its blessings. Within Orthodoxy, which maintains the strictures of a fundamentalist dogma regarding the Bible, freedom of interpretation is consequently limited and one might say that the child is taught to view the material of the Bible as dogma, as God's word which is unable to be questioned. This aspect of Orthodox belief corresponds closely to the instruction of the primitive in sacred mysteries and tribal legend. Within Reform Judaism, though the autonomy of the individual synagogue does not permit one to assess the rite of instruction on a blanket basis, the teaching is open to interpretation and freedom of thought and expression by the student, where he has an opportunity to question and challenge his rabbi or tutor. This give and take between teacher and pupil was not a part of the primitive instruction - the neophyte followed his chief, did as he was told, and passed or failed.

As the primitive rite included instruction in conduct, the Bar Mitzvah follows similar lines. The student is taught that the Bar Mitzvah should instill in him "a reverence for God and man and life,

with a decent respect for themselves as human beings with an enormous potential for goodness, and with a knowledge of their moral and communal responsibilities as members of the household of Israel."<sup>15</sup> It is hoped that the child, through his study, will "be drawn closer to God and to Judaism,"<sup>16</sup> will learn "something of Judaism's cry for social justice and for an ethical life....will receive the guidance that will enable him to achieve a better perspective and find in life the deeper meanings."<sup>17</sup> Thus there are close parallels between the instructions in conduct in the primitive and Bar Mitzvah rites.

But these are not the only similarities at this stage. Within the primitive society a new name was often given to the neophyte - in the Bar Mitzvah rite, though no name change is effected, the child is told that he is now to be considered a "man," which is meant to signify his growth, and which relates peripherally to the primitive name change. Again, in primitive societies, there was in many tribes the ritual of "death" and "resurrection," signifying new status for the initiate. Similarly, in the Bar Mitzvah rite, we are aware of the thought that, particularly in centuries past, the youth entered upon his Bar Mitzvah studies as a boy and completed them as a man, with all the rights and privileges of his new status. This change is not viewed in terms of "death" and "resurrection" but the principle is the same - a change in status, effected by the rite of instruction.

Yet further similarities are noticed: in primitive tribes instruction often centered on the neophyte's duties toward the aged and the poor or toward the community. In some communities in the United States



today, the same instruction is given at the time of Bar Mitzvah, and in fact many rabbis have instituted Mitzvah programs, through which the youngster strengthens his commitment to Judaism. One Mitzvah program includes the following: a) that the Bar Mitzvah "keep a record of contributions to various worthy causes made out of your allowance or from what you have earned; b) give thirteen hours of personal service to any of the following: Temple-Religious School, public school, UNESCO Halloween campaign or any other organization dedicated to the cause of human welfare."<sup>18</sup> There is one further relationship,-usually the primitive educational system was climaxed in the didactic tactics of the initiation. Though it is assumed that granting the youth the privilege of Bar Mitzvah will instill in him a greater sense of commitment to Jewish study and learning, it often happens that the experience of Bar Mitzvah means the end of the boy's enrollment in the religious school - a true parallel with the primitive didactic.

\* Thus, as in the separation phase, there are affinities in the transition phase between the primitive puberty rite and the Bar Mitzvah. The relationships are closer than one would imagine on first perusal, and they become intensified in phase three of the rite, the rite of incorporation.

Incorporation within the primitive society involved a number of different rituals; some tribes incorporated their neophytes through a religious ceremony, others through a ritual purification. Often gifts were given to the initiates as a welcome into the tribe - many times the gift was a spear. Examination formed the sole initiation ritual in some

tribes, while in others the initiate presented gifts to his chief and distributed food to his fellow members. In Australia, certain tribes presented the sacred bullroarer to the new member, which he was forbidden to show to women or to younger brothers. Sometimes the novice was marked on the forehead with a spot of blood - in many instances the boys received some badge of manhood on the completion of the rites, and were clothed in new garments, anointed and decorated. "Among some of the Victorian tribes, the novice is given over to the women, who wash off the clay and charcoal with which he has been daubed, paint him, and dance before him. He is now a man."<sup>19</sup> Other tribes engage in ceremonial hair cutting at both separation and incorporation. In many instances the end of the ceremonies is marked by feasting and dancing and is frequently made the occasion of great license. The primitive incorporation rite, then, is a time of much involvement, by the novice himself, by the conductor(s) of the ceremony, and by the general community. Those anthropologists who have conducted field work among these tribes have reported that the incorporation rite is also a very anxious period for the inductee, though the data available do not permit further elaboration. This reaction will be further discussed in the last section of this chapter.

Within the Bar Mitzvah ceremony, the incorporation rite parallels closely the patterns of many primitive tribes. Though incorporation at Bar Mitzvah is celebrated in several ways, depending upon the area of the country, the rabbi, local custom, and the particular branch of Judaism, several general patterns can be noticed which are a part of most Bar Mitzvah ceremonies. In the following list many relationships with the primitive rite can be noticed:

The Bar Mitzvah youth:

- 1) gets a "Bar Mitzvah suit" for the occasion  
(corresponding to the primitive ornamentation,  
decoration, and daubing)
- 2) prays with the rabbi privately before the service  
(corresponding to the primitive chief meeting with  
the neophyte before actual initiation to check on  
their preparedness)
- 3) kisses mother and grandmother "goodbye" before the  
service as they wish him well  
(primitive rites often saw this mother-son separation,  
both at the time of separation and of incorporation)
- 4) puts on talis (and tefillin), a ritual object commented  
upon by the worshippers because it is usually a gift from  
parents or grandparents  
(neophytes were adorned at this time with ceremonial  
clothing and ritual objects which they continued to  
wear as a mark of their maturity, and new status as a  
member of adult society)
- 5) participates in a religious ceremony, where he is on  
trial in front of the congregation, has access to  
specific ritual objects for the first time, and often  
is presented with gifts from synagogue interest groups  
(this pattern follows very closely that of many  
primitive tribes)

- 6) is often party to a feast after the ceremony, marking the culmination of the rite  
(very similar to the primitive feasting and dancing, the occasion of great license)
- 7) is "charged" by the rabbi, either privately or publicly but either way in front of the assemblage. The officiating rabbi often tells the youth that the private "charge" is to remain confidential. A kiss by the rabbi on the youth's forehead often concludes the charge, following the priestly benediction, both of which "seal" the relationship of the youth to his new group.
- 8) receives gifts from family and friends. The fountain pen is usually the symbol of a Bar Mitzvah boy. Its phallic significance and relationship to the primitive gift of a spear should be noted later.

\* These eight parts of the Bar Mitzvah ceremony illustrate clearly that many of its functions are influences, consciously or unconsciously, from primitive tribes. The many relationships between the two rites bespeak this kinship. One should further note that there are certainly the three phases of separation, transition and incorporation distinguishable in the Bar Mitzvah. The ceremony represents through these stages, a change from the asexual to the sexual world and a responsibility to religion, parents and teachers previously not asked of the boy. Though he does not have full status in the society of men, as does his primitive

counterpart, the boy is, ironically, now in the "transition" stage of his life, apart from the world of childhood, a part of the world of adolescence, not yet a part of the world of manhood.

THE PROBLEMS OF ADOLESCENCE AND THEIR MANIFESTATIONS  
AT THE TIME OF BAR MITZVAH

Now that it has been shown that the Bar Mitzvah ceremony follows the threefold stages of separation, transition and incorporation, it is necessary to elucidate somewhat more clearly the suggestion made several times above, namely, that the time of adolescence is a period of problems, conflicts and stresses, a weigh station in one's development. It is the intent here to look carefully at this period of "sturm und drang," of storm and stress, and to see how the problems of this period are reflected in the Bar Mitzvah rite. way

Within the young adolescent, many things are happening. Childhood proper comes to an end and with the advent of sexual maturity he is termed an adolescent. Erikson tells us that the child is in the process of discovering who he is, that "the growing and developing youths, faced with this physiological revolution within them, are now primarily concerned with what they appear to be in the eyes of others as compared with what they feel they are...adolescents have to refight many of the battles of earlier years, even though to do so they must artificially appoint perfectly well meaning people to play the roles of enemies; and they are ever ready to install lasting idols and ideals as guardians of a final destiny: here puberty rites "confirm" the inner design for life... (they) help to integrate and to affirm the new identity."<sup>20</sup> Thus Erikson

sees the search for identity as one of the major problems of adolescence. And indeed this is true, for "the central theme of adolescence is the finding of one's self. The adolescent must learn to know a whole new body and its potentials for feeling and behavior, and fit it into his picture of himself. He must come to terms with the new constellation of meanings presented by the environment. He must define the place he will occupy in adult society. This means an intensified self-awareness--largely manifested as self-consciousness--and a new push for independence. In early adolescence, the individual continues to seek independence--although with new vigor and in new areas--almost in the way he did in the middle years; he wants more privileges, more freedom from adult supervision and restraint so that he can follow the dictates of the gang (which he now probably calls "the crowd."). For the young adolescent is still primarily concerned about his status with his immediate peers; he strives to be as much like the others as possible, largely as a result of feeling out of step with them. Individual differences are now more clear-cut than at earlier ages, but a uniqueness which is still only half-understood is not completely welcome."<sup>21</sup>

This assessment of the adolescent and his problems has been verified by this writer's observations of adolescent youth. Having worked for nine years in summer camps, as counselor and later as village leader of coeducational units, he had a first hand opportunity to work as an involved person with the adolescent at work and at play. Perhaps an even greater opportunity was afforded him as he was cabin counselor to these youths during their childhood (8-11) and later became village leader to the same youths during the period of their adolescence. Besides having to

cope with their changing physical structure, these youths were busy looking in mirrors, so to speak, in efforts to answer the question - "who am I?" Intellectually, these middle class Jewish youngsters were vitally concerned with religion, death, miracles, politics, peace, the end of the world, - they often talked long into the night and asked for, on their own initiative, adult leaders to guide their discussions. Socially, the young adolescents cannot be spoken of together. The girls are far ahead of the boys at this stage, both physically and intellectually, their needs vastly different from their male counterparts. At dances and parties, young adolescents (13) can be found in small groups, the boys together in a huddle, the girls off by themselves. The difference is that the girls are able and want to participate, while a majority of the boys are unable and reluctant to participate. Ritualistically, both groups engage in similar practices; both sexes in their own special "vocabulary," which, if not used by a member, puts one in the "out" group, in their manner of dress which is almost a uniform in our times, boys with their hair, girls with their hair. This effort to "be like everyone else," to conform, seems to be a temporary phase, one of insecurity, because the young adolescent knows that if he does not "fall in" with his peer group, he will fall outside the circle completely. In later adolescence, as the youth begins to find himself, he tends less to follow the crowd, and more to establish his identity.

In assessing some of the problems, then, of the adolescent, problems affecting him alone, that of finding oneself is the major heading, with subheadings which might read: physical changes and how to understand

them, intellectual problems, social problems, and peer group relationships. But the adolescent interacts with yet another group aside from his peer-group--his parents--and the period of adolescence has always been fraught with parent-child tensions. "A substantial portion of the adolescent's time with his family is colored by feelings, on both sides, of frustration, outrage, humiliation, sullenness, resentment and dramatic despair."<sup>22</sup> These conflicts arise for a number of reasons.

The developmental pattern of the adolescent is such that it takes him further and further away from home, but in body and spirit, until home sometimes seems to be only a rooming house where he eats, sleeps, leaves his clothes to be picked up and washed, reads the paper, watches television, and makes and receives phone calls. This growth pattern causes "parental pangs"--the parents are suddenly struck with the realization that the child is growing up, that he no longer needs to depend so much on the parents, and thus that the parent role becomes minimized or the youth spends the maximum amount of his time away from the family group. This kind of strain within the family group, working both in parent and child has been called "dual ambivalence."<sup>23</sup> There are doubts on both sides as to where the child stands developmentally--"the situation is complicated by the fact that not only do parent and adolescent war with each other, but each is at war with himself."<sup>24</sup> In terms of the young adolescent, with whom we are concerned here, one notices that he is in a quandry--  
a |  
he does not know whether he should be acting as a child or an adult. "He demands privileges, but views their corresponding responsibilities as onerous. In other words, he wants the privileges both of childhood and adulthood. From the parents standpoint, of course, responsibilities



are as much a mark of mature status as are privileges. To the child, however, because they are imposed by his parents, responsibilities appear as tokens of his subordinate position and so are degrading as well as burdensome."<sup>25</sup> Thus the young adolescent finds himself sitting on the fulcrum of a wobbly see-saw; on one side is childhood, on the other, adulthood—the problem: which way is he to lean?

Parental ambivalence stems from several factors: to watch their children grow up may be threatening as "it may reawaken their own past adolescent fears and conflicts and yearnings. It may bring home to them with new force how the years have slipped away and that they are now members of an aging generation. It may even breed a species of jealousy over the pleasures that still await the adolescent but are disappearing for his parents with the coming of middle age. It may imply the end of the parents' usefulness, or it may spell a lonely life in quarters that have suddenly become too big. Then, too, parental resistance to the child's growing up may stem from unwillingness to relinquish authority built up over a decade and a half...the parents ambivalence dates back just as far as the child's: even as they are applauding his first steps or his first words, they are experiencing pangs of regret at the passing of infancy."<sup>26</sup> Parents, then, do not suddenly develop ambivalent feelings—they take root shortly after birth and reach fruition, as it were, at the very time the child is beginning to "sow his wild oats."

We have seen, from the above discussion, some of the difficulties of adolescence, a period of problems and adjustments for both parents and children. These problems have been looked at in an attempt to determine

just what is happening to the young adolescent. His search for himself, it is suggested, is more than simply an attempt to find something that is already there. It is also an attempt to create a personality. As he tries on various roles and manners, his interior experience crystallizes and becomes his own, to feel, to think about, to change, to conceptualize, to act upon.

Within Jewish family life, many of the problems of the adolescent, already described, become most evident at the beginning of the thirteenth year, when, in a large number of homes, the male youngster begins serious preparation for the Bar Mitzvah, that ceremony initiating him into full religious membership in the synagogue. This period, leading to its climax in the actual celebration itself, presents problems both to the youth and his parents, problems akin to those discussed under dual ambivalence. Added to the already present strains of adolescent life within the family group at this time, is the additional strain of the Bar Mitzvah preparation, the actual ceremony of which brings to the fore, consciously and unconsciously, all, or at least most of the child's and the parent's ambivalences toward each other. Though much of this kind of thinking will be analyzed in chapter three, wherein is presented data from actual interviews with Bar Mitzvah students, this section includes a summary and analysis of perhaps the only published material on the Bar Mitzvah considered psychoanalytically. This study, by Jacob Arlow, elucidates clearly the compounded problems of the adolescent Bar Mitzvah boy, as manifested on his Bar Mitzvah day. Arlow's analysis is seen from the clinician's view, and interprets the ceremony psychoanalytically rather

than religiously. His interpretation, it will be seen, sheds much light on the conflicts, tensions and problems of adolescent life. As Arlow states: "The purpose of this study of Bar Mitzvah is to examine this institution as an initiation rite and to observe the impact of this affect-arousing experience in its relation to character and symptom development, especially during the pubertal period."<sup>27</sup>

After an initial definition of the Bar Mitzvah, Arlow assesses it as a time, frequently, for rebellion against the parents, noting that the boy "may refuse to participate in the entire process and may repudiate his parents' authority as represented by the need to go through the Bar Mitzvah initiation. In any event the need to prepare and to participate in the Bar Mitzvah is usually regarded as an imposition..."<sup>28</sup> Though certainly rebellion at this time may take place, for a number of reasons, the reasons given by Arlow hardly seem justified. While his results may indicate what he found in his research, one should note that the research was conducted with eleven adults, all under psychiatric care, all reporting to him later recollections of an earlier event. Consequently, it is reasonable to assume that, in their reporting, fiction was commingled with fact, imagination confused with actuality. In twenty interviews with youth of Bar Mitzvah age, all of whom had recently experienced Bar Mitzvah, there was not one instance of parental coercion to go through the Bar Mitzvah initiation.

Arlow is correct in noting that "the initiate has to undertake studies from which, for the moment, his playmates are exempt."<sup>29</sup> This prolonged period of study often excludes the Bar Mitzvah student from

play groups, adds to the academic load he is carrying (one should remember that this is the first year of junior high school and itself represents a transition from the elementary system), and causes anxiety. In the writer's research, this fact was often noted by the respondents and Arlow's confirmation in his research indicates that the effects of the prolonged study are remembered years later.

In describing the tensions attached to the ceremony, Arlow states that the boy "prepares as for a very important examination, with the fear of public humiliation before him should he fail to pronounce the blessings correctly or falter in the delivery of his speech...Throughout his recitation the initiate is observed intently as a young man on trial undergoing a very difficult examination. A sense of compassionate participation grips the audience, especially the boy's mother. With the successful completion of the recitation, the tension is broken. A great sense of relief is experienced by the friends and relatives as well as by the Bar Mitzvah boy..."<sup>30</sup> These statements are documented by Dr. Arlow's research as well as by the writer's. It was one of the requirements of the primitive puberty rite that examinations were to take place during the stages of initiation—if the neophyte passed the tests (whether of strength, endurance, or the like) he became a full member of society; if he failed, then he was rejected from adult society. Differences in the Bar Mitzvah ritual are several: contrary to the primitive initiation rite, the Bar Mitzvah is not a mandatory ceremony. Youngsters not Bar Mitzvah, but past age thirteen, are considered "of age" for religious responsibility. Further, no one "flunks" his Bar Mitzvah--the least prepared student is greeted with congratulations, and his performance

is usually forgotten shortly afterward by the congregation in attendance. This is not to obliterate the fact that the Bar Mitzvah, certainly for the boy and his family, and often, interestingly, for the rabbi, is viewed as an examination. The humiliation, if it is present, affects the parents and the boy only temporarily, as friends gloss over mistakes and attribute it to nerves. But the "examination aspect" is ever present--the youths prepare assiduously, as if for their most difficult academic exercise, and anxieties concerning possible failure (noted in chapter three) are prevalent in every student. This writer has experienced the reaction of his own Bar Mitzvah pupils when the "exam" was completed--several actually heaved huge sighs of relief and wiped their foreheads on the pulpit at the conclusion of their part of the service.

In discussing the 'שְׁמֵהּ שְׁמֵהּ blessing said by the father, Arlow reaches conclusions that hardly seem justified. Noting that "even the name of God is omitted from this prayer and the word, pator, which means to get rid of, conveys a definite connotation of vexation and distaste,"<sup>31</sup> he neglects to mention that the prayer has only symbolic meaning today, that in modern society, the father is hardly free from his responsibility to his son, and that further, the prayer is omitted in many rituals in the United States. The New York psychiatrist has used the prayer as an illustration of ambivalent father-son relations in the Bar Mitzvah ceremony--its relevance at this particular juncture does not seem apparent, though these feelings are present as part of the adolescent growth experience.

As has been noted earlier in this study, the young adolescent is undergoing a transition from asexuality to sexual maturity. Psychiatry tells us that this period arouses conflicts originally associated with the oedipus complex. Arlow says that "Although not as dramatic and definitive as the menarche in girls, the Bar Mitzvah ceremony serves as a sharp reminder to the boy of his new biological status and forces him to re-examine his attitude toward his masculinity. This attitude is an ambivalent one. Over the triumph at the approach of man's estate falls the shadow of the feared hostility of the older generation. Although secondary motivations, dependent upon the specific life situation, may obscure this element, the feeling that the Bar Mitzvah ceremony is a hostile imposition is almost always present."<sup>32</sup> Though this commentary adds to our understanding of the phenomenon of what has been earlier termed "dual ambivalence," it also states generalities, which from isolated cases, hardly seem justified. One doubts whether it is the Bar Mitzvah ceremony itself which reminds the youth "of his new biological status and forces him to reexamine his attitude toward his masculinity." Rather it would seem more appropriate to suggest that the young adolescent period is one of heightened physical self-awareness, an awareness present even in the absence of a specific puberty rite, - that further, "the Bar Mitzvah ceremony is a hostile imposition (which) is almost always present," may have been true in Arlow's study of Jewish adults under psychiatric care. It has been quite the opposite, however, in case studies of Jewish adolescents, who remember the Bar Mitzvah, not as an imposition, but as an inroad into developing religious awareness.

Arlow's study suggests that the Bar Mitzvah time represents both the unsuccessful and successful resolution of oedipal conflicts. In terms of the former, "the affects mobilized by the experience of Bar Mitzvah may upset the equilibrium within the ego and make necessary new measures of defense. This may result in symptom formation and/or characterological changes."<sup>33</sup>

Arlow's conclusions have important considerations for this study. He concludes that

- a. "two elements are fused in the Bar Mitzvah ritual, a conscious religious component of induction into Judaism and a more general unconscious component of transition to sexual maturity."<sup>34</sup>
- b. the biological event "can be utilized as the occasion for strengthening the affiliation of the developing young man to the historic traditions and values of the group or community."<sup>35</sup>
- c. "a temporary allegiance to an idealized substitute father image, the rabbi, serves as a transitional figure in the process of detachment from the authority of the father--a rather common phenomenon in the psychology of adolescents."<sup>36</sup>
- d. for those individuals whose anxiety over casting off the authority of the father is very great, the Bar Mitzvah experience may suggest a way out in the form of renewed submission to an exalted father image-- God."<sup>37</sup>

- e. "in the context of the Bar Mitzvah initiation the prestige of learning as a masculine attribute is clearly pre-eminent, reinforced by, and at the same time reinforcing, a tradition of esteem for learning in which the heroes are the heroes of the intellect."<sup>38</sup>
- f. the Bar Mitzvah initiation is not nearly as effective as its counterpart among the primitive peoples.
- g. "Despite the progressive deterioration of the religious significance of the Bar Mitzvah ceremony, the demand of Jewish parents to have their sons undergo Bar Mitzvah has abated only slightly."<sup>39</sup>

Arlow's research concludes that the Bar Mitzvah assertion of religious manhood is unconsciously understood by the Bar Mitzvah boy and the members of the community in terms of physical, sexual maturity, a conclusion to be studied in greater detail.



SUMMARY OF CHAPTER

This chapter has posited a definition of the puberty rite as the ceremony which, at a specified age, officially breaks all ties binding the adolescent to children and women, and admits him into the society of men. To attain entrance into the society of men, one is required to observe certain customs and/or engage in rites which are performed during three specific periods of the rite, the periods of separation, transition, and incorporation. This rite, within the primitive society, has specific aims:

- a. to confer on the adolescent the rights and obligations of an active member of society
- b. to enable him to take a part in war
- c. to lay the foundations of family life
- d. to observe the customs and rites necessary for the wellbeing of the tribe

all of which express the notion of severance from the past and entrance upon a new life. These aims are achieved during the threefold stages noted above, at which time, depending upon the particular tribe, a series of functions must be performed by the initiate in order to gain full admittance into adult society. Once the youths have completed the rite they are tied securely to the ruling social order and are devices for the development of social cohesion and are an integral part of the corporate life of the community.

Part two points to the Bar Mitzvah, as a puberty rite of initiation, or a rite of passage. It was shown by comparison and example that the Bar Mitzvah follows rather clearly the same pattern of separation, transition

and incorporation as its primitive counterpart, and that it does classify, at least anthropologically, as a "rite de passage."

The aims of the Bar Mitzvah are not so clearly defined as are the aims of the tribal puberty rite, though it was shown that the Bar Mitzvah does confer on the adolescent Jew specific rights and obligations within his own milieu. There are also a number of new privileges granted to the Bar Mitzvah, previously withheld from him. It was noted that though both primitive and Bar Mitzvah rites do have concrete aims, they coincide less than in other areas because the Bar Mitzvah is confined to a religious group within the general society, taking place at a specific age, where the primitive rite encompassed the entire society and took place at an age determined by the tribe as being anywhere from twelve to twenty.

The ritual of Bar Mitzvah was next studied, wherein were noted the direct relationships between the rites of separation, transition, and incorporation of the primitive tribes and of contemporary Bar Mitzvah practices in this country. It was shown that in each phase of the rite there are distinct parallels, and that, in fact, several parts of the Bar Mitzvah ceremony are a result, consciously or unconsciously, of influences from primitive tribes.

Lastly, the problems of adolescence and their manifestations at the time of Bar Mitzvah, were discussed. Material from mythology, anthropology, psychology and psychiatry was utilized in an effort to understand the adolescent and his world. Physical changes, emotional growth, feelings of dual ambivalence and oedipal conflicts were dis-

cussed as the period of adolescence was scrutinized. It was determined that, above all, the problem of finding himself is the chief goal of the adolescent and that this search may be centralized for the young Jewish youth in the ceremony of Bar Mitzvah, in which the above problems are often manifested. These problems are hardly solved in the thirteenth year, but Bar Mitzvah for the Jewish child is often one of the pivotal moves in the transition from childhood to adulthood.

## CHAPTER THREE

### INTRODUCTION

Much material has been published on the Bar Mitzvah. Early in this century, several members of the Central Conference of American Rabbis suggested that Bar Mitzvah be excluded from Reform practice because it was not in keeping with the feeling and mood of Reform Judaism. This early feeling was not heeded and as a consequence Bar Mitzvah became and still remains a significant part of our ritual, though argument about its efficacy has existed since its inception.

That Bar Mitzvah as a religious rite is growing each year is evident from the increased number of Bar Mitzvah ceremonies held in synagogues of every branch of Judaism. It was the increase in observance, plus the writer's involvement with Bar Mitzvah students, which prompted him to undertake this study, an attempt to analyze "at first hand" the feelings and attitudes of post Bar Mitzvah students. The effort is a phenomenological one, seeking to derive the concrete data of experience and then to interpret the responses. The result, hopefully, yields teen age insights and feelings about a relatively new religious ceremony, coupled with the writer's analysis of the Bar Mitzvah as a rite of passage.

This study sheds light on the Bar Mitzvah attitudes of Jewish youth who have very recently experienced the rite, and considers the feelings and attitudes of a selected group of parents. It seeks to measure by interview the youthful and parental beliefs and sentiments concerning the

entire Bar Mitzvah experience. To create a manageable sampling, it was decided to limit the respondents (interviewees) to Reform and Conservative youth who had experienced Bar Mitzvah several months prior to the interviews. Twenty Jewish youth were selected, all but three members of what may be considered large congregations (750 families and above). The youths interviewed are members of Holy Blossom Temple (Reform), Toronto, Ontario, Canada, Beth El Temple (Reform), Winchester, Virginia, Temple Israel, (Reform) Marion, Ohio, Beth Zedek Synagogue (Conservative), Toronto, Ontario, Canada, and Isaac Mayer Wise Temple (Reform), Cincinnati, Ohio. Four parent interviews were conducted in Cincinnati with selected families from Isaac Mayer Wise Temple, and one interview in Marion, Ohio.

It was next necessary to analyze reported experiences re the Bar Mitzvah to determine more precisely its significance as a rite of passage. It was determined that these reported experiences could best be categorized in the following manner:

- 1) Bar Mitzvah and the Possibility of Change in Family Attitudes
- 2) Preparation and the Bar Mitzvah
- 3) The Bar Mitzvah Service and its Deeper Meaning
- 4) The Bar Mitzvah and Jewish Education
- 5) Attitudes of the Bar Mitzvah Boy towards the Bar Mitzvah, Jews and Judaism.
- 6) Relationship with Rabbi/Tutor during Bar Mitzvah experience.

These areas of expression served the interviewer as an underlying ordering system, wherein he could arrange direct questions for the respondent. Hypotheses were posited under each area, to be tested through the interviews.

The following represents the five areas of expression and their respective hypotheses:

Area Number One Re: The Significance of the Bar Mitzvah  
as a Rite of Passage

Bar Mitzvah and Possibility of Change in Family Attitudes

Hypothesis: There is little modification of attitude by the parents toward the child at the time of Bar Mitzvah.

Hypothesis: There is no significant change in the youth's self-image in moving from childhood to adolescence during the period of Bar Mitzvah.

Hypothesis: Responsibilities and privileges accruing to the Bar Mitzvah are secular rather than religiously oriented.

Area Number Two Re: Significance of Bar Mitzvah as a Rite  
of Passage

Preparation and the Bar Mitzvah

Hypothesis: The period of preparation is an intense, anxiety provoking period for the youth and the family.

Hypothesis: In the child's eyes, the lengthy preparation is not justified by the ephemeral ceremony.

Area Number Three Re: Significance of the Bar Mitzvah  
as a Rite of Passage

The Bar Mitzvah Service and its Deeper Meaning

Hypothesis: The Bar Mitzvah service reaffirms the relationship of  
the parents to the Jewish community.

Hypothesis: The handling of the Torah and other religious objects  
has symbolic meaning for the child.

Hypothesis: The Bar Mitzvah, on his Bar Mitzvah day, has what might  
be termed a mystical experience of God.

Area Number Four Re: Significance of the Bar Mitzvah  
as a Rite of Passage

The Bar Mitzvah and Jewish Education

Hypothesis: In most cases, the Bar Mitzvah represents the end of  
formal Jewish education.

Area Number Five Re: Significance of the Bar Mitzvah as  
a Rite of Passage

Attitudes of Bar Mitzvah Boys toward Bar Mitzvah, Jews, Judaism

Hypothesis: Bar Mitzvah solidifies the youth's feelings, though  
ephemerally, toward Judaism.

Area Number Six Re: Significance of Bar Mitzvah as a  
Rite of Passage

Relationship with Rabbi (tutor) during Bar Mitzvah experience

Hypothesis: Many Jewish youth leave the synagogue after Bar Mitzvah  
because they had no personal relationship with Temple  
figures when they most needed them.

Once the areas of expression were established and the hypotheses proposed, it was necessary to formulate the method of interviewing the respondents. Before forming the questions themselves it was necessary to determine just what kind of interview to use - the closed question interview, which is more reliable, which minimizes errors of question wording and which makes information comparable from case to case, or the open-ended interview, which encourages more true to life replies and is more flexible. The closed question limits the answer of the respondent and specifies, usually, a series of alternatives. The open-ended interview, however, does not give the respondent very much guidance as to the form or content of his answer. "Open questions, in a sense, ask the respondent to recall something - to produce it spontaneously. Closed questions on the other hand, ask the respondent to recognize something."<sup>1</sup>

It was thus decided to employ the open-ended interview. In this way, the questions were not so likely to suggest an answer to the respondent, greater rapport was promoted, and the interview was often more like an ordinary conversation. This was particularly helpful because most of the interviewing was with adolescent youth and "the interviewer who works with children must devote considerable attention to getting good rapport. The child may be more reluctant than adults to express his own thoughts and feelings because (1) he assumes that everything he knows is already known by adults, and (2) he is afraid of saying something wrong or foolish."<sup>2</sup> There is another problem in interviewing children and that is "their suggestibility. They are accustomed to taking cues from adults when they are unsure about what they should say or do, and they are therefore quick to agree with the interviewer, if he says, "I imagine



you feel (think) thus and so, don't you?" The usual rules about non-directive phrasing of questions are, then, even more important for child interviews than adult interviews. As a way of checking on whether a child's statement is merely a response to a suggestion from the interviewer, Praget suggests that the research worker should use counter suggestion, and ask about the same subject in different ways at different times."<sup>3</sup> This latter method was followed in the interviews and enabled the respondent to answer in his own terms.

The setting for the majority of the interviews was a summer camp in Northern Ontario and those youths interviewed were all well known to the interviewer as he had been their cabin counselor several years earlier. This friendship between the interviewer and the respondents, plus the camp environment, presented the relaxed setting for open-ended interviews and created good rapport. The remaining interviews were conducted in Cincinnati, Ohio, Marion, Ohio, and Winchester, Virginia, in the homes of the youths, several of whom were tutored for the Bar Mitzvah by the interviewer.

Interviews were also held with parents of several of the youths interviewed in order to determine their attitudes toward Bar Mitzvah, Judaism and contemporary religion. These interviews were open-ended as well, the results of which are summarized later in the text.

Once the hypotheses were formulated, the sampling selected, and the interview techniques established, the interview questions were prepared. They follow:

Area Number One: Bar Mitzvah and Possibility of Change in Family Attitudes

1. Have you noticed any changes in your parent's attitudes toward you since your Bar Mitzvah?  
Do you feel more grown-up?  
Were you kidded at all by anyone?
2. Has the attitude of your grandparents changed toward you, toward your parents since your Bar Mitzvah?
3. What meaning did your becoming Bar Mitzvah have for your brothers and sisters?
4. What, if any, kinds of new responsibilities have come to you since your Bar Mitzvah?
5. How do you think you should be regarded by your parents now that you are Bar Mitzvah?
6. How would you want your parents to treat you?  
Have any of these occurred?
7. Did you notice any changes at all in your family during your period of preparation?
8. Did your parents say anything to you about their feelings during the Bar Mitzvah period?
9. What advice would you give to a younger brother who didn't want to be Bar Mitzvah?

Area Number Two: Preparation and the Bar Mitzvah

1. What were the requirements of your religious school in order to become Bar Mitzvah?  
Were these requirements fair?
2. Did you feel that the preparation was very difficult? not difficult enough?

3. Do you think you really accomplished anything?
4. Do you remember what your Torah portion was about? your Haftorah?  
Do you happen to remember the difference between the terms "Torah"  
and "Haftorah?"
5. Did you enjoy your preparation? What feelings ran through your mind  
during the months leading to the Bar Mitzvah?
6. If you were given an opportunity to prepare a curriculum for Bar  
Mitzvah students, what would you emphasize?
7. Did you ever dream about your Bar Mitzvah before it occurred? What  
did you dream? What did you think about these dreams?
8. Why did they make you go through this? Did they demand too much?
9. Did you ever look upon the preparation as an ordeal?
10. Should every Jewish boy be Bar Mitzvah? Why? Is it necessary for  
every Jew to know these things?
11. Did you ever complain about your preparation? to whom? what good  
did it do you?
12. Did you ever think you were being forced to do something you really  
didn't want to do?
13. When did you feel you were ready for the Bar Mitzvah?
14. Did you ever want to quit it? At what point and why?
15. Do Christian kids have anything like this? Then why do we?
16. Do Christians have anything like Torah?
17. What does Torah mean to the Jews? Is it God's word?

Area Number Three: The Bar Mitzvah Service and its Deeper Meaning

1. What kinds of feelings did you have the day of the service?
2. Would you describe the service?

3. Were you afraid of anything?
4. What do you think the service meant to your parents and grandparents?
5. Was there anything at all embarrassing about the ceremony?
6. Have any of your friends ever "goofed" - how did they feel?
7. Do you remember what the rabbi said to you in his charge? What do you think he was trying to do and why?
8. What was it like standing in front of everyone?
9. Have you had any other experiences involving public appearances?
10. What thoughts ran through your mind as you were participating in the service? And what do you think the congregation was thinking about you?
11. What was the most important moment in the service? why?
12. What are the Torah blessings? What do they mean? Are we really the chosen people?
13. What is the purpose of the ceremony? Why do we read from the Torah?
14. How do you think you should feel at the time of the rabbi's blessing?  
Did you have some of these feelings?
15. Did you notice any of your relatives crying?
16. What was the hardest thing for you in the service? When were you most worried?
17. What did you get out of the service?
18. Did you feel happy during the service?
19. Does the Bar Mitzvah make you a better Jew? a better person? Do you make any pledge?  
Will you live up to it? How?

20. Did you ever feel particularly close to God during the entire Bar Mitzvah period? during the actual service in particular?
21. Is there any authority which guides your life?
22. What does prayer mean to you? What is it supposed to do?
23. Do you know how to pray? What do we pray for?
24. Do you ever say any prayers? on what occasions? do they "work?" are our prayers answered?
25. Is the Torah God's word?

Area Number Four: The Bar Mitzvah and Jewish Education

1. Did you and your family make any pledge about your continuing in the religious school after your Bar Mitzvah?  
Do you think this is a fair stipulation of the Temple?
2. Would you like to learn more about Judaism? In what areas?
3. Will you be confirmed? What are the differences between Bar Mitzvah and Confirmation?
4. Are there, or should there be, any new privileges granted to you at the Temple because you have been Bar Mitzvah?
5. Are Bar Mitzvah students better than non-Bar Mitzvah students?
6. Have you worked hard enough to deserve being Bar Mitzvah? Should you have worked harder?
7. Do teachers and rabbis honor you since your Bar Mitzvah? Do you feel more a part of the Temple? Are you planning to continue in Hebrew school?
8. Do your parents want you to continue in Hebrew school?

Area Number Five: Attitudes of the Bar Mitzvah toward Bar Mitzvah,  
Jews and Judaism

1. What did you get out of your Bar Mitzvah?
2. What do you think is the purpose of Bar Mitzvah?  
What's supposed to happen to you?
3. What do you think your friends think of you, now that you have been Bar Mitzvah?
4. How do you think Jews are different from other people, if they are at all?
5. What is a bad Jew?
6. What are the demands of being a Jew?
7. Does Bar Mitzvah make you a better Jew?
8. What is a good Jew?
9. Bar Mitzvah means "son of the commandment." What commandments are they talking about?
10. Do you know what is right and what is wrong?
11. How would you explain Bar Mitzvah to a non-Jewish friend?

Relationship with rabbi/tutor during Bar Mitzvah experience

1. Do you know your rabbi?
2. What does a rabbi stand for? What does he want for you?
3. Have you ever talked frankly with your rabbi?
4. What kind of relationship did you have with your tutor?
5. Why did you choose that particular tutor?
6. What are your feelings about the rabbi versus the tutor working with you?
7. When did the rabbi begin seeing you? Did he encourage you?

The social life of the child

1. What kinds of parties do you attend?
2. Do your parents allow you to go to parties on Friday nights?
3. What kinds of gifts did you get? What will you do with the money?
4. Do you have any non-Jewish friends whom you see socially?

Worries and problems

1. Do you follow the news of the world very carefully?
2. Are you concerned at all about national and world problems?

Which ones? Why?

The tenor of the interviews varied with the places in which they were held. Those interviews held at the summer camp yielded more fruitful discussion and information than those held in private homes in the city and this fact may be attributed to:

- a. the relationship between interviewee and respondent
- b. the mode of attire (usually shirt and shorts) and the place the interview was held (by the beach, under a tree, or in the interviewer's cabin)
- c. the time of year, free from pressures of home and school.

The at home interviews yielded less productive results because:

- a. the interviewer had been, in several cases, the teacher of the respondent which may have inhibited the response
- b. the physical situation was formal as was the attire (in contradistinction to camp)

Interviews lasted from forty-five minutes to an hour and a half--one lasted two hours. The interviewer took notes throughout the sessions, in clear view of the respondent, but at no time did the writing seem to inhibit the respondent. Although the open-ended questioning grants much leeway, both to the interviewer and to the respondent, the results of the sessions elicited some uniformity, and one feels that this form of questioning for this kind of sample is the most fruitful.

It should also be mentioned that the respondents as a group were eager to assist in the research for this project. Several respondents questioned the writer intensively about the project, and a few requested copies of their interviews. They were also very willing to suggest other youths' names for interview purposes. It was the interviewer's procedure to thank each youth for his help in the project, and in each case it appeared that he was flattered to have participated. These reactions seemed to indicate that the youths felt close to the adult world. Here an adult was asking them for assistance, and was interested in their responses. For these adolescents, then, the interview experience seemed to represent a rung on the ladder toward maturity.

The study now focuses its attention on the content of the twenty interviews under the six area headings.



AREA ONE

BAR MITZVAH AND POSSIBILITY OF CHANGE IN FAMILY ATTITUDES

Very few of the respondents noted any significant changes in parental attitudes toward them since the Bar Mitzvah. Respondent 14 stated that there were "very few changes as a result of the Bar Mitzvah;" instead, he noted that the changes occurred not because of the Bar Mitzvah per se, but, "because of this whole childhood-adulthood thing." Though not ready to attribute any of these changes to the rite itself, he did note that "changes" took the form of new "privileges," as did several other respondents. Respondent 1 stated that he "now has money in the bank, is allowed to baby-sit," while respondent 2 "got more authority over my baby sister, got paid for baby sitting, had my allowance raised, and started my own bank account." Similar answers were elicited from respondent 8, who can "now stay up later, go out at night," yet said there were "no big changes." Respondent 11, who resides in a Canadian community with a small population, said that, "before Bar Mitzvah I had no privileges; after the Bar Mitzvah I got a paper route, and got my first house key." Thus many respondents saw parental attitude changes in terms of greater permissiveness, though a few, like respondent 5, said, "I need less help--they give me less help, and I'm more on my own," while respondent 6 said, "they should treat me harsher--I need it." Respondent 7's parents give him "the right of way now." Two respondents noted significant changes in grandparents' attitudes. Respondent 6 said "my grandmother feels I'm much older. I can tell by the way she acts. After the Bar Mitzvah, she said, "now you are a man."

There are two significant points to the above: 1) that, in the minds of the boys, new privileges do seem to be granted after the Bar Mitzvah ceremony, and 2) that attitude changes may be more pronounced in grandparents than in parents. One is then ready to ask: are the new privileges a direct result of the Bar Mitzvah ceremony which would not accrue to non-Bar Mitzvah students, or do these privileges "just naturally" come at this time in one's life? It is suggested here, from material available on the adolescent, that these privileges would come at this stage in one's adolescent life. The youth at thirteen is in the process of "becoming," of moving away from dependence upon his parents to greater independence, both of thought and action. This thought was considered earlier, when ambivalence was discussed, where it was noted that both parents and children are walking a tight rope at this time. Thus it is suggested that more privileges and greater permissiveness at age thirteen are a part of the adult-adolescent constellation and do not accrue to youngsters because they have experienced Bar Mitzvah. This suggestion is further borne out when one remembers that these same privileges and new freedoms accrue to thirteen year old Christian adolescents, who have no religious rite at this time, and to thirteen year old Jewish youths who have not experienced Bar Mitzvah.

The second point of significance is in the meaning the Bar Mitzvah ceremony may have for grandparents. The responses elicited would indicate that when grandparents were Bar Mitzvah, the ceremony assumed a different meaning--that greater responsibilities, both religious and secular, accrued to a Bar Mitzvah child, and that in the minds of the grandparents, these same responsibilities should come to their grandchild. Thus some

grandparents view the significance of the Bar Mitzvah as it used to be, not as it is today. This causes them to attach some real meaning to the phrase "today you are a man," while their children attach only symbolic meaning to it, if that.

In assessing the meaning of Bar Mitzvah for one's brothers and sisters, one notices some interesting responses. Respondent 4 stated that his new status as a Bar Mitzvah made him feel "protective toward my brother," while respondent 6 now "takes care of my brother and sister." Respondent 7, who vividly remembered fights with his brother, now feels he should "act more maturely," and is appreciative of "a more solid brother relationship." A similar response was elicited from respondent 13 who "intensified my relationship with my brother." Respondent 18, elder brother to a younger sister and brother, noted that they "seemed proud of me at my Bar Mitzvah," and was anxious to help his younger brother with his Bar Mitzvah this coming summer. It thus seemed clear that the Bar Mitzvah helped to impress upon the youngster a feeling of maturity and responsibility for younger children in the family. He seems to realize that past fights were a part of growing up--that reason and a responsible attitude can now replace fistcuffs and irresponsibility. Thus, what formerly appeared as intense sibling rivalry now gives way to a more mature sibling relationship. The Bar Mitzvah, then, is a rung of the ladder which the Bar Mitzvah boy uses as he ascends toward maturity.

In discussing parental feelings during the Bar Mitzvah period, a majority of the respondents stated that their parents were helpful and cooperative, giving encouragement and morale boosting when needed.

This question elicited responses about the boy's feelings at this time as well, with the majority of respondents answering positively about their thoughts. Though interviewee 1 said, "you have to do it no matter what," he was anxious to "do it again--it made my parents so happy." This response was similar to that of respondent 4 who said that "there was nothing to it; it wasn't that hard. My parents were pleased, though they were very nervous during the period of preparation and started making arrangements very early." Several boys remarked how "proud" their parents were of them, how they remember mothers and grandmothers crying during the service--few remembered any distinct feelings expressed during the period of preparation. These feelings were expressed after the ceremony, once it had become a reality, and manifested themselves in statements of pride and happiness, and tearful maternal joy.

Respondents were anxious to talk about advice they would give to a younger brother who did not want to be Bar Mitzvah. Some of the responses were:

- #1: "You have to do it no matter what."
- #2: "He should be proud of his religion--it will help him teach people about his religion."
- #3: "a great experience! I enjoyed it so much that I was reaffirmed in the synagogue on my 14th birthday. A younger brother would just love it."
- #6: "Bar Mitzvah is a change in life. He'll really feel like he belongs to the Jewish religion."
- #7: "Bar Mitzvah is very necessary, a part of your religion and an honor."
- #9: "it's useless after  $4\frac{1}{2}$  years of Hebrew not to be Bar Mitzvah."

If you don't do it, you are a disappointment to your family. The Bar Mitzvah is necessary in a Jewish boy's life as we are a minority group and the Bar Mitzvah reminds the 13 year old boy that he is Jewish."

#10: "Deep down in your heart, you want to be Bar Mitzvah."

#12: "You're not playing the role of a Jew if you're not Bar Mitzvah.

It is the duty of the Jew to participate in the service and if he is not Bar Mitzvah, he doesn't have the right to participate."

#13: "Your parents expect it of you."

#14: After much hemming and hawing, he blurted out, "I just couldn't conceive of a younger brother in our family not wanting to be Bar Mitzvah."

#16: "Oh, he would want to--Dad was, I was, everyone is!"

#20: "I would tell him about our history, how he has the responsibility to teach Judaism to gentiles who will ask him questions."

Thus the responses covered wide areas, and touched on significant aspects of Jewish family life. The respondents were generally agreed that, because their Bar Mitzvah experiences were positive, their younger brothers' experiences would be. The theme of responsibility toward family and religion is noted as a sign of growing awareness and maturity in these post Bar Mitzvah students.

AREA TWO

PREPARATION AND THE BAR MITZVAH

There are several generalizations which can be made in this area on the basis of the interviews. 1) Preparation for the Bar Mitzvah was not very difficult. 2) Most respondents did not remember the contents of their Torah portion. 3) The preparation was enjoyable. 4) The actual service was a time of nervousness and fright. 5) The experience was worth the effort.

In every instance, with one exception, the respondents indicated that the preparation was not too difficult, with several stating that they were ready weeks, and a few, even months before the actual ceremony. Though this might indicate the need for a review of Bar Mitzvah practices, none of the respondents suggested this.

Sixteen of the twenty respondents either could not recall or were never taught the contents of their Torah and Haftorah portions, an interesting fact when one remembers that the interviews were held very shortly after the Bar Mitzvah ceremony. Though they were often able to repeat the opening lines in Hebrew (but less often the Torah blessings), they were not apprised of their meaning. These findings indicate, it seems,

a- that, as several respondents noted, the cantor "doesn't have the time to teach us the meaning because he has so many boys coming so often."

b- that emphasis is being placed "on memorizing your portion so that you can make a good showing."

c- that the students are not curious to learn the meaning of their

memorized portion -- "He (the cantor) never taught it to me and it never occurred to me to ask the meaning."

d- that large congregations are more concerned with Bar Mitzvah "ends" than with significant means to achieve those ends.

Those few students who were aware of the meaning of their Torah and Haftorah portions were from small congregations where they had enjoyed good experiences under the guidance of an interested rabbi, or from large congregations where they had worked with tutors from the Hebrew Union College, tutors who had just one or two boys and who tried to make the Bar Mitzvah a total Jewish learning experience. It might also be noted in passing that less than five respondents knew the names of the Five Books of Moses, one calling it the "Books of Noah," and then asking, "Would it be the newer translation?" Others slid rather sloppily over the names of the Books. A similar ratio was noted when the respondents were asked to translate the words "Bar Mitzvah" into English.

For a majority of the respondents, the period of preparation was enjoyable, a) "because it wasn't too difficult," and b) "because of what it was leading to." For respondent 1, he realized "that I was starting to reach adolescence." Respondent 2, though "scared of the first lesson because I didn't know what to expect," was ready "two months before." Only respondent 8 needed "two more weeks." Respondents 5, 17 and 20 all stated that they "mastered the Torah portion," know more about their religious background and are proud Jews. But this same respondent 5 complained that "my parents bothered me to study," that "I wanted to quit the year before the Bar Mitzvah," that "Hebrew study is stupid and a waste

of time and expense." Respondent 6 did not want to go to Bar Mitzvah lessons. Respondent 10 did not enjoy it, wanted to play ball instead of going to Bar Mitzvah lessons and thought of preparation as a "drudge."

Of course, a discussion of one's preparation almost necessarily lead into "what it was leading to," which results are interesting to note. In recalling the actual ceremony, recollections often centered on the nervous conditions of the participants who recalled that

#2- "I was scared when I was called up for my aliyah"

#5- "I was afraid I might muck it up"

#7- "I was so nervous I thought I would crack up"

#8- "lots of tension, hectic, hectic! I felt I'd never get through it"

#12- "The fastest day of my life. What will happen if I sneeze, cough or go blank. This actually happened at the rehearsal. My mouth was very wet, my hands perspired, had Life-Savers and Kleenex, got shakier and shakier. I wanted to tell people "what do you think I am, a freak?" After the second aliyah it got to be fun but I couldn't seem to follow the services." (This respondent was part of a double Bar Mitzvah and his partner said that this respondent was "terrific," as did others who attended this service.)

But even though the actual experience was a nervous ordeal, at least initially, the experience was worth the effort. Perhaps respondent 8 summed up the feelings of his colleagues when he said, "You shouldn't just say you are Jewish. You should respect your religion--Bar Mitzvah is



a privilege and we should want to respect God." The Bar Mitzvah, he continued, was "a time when the congregation prays with you, not you with them. You go up before God. It doesn't matter if you make a mistake as long as you say something. It is a day when you stand up before God..." In the same tenor, another respondent "felt different, like I'd like to do it again," while another noted that it comes "once in a lifetime," that "there are no Peter Pans in the Jewish religion--we have to grow up." To yet another it was meaningful because of the paucity of Jewish life cycle experiences. "Gee we have a bris and consecration but this is really the only big experience between now and my wedding!" When confirmation was mentioned to him, he replied, "yeah, but that's with a bunch of other kids-- I mean an individual experience." Another youth expressed it rather candidly: "The Bar Mitzvah? You had your day with God! The Bar Mitzvah for me is the most important individual experience." And finally, one reflective youngster noted that "the nicest present I received was the feeling of accomplishment and self-satisfaction." Within this section, then, one notices a steady upward progression; from pre-Bar Mitzvah days to recollection later runs the gamut of a total experience.

### AREA THREE

#### THE BAR MITZVAH SERVICE AND ITS DEEPER MEANING

This area represents an attempt to get to the core of the Bar Mitzvah, to find out what actually happened to the boy on the day of the service and to have him explain it in his own words.

Concerns about the day of the Bar Mitzvah cover a wide range.

Responses such as "I was hoping I wouldn't make a mistake," "I was nervous, shaky, nervous as anything, scared of the audience, worried about goofing and tripping," "Mother said I was white, I felt cold, a tingle went through me and I ate Life Savers," "I was killing myself, I couldn't take it," "I was sick the week before," "my main worry was goofing--I took the whole first blessing in one breath," "it was a terrible strain," indicate the anxiety that accompanies the ceremony. These kinds of statements go side by side with what are considered the high points of the service. For one it was "when I was called for an aliyah," while another noted that it was "reading from the Torah as it was a thrill to see it." In seconding the above, one young man commented that his biggest thrill was "reading from the Torah because I'd never been that close." Several other respondents also mentioned the Torah as a high point, though others remembered the Rabbi's blessing, "lifting up the Torah and singing S'u Sh'areem," "my prayer before the ark where you promise everything to God," "the rabbi's charge because I felt closer to God." Though none of the respondents found anything embarrassing about the service, several did feel self-conscious and as if they were on display. "The people looking on scared me," "getting up in front of all those people--I can't make a mistake," "I thought I might trip going up to the pulpit and then tear pages in turning them," "it was too much of a performance--I was saying words," "I realized when I got to the temple I didn't have my Bar Mitzvah suit on. I had put on the wrong pants because I was so nervous so I wasn't wearing my suit, and felt out of place in the Temple."

In response to the questions "what did you get out of the service?" and "Does the Bar Mitzvah make you a better Jew?" related questions, mature

responses were elicited.

"You learn more about your religion and you understand what the feelings of Jews are. The Bar Mitzvah gave me more self-confidence, more guts. I don't pretend I'm not Jewish--I'm proud of it."

"The Bar Mitzvah service doesn't make me a better Jew,--I'm really the same now; I did feel close to God, though five minutes isn't really enough."

"Now that I have been Bar Mitzvah, I feel a greater responsibility to my parents and an obligation to my religion. I lay tefillin every day."

"I prayed for good weather on my Bar Mitzvah day. When the service began I remember that it went too quickly. The singing of the *Shema* was 'touchy,' and I felt beside God. I felt it in my heart. This was a time to be before God by myself and talk to him. God thought more of me up there--something extra special."

"Bar Mitzvah was a reward for study, and I felt closer to the Jewish religion. However, I stopped going to religious school immediately after my Bar Mitzvah because I despised Hebrew school so much, so much. Now I feel that I broke an agreement, and I feel guilty."

(respondent from very small town)

"During the service I kept thinking 'what's my party going to be like.' The Bar Mitzvah exists for parties, drinks and presents...I proved I could do it...The Bar Mitzvah is the first time you ever speak to God... The rabbi said to me 'don't disgrace me.'"

"The Bar Mitzvah signifies an achievement in Hebrew. On your Bar Mitzvah day you are really a Jew - look at me - I'm Jewish, you want to say. Reform Judaism is going to pot. Religion is frowned on in college. Where is the unity of Jews - it is external, like buying bonds."

"Bar Mitzvah meant a lot to my Mother as she was raised in a good Jewish home. The Bar Mitzvah gives you a better rounded out Jewish life, makes you a better Jew and the Bar Mitzvah boy is better informed about Judaism than the non-Bar Mitzvah boy. I broke out in tears after my Bar Mitzvah because of joy. The rabbi blessed me and pronounced me Bar Mitzvah with Hebrew words-- I wouldn't know what they mean...The Torah reading itself isn't important--it's what it means morally, that you should practice if after Bar Mitzvah."

"The Bar Mitzvah means you should be more mature--act like an adult. It acts as the door through boyhood to manhood. But is thirteen the right age?...An Indian would prove he was an Indian by killing a deer or something--you know what I mean, other cultures. Well, you prove you are a Jew by being Bar Mitzvah."

These expressions of feeling about one's Bar Mitzvah take us into the heart of the experience. They illustrate quite vividly the varied meanings the rite had for a group of young boys shortly past the experience. In their own words and language, the youths have spoken candidly of their feelings. Several significant thoughts can be derived from this material:

- 1 - That, as an initiatory rite, the Bar Mitzvah may be compared to the primitive rite in its "ordeal" aspect. The element of strain, tension and pressure attests significantly to the "trial aspect" of the Bar Mitzvah.

- 2 - That the Bar Mitzvah is viewed by some as a passage out of the Synagogue and further religious study rather than as a passage into adult Jewish life and synagogue participation.
- 3 - That for others the Bar Mitzvah is more an intellectual than a religious rite. The equation of Bar Mitzvah with Hebrew language skills, as well as "reward for study" attest to this understanding of the rite.

#### AREA FOUR

##### THE BAR MITZVAH AND THE JEWISH EDUCATION

Certain generalizations may be noted from these responses:

- 1) a large majority of Reform Jewish youth discontinue their religious school studies shortly after Bar Mitzvah because of dissatisfaction with the religious school and with the satisfaction of having achieved their appointed goal.
- 2) yet these same youth are interested in furthering their Jewish education, in specific areas, and state that they will pursue these areas individually.
- 3) though religious school for many of them ends with the Bar Mitzvah, and though many boys went to great pains to discredit the educational system, the majority of responses indicated that Bar Mitzvah students are "Jewishly" much better off than non-Bar Mitzvah students.

Thirteen of the twenty respondents discontinued religious studies after the Bar Mitzvah - seven are continuing on to Confirmation, four

self-motivated, three under parental pressure. Respondent ten spoke for the majority when he said:

"The teachers are terrible. They are untrained and can't teach and they can't keep discipline in the classroom. The material is not related to us--why bother with modern Hebrew when we will never use it...Hebrew school is stupid and a wasted expense. I'd rather be playing ball or hockey."

Those students continuing in religious school gave mature reasons for their desires to pursue further study.

"I put on tefillin every day as it makes me feel like I'll have a good day. We Jews have more responsibilities than non-Jews."

"It's our responsibility to know our history and background. I want to learn more history."

"I'm continuing in religious school because I want to be confirmed and because I want to be satisfied that I know enough about Judaism."

"I want to learn more about Judaism, the Torah, and Jewish personalities."

"I expect to go to Israel some day and want to learn conversational Hebrew."

It is clear from these results, and from other studies made in this area, that difficulties exist within the Jewish educational system, difficulties which are causing a drop-out problem in our academic ranks and which tide must be stemmed if we are to maintain any scholarship

balance. It cannot be left to the "remnant" alone to carry on the task-- a concerted effort is needed on all fronts and these interviews attest to that fact.

#### AREA FIVE

#### ATTITUDES OF THE BAR MITZVAH TOWARD BAR MITZVAH,

#### JEWS AND JUDAISM

Teen-agers have very definite thoughts about the world around them and delight in expressing their feelings. This section is an attempt to have the youths do some in-depth thinking about the Jewish community and about their fellow Jews in general. It attempts to probe the mind of the Bar Mitzvah student in an effort to understand his conception of the good Jew, as well as his further developing the meaning of his Bar Mitzvah.

In assessing who is the good Jew, the young people stated that he "knows history, Hebrew, goes to Temple, contributes to funds, helps unfortunates," that he "goes to shul, knows, and won't back away from his religion," "he keeps the Shema, goes to shul, and differs from non-Jews in his way of life and in keeping Kosher." Yet another respondent said that "a good Jew would die for his religion, puts on tefillin, and goes to synagogue," while one stressed the fact that "a good Jew believes in God and stresses Torah as a part of his life." A mature note was sounded when one said that "a good Jew grows as a Jew, and continues to study Judaism," while another youth added that the good Jew "is willing to sacrifice and be unselfish." An interesting reaction came from respondent

12 who noted "that a Jew is closer to God than are his Gentile friends, and that a good Jew is a good anything who believes in what he does, in worshipping God." This feeling of superiority was seconded by respondent 14 who felt that Jews were stronger about their religion, and proceeded to say that in his mind God is more reasonable and understandable than is Christ, and further that "the Christian dogmas cannot compare with the Reform Jewish principle of freedom, in which the Reform Jew can internalize feelings and concepts and then accept or reject them."

In trying to understand the above statements, one notices that the entire range of Jewish experience is included--seen as a religion and as a civilization, with implicit awareness of anti-Semitism and of the 'chosen people' concept, these definitions of the good Jew are all inclusive in their scope. They reflect a mature awareness of the world in which the Jewish teen lives.

#### AREA SIX

##### RELATIONSHIP WITH RABBI-TUTOR DURING BAR MITZVAH EXPERIENCE

A significant generalization can be stated herein based on the interview schedule:

that Bar Mitzvah students from large congregations have little contact with their rabbi and as a result have little understanding of rabbinic functions. The implications of this generalization for the Bar Mitzvah experience will be thoroughly analyzed in chapter four.



When asked the question "do you know your rabbi?" thirteen of twenty respondents answered negatively. Because they had worked with cantors and tutors, there was little contact with the rabbi, and because the Bar Mitzvah is the only experience wherein the youths would have had an opportunity to work intimately with him, negative answers resulted. One respondent answered, "I don't know the rabbi, but he's smart and very famous. I had never met the rabbi before my meeting with him the week before my Bar Mitzvah." Several students said, "I would have preferred to work with the rabbi because I think I would have learned more, but he's so busy that he doesn't have time for us." A small town boy said, "I know the rabbi very well. He's a good friend of my parents, and has been in our home often." This youngster then proceeded to give the rabbi's biography. It was also this respondent who was told before the Bar Mitzvah service by the rabbi, "don't disgrace me." One respondent, who wanted very much to work with his rabbi, but who worked instead with a cantor said, "the rabbi could make the Bar Mitzvah twice as interesting." This student dropped his religious school studies the week after having completed the Bar Mitzvah.

The general consensus was that though the students had enjoyed their experiences with cantors and tutors, more could have been gained from rabbinic participation. This seems obvious from their statements.

When asked the functions of the rabbi, responses covered a wide range.

"The rabbi helps the service."

"The rabbi is the representative of the congregation."

"The rabbi should set the example."

"The rabbi is no closer to God. He is a leader who helps and teaches."

"The rabbi stands for perfection. He is a human being, a source of strength."

"The rabbi knows the prayers, and helps the congregation commune with God."

"The rabbi has the most knowledge in the congregation."

In no instances were the respondents aware of the rabbi's community responsibilities, and when apprised of the variety of rabbinic duties, several seemed surprised that the rabbi didn't "just stay in his study and write his sermon all week," as one replied. This lack of knowledge will be analyzed later.

#### PARENT INTERVIEWS

In addition to the twenty student interviews, interviews were held with five sets of parents whose children were a part of the sampling. These interviews were conducted in Cincinnati (four) and in Marion, Ohio, (one), with members of Reform congregations. Though the parent interview schedule was similar to the student questionnaire, responses were not as standardized, because the open ended questions led the parents far afield--the interviewer was satisfied with the results of these responses however, for several reasons:

- 1- the parents "free associated," which seemed to give them greater insights into the questions under discussion, and

also insights into each other.

2- the open ended technique seemed to maintain a high interest level for long periods of time.

3- the unpressured approach seemed to elicit more thoughtful responses.

The interview schedule follows:

Interview with Parents - Factual Information

To which temple do you belong?

Are you affiliated with more than one temple?

why?

do you enjoy one temple more than the other? why?

What rituals do you celebrate in your home?

Sabbath, Havdalah, Pesach, Kiddush, fast on Yom Kippur

What Jewish objects and books do you have in your home?

Do you read any Jewish literature, periodicals? which ones?

What kinds of customs/rituals were-are observed in your parents' homes?

Tell me something about your own religious education...

your impressions, recollections

what kinds of students were you?

what do you think you missed in your religious education?

Did you attend High Holyday services?

do you attend services at other times during the year?

Were you confirmed and/or Bar Mitzvahed?

what could these two experiences have done for you?

General trends in Modern Judaism

1. What does it mean to be a "good Jew?"  
what does it mean when someone says, "He leads a Jewish life?"
2. What kinds of Jews do you think you are?  
religious, "secular," devout, irreligious
3. How do you think the Bar Mitzvah might help a child to become a better Jew?
4. Have you noticed any changes in Jewish life, relationships to the Temple, in the last ten years or so? rituals or home celebrations?
5. Do you think people are getting more religious?  
How is this happening?  
Why is this happening?
6. We've heard much of the phrase "Jewish survival." What about it?  
Do you think it's important that Judaism survives? (show LOOK magazine article on Vanishing American Jew)
7. Have you been to Israel? What impressed you most? Are you concerned about Israel? in what ways?

Background for having Bar Mitzvah

1. Did you have a particular reason for wanting you son Bar Mitzvahed?
2. Was the idea of Bar Mitzvah your suggestion or his desire?
3. Did any of your relatives have an influence on your son's becoming Bar Mitzvah?  
If so, how? What was your reaction to this influence?
4. Some parents have offered their sons inducements, rewards and promises in conjunction with the Bar Mitzvah experience. What do you think of this?

5. Were your other children Bar Mitzvahed and/or confirmed? What was their reaction to the experiences? Were they helpful with this child in his experience?

Parental feelings about Bar Mitzvah - the service itself and the total experience

1. Was your son given any new privileges and/or responsibilities after his Bar Mitzvah?  
what were they? what was his reaction to these new responsibilities?
2. Did you consider it your responsibility to see that his Jewish education was continued after his Bar Mitzvah?
3. Were you pleased with the Bar Mitzvah?  
Did it help him to "become a man?" In what ways?  
What does the Bar Mitzvah do for the growing-up process?
4. What did the Bar Mitzvah do for your boy?  
What good could it do for a child?
5. What patterns did your friends follow in the Bar Mitzvahs of their sons?  
e.g. tutors, parties, attitudes and feelings?
6. Were your friends, whose sons were being Bar Mitzvah, enthusiastic about their Bar Mitzvahs?
7. What do "non-Bar Mitzvah" parents miss?
8. What kind of celebration did you have for your son?  
Do you often have parties of this kind?
9. What do you think are the differences between Bar Mitzvah and Confirmation?  
individual and communal aspects?
10. How would you assess your child's progress in school? Do you have any idea what he wants to be?
11. To what do you attribute the increase in Bar Mitzvah today?

The preceding interview questions, though leading to interesting and thoughtful discussions about many areas of Jewish life, did not elicit the lengthy responses about Bar Mitzvah that the interviewer hoped for. This was due in part to the arrangement of the interview questions, and to the previously established relationships the interviewer had established with the respondents. The latter may have interfered with some objective discussion. However, significant attitudes toward the Bar Mitzvah can be determined by each set of respondents and these will be discussed here.

Mr. and Mrs. A. felt "that Bar Mitzvah in Reform Judaism is to stimulate Jewish education. It is much more than we could have given him. It gave him an understanding of his Judaism, and is a religious transition, giving a keener introduction into Judaism. We would equate it with an increase in Jewish Knowledge."

The emphasis here is on the intellectual aspect of the rite, rather than the religious. The temple, as the teaching instrument, assumed a responsibility for which the parents were unqualified. The child here developed a heightened intellectual understanding of Judaism through his work with a Hebrew Union College student, which the parents recognized and appreciated as a legitimation of the Bar Mitzvah.

Mr. and Mrs. B. were "pleased that he learned his portion so well in such a short time and that he was able to translate almost word for word both his Torah and Haftorah portion." They also agreed that the Bar Mitzvah illustrated significant Hebrew achievement. Thus, this couple viewed the Bar Mitzvah as a significant intellectual accomplishment—an

intellectual rite of passage. They seemed to suggest satisfaction and pride in knowing that both of their sons passed this public test so well. This view of the Bar Mitzvah corresponds completely to the Jewish emphasis in this particular home--the emphasis is one of intellectual attainment and concern, as well as activity. Very few religious rituals are practiced. The emphasis is on Jewish organizational activity, a reading of Jewish books, and a satisfaction in the scholastic accomplishments of the children.

Mrs. C. said "to be a Jew is to improve your mind." This emphasis on learning, the equating of Judaism with knowledge, carried over to her thoughts on Bar Mitzvah, which she viewed as an educational achievement and little else. The E's agreed.

Mr. and Mrs. D. said that "Bar Mitzvah is a fine traditional Jewish thing, part of being a Jew, and the main value is educational." Thus we notice a blending of the past with the present, of tradition with intellectual achievement. The home life of the D's reflects an emphasis on tradition. The youngest child is in a Hebrew day school, and the D's are happy and proud of her accomplishments. However, tradition and intellectual attainment have always congealed, and they do in this home, where one youngster has been Bar Mitzvah and another is on the threshold.

Though this sampling is not large enough to draw conclusions which would speak for a significant number of Reform Jews, it does suggest a current parental feeling about Bar Mitzvah which was not prevalent years ago. In the not too distant past, "today you are a man" had more than just cursory meaning. Significant religious responsibilities were granted

to the Bar Mitzvah boy and he was expected to carry them out faithfully. Within Reform Judaism, however, few if any religious responsibilities fall upon the youth, and as a consequence the direction of Bar Mitzvah has changed. This new direction, that of educational progress and intellectual prowess, is strongly suggested by the respondents interviewed in this sampling.



### SUMMARY

The meaningful responses given by twenty teen-age Jewish youth indicate the dilemma in which the Bar Mitzvah finds itself at this juncture in Jewish history. Our youth seem to indicate that a meaningful religious experience at age thirteen is wanted by them and their peers, to help bridge the gap between childhood and adolescence. They suggest by their responses that they may have been more positively oriented, and more knowledgeable about their religion if the rite had not merely been "a pro forma" experience. Perhaps the discrepancy in understanding the meaning and importance of Bar Mitzvah, as found in student and parent responses, has caused this conflict. Certainly this discrepancy in thought, plus current rabbinic frustrations, leaves much work to be done before the Bar Mitzvah can regain its rightful place as a significant rite within Judaism.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### AN EVALUATION OF THE HYPOTHESES

The reader will remember that under the six area headings mentioned in chapter three, hypotheses were posited to be tested through the interviews. The first part of this chapter tests these hypotheses in an effort to probe more deeply the significance of the Bar Mitzvah as a rite of passage. In each instance the hypothesis is stated, followed by a general statement either validating or invalidating the hypothesis, and concluded with specific material from the respondents relating to the hypothesis. This kind of approach allows one to look more carefully at the material gained from the interviews and to make his conclusions after careful research.

The second part of the chapter concerns itself with a comparison of this material with that of Arnold van Gennep and Jacob Arlow. The reader will remember van Gennep as the author of "Rites of Passage," the most definitive authority on this subject, whose book, first published in 1907, has guided later researchers in their scientific inquiries. Since chapter two centered more specifically on van Gennep's findings and their influence on our understanding of the Bar Mitzvah, the material presented herein appears in the form of a summary statement.

The first published material which examines the Bar Mitzvah psychoanalytically was written by Jacob Arlow, M.D., a New York psychiatrist, whose monograph "A Psychoanalytic Study of a Religious Initiation Rite - Bar Mitzvah" is interpreted herein in the light of this research. Arlow's

material differs considerably from that presented here, though many of his conclusions have relevance for this study. These conclusions will be analyzed and compared with the conclusions presented here, in order to scrutinize more carefully the entire Bar Mitzvah phenomenon. This material is followed by a concluding statement.

#### HYPOTHESIS

There is little modification of attitude by the parents toward the child at the time of Bar Mitzvah.

Generally, this seemed to be true. In five interviews with parents the prevailing feeling was one of concern about the Bar Mitzvah itself, and worry about parental preparation, i.e. catering, invitations, and the like. In work with Bar Mitzvah students, which often brought the interviewer into the homes of his students, a distinct division of labor was noticed within the family circle during the period of preparation. Mother prepares the food, or at least makes the arrangements, chauffeurs her son for lessons, Father pays the bills, and the boy prepares for the ceremony.

The absence of parental attitude modification was perhaps best summed up by one parent who said, "the saying 'today you are a man' just doesn't hold true today because the thirteen year old has very few new privileges or status changes." Two students questioned the age of thirteen as the proper age, one saying, "You're not old enough at thirteen to understand the real meaning of Bar Mitzvah."

Thus, parents and children alike noticed no significant attitude changes. There did not seem to be any reason to change one's attitude and both parties implicitly suggested this.

#### HYPOTHESIS

There is no significant change in the youth's self-image in moving from childhood to adolescence during the period of Bar Mitzvah.

This hypothesis was not borne out by the research. Although both parents and students noticed little parental change in attitude at this time, the majority of student respondents felt that the Bar Mitzvah was a significant turning point in the move from childhood to adolescence, or at least should be so. They felt this change in self-image in a number of ways.

"I'm more on my own now."

"My parents look on me as older."

"My parents give me the right of way."

"You have to act like you're more grownup."

"After my Bar Mitzvah I got privileges I didn't have before."

"You have to act more like a man."

"I feel I am starting to reach adolescence now."

"I should act more mature."

"My father isn't supposed to pray for me any more."

"The Bar Mitzvah is the first step into manhood, an incentive."

"The Bar Mitzvah is the door through boyhood to manhood."

Thus one sees that this experience is seen as an important transition from childhood to adolescence. The youths feel older, feel they should have more responsibilities, feel obligated to act older. The one respondent who referred implicitly to the Baruch Shepatarani blessing when he said "My father isn't supposed to pray for me any more," was suggesting that more responsibilities within the Temple accrue to the youth once he has been Bar Mitzvah. Almost every respondent said, in one way or another, that the Bar Mitzvah made him feel older and more mature. It is apparent, then, that this experience does something for the lad who experiences it. If it does not increase his knowledge of Judaism, which in many cases it does not, and if it does not encourage him to continue in religious school, which in the majority of cases interviewed it does not, it does increase his self-awareness, giving him a greater world-view, expanding his field of religious vision, introducing him to new people and ideas, and helping him to move more smoothly over a rough period of his young life. The question is, however, "how much lasting effect does this change have?"

#### HYPOTHESIS

Responsibilities and privileges accruing to the Bar Mitzvah boy are secular rather than religiously oriented.

From the findings it would appear that the Bar Mitzvah is viewed as rather insignificant religiously; that it instead serves to inform one that he is beginning to leave childhood and enter the adolescent world. Thus its religious significance is minimized, or at least the new responsibilities which accrue to the Bar Mitzvah boy are more secularly than religiously oriented. Listen to the responses:

"I cut lawns, shovel snow, have money in the bank,  
baby sit..."

"I have authority over my baby sister, got paid for baby  
sitting, had my allowance raised and started my own bank  
account."

"...new household duties...."

"I take care of my brother and sister."

"I can stay up later and go out at night."

"I take more responsibilities - keeping my room neat and  
going out of my way to help others."

"I can make more decisions now."

"I can have late nights unchaperoned."

In reading these responses, one wonders what has happened to the religious responsibilities and privileges which traditionally are granted to the Bar Mitzvah boy. What about wearing the talis, praying by yourself, being included in a minyan, saying Kaddish? Why were these new responsibilities and privileges not mentioned? Either they were not taught or there is the possibility of interview error. Though the latter is entirely possible, it is also possible that the Bar Mitzvah curriculum never included this information. Judging from the responses received in answer to questions about specific knowledge gained from the Bar Mitzvah experience, it would seem that much that should have been taught, was not. Thus, there was the prevalent tendency to think of new responsibilities in secular terms. This view of the Bar Mitzvah tends to obliterate almost completely its religious significance, and illustrates the tendency for religious rites to strengthen already existing

secular patterns. Very little "carry-over" of religious feeling is expressed here; rather, the responses indicate the secularity of the religious rite. Certainly one is aware that the Bar Mitzvah appears to serve meaningfully as a significant juncture in the acquiescence of new responsibilities. It is both interesting and saddening to see that one of the original purposes of Bar Mitzvah, that of giving a heightened religious understanding, has been put aside in our highly secularized society.

#### HYPOTHESIS

The period of preparation is an intense, anxiety-provoking period for the youth and the family.

This hypothesis was proved correct in part. In every instance the student respondents mentioned, and repeated, the anxieties they felt, not as much during the initial preparation as toward the end and during the actual ceremony. These feelings have been adequately noted and quoted in chapter three.

The period of preparation was not an anxiety provoking time for the rest of the family. Though this response was expected, both from the students and the parents, neither group mentioned it. The parents interviewed seemed to expect that their sons would do well, and as a result did not pressure them during the preparatory period. Though parents had to remind their sons to study their portions, undue and extreme pressure did not occur in the cases interviewed.

Only during the last few weeks of preparation and during the actual ceremony did the students experience anxiety and fright. Several respondents said they dreamed about their Bar Mitzvah, and in every instance the youths saw themselves performing well. One boy said he daydreamed often about "what it would be like."

Though all of the youths worried about making mistakes, perhaps one summed up the general feeling when he said, "It doesn't make any difference if you make a mistake as long as you say something up there." All of the youths said in retrospect that their initial fears were unfounded in the end "because only you know you've made a mistake - you and the rabbi." This seemed to be true in most cases. The fears and worries the youths had, never, or rarely, became actualized - "all that worrying for nothing," as one boy said. However, this does not negate the anxiety which the Bar Mitzvah evokes. From the responses quoted, it is obvious that the "trial aspect" of the rite causes great stress and provokes fear. In fact, the Bar Mitzvah appears as the only public trial within Judaism and tremendous anxiety is attached to a positive public verdict. This anxiety is found to be present within the parents as well as the students, all of whom feel and worry about the tensions accompanying the Bar Mitzvah. The almost universal acceptance and praise of every Bar Mitzvah boy's efforts, regardless of his actual performance, mitigates these worries, and reduces family tensions afterwards, but the trial and testing aspects of the rite cannot reduce them completely.

#### HYPOTHESIS

In the child's eyes, the lengthy preparation is not justified by the



ephemeral ceremony.

This was proved true in a number of cases. Several respondents intimated that the many months of preparation were not justified by the very brief service, and this reaction suggested either:

- a) that if the service is to remain as is, the many months are not needed
- b) that the participation in the service can be increased to be commensurate with the lengthy preparation

Comments such as:

"There was nothing to it - it wasn't that hard..."

"The Bar Mitzvah was no big thing to celebrate"

"I'd like to do it again - it was so short"

"It was much too short"

"The Bar Mitzvah went too quickly - you should have more to read and do"

"My portion was too short - wasn't I capable of doing more?"

led the interviewer to the conclusion that most boys would have liked more material, or if not, that they would like to have been more knowledgeable about what was assigned to them. Several respondents complained that their lessons were boring because they always repeated their Torah, Haftorah and blessings, nothing more. These kinds of responses, the relatively brief time the Bar Mitzvah boy is at the pulpit, indicate a serious weakness in the Bar Mitzvah pattern, which leads to high school dropouts once the Bar Mitzvah is completed. One lad, who said, "if only it would have been longer and they had tried to make it more interesting" seemed to sum up the general feeling.

#### HYPOTHESIS

The Bar Mitzvah service reaffirms the relationship of the parents to the Jewish community.

In the sense that the service draws the Jewish community together to share in a family joy, the relationship of the parents to the community was reaffirmed. However, this kind of re-affirmation does not seem to differ from similar re-affirmings at the time of a bris, wedding or funeral. Rather, at the time of Bar Mitzvah, the boy is affirmed in his relationship with the community, more so than his parents.

#### HYPOTHESIS

The handling of the Torah and other religious objects has symbolic meaning for the child.

The handling of ritual objects did have symbolic meaning for many of the respondents. Handling them seemed to connect these youths with Jewish tradition, with the actions of their forefathers and in several instances with stories their fathers had repeated about their Bar Mitzvahs.

Listen to the comments:

"I conquered the Torah and felt a tie with my ancestors."

"Reading from the Torah was my high point - it was a thrill to see it."

"I'd never been that close before."

"Reading from the Torah the first time, I was really excited."

"The high point was lifting up the Torah."

In tutoring Bar Mitzvah students, and showing them the Torah for the first time, the interviewer recalls reactions of amazement at "the letters - they're much bigger than I expected" - "no vowels, wow!" - "gee, it's beautiful!" The handling and reading of the Torah serves as a connecting link between the present and the past.

#### HYPOTHESIS

The Bar Mitzvah boy, on his Bar Mitzvah day, has what might be termed a mystical experience of God..

This hypothesis was proved true, or at least partially true, by the statements of many respondents. Though several complained of the brevity of the ceremony, it was apparent that this did not stand in the way of the emotion of the moment. In discussing the impact of the ceremony upon them, respondents said:

"I felt that I really belong to the Jewish religion"

"I felt different up there, like I'd like to do it again"

"It was a once in a lifetime thing"

"You go up before God; it doesn't matter if you make a mistake as long as you say something. You stand up before God and read by yourself"

"The Shema was 'touchy' - you feel beside God, you feel it in your heart"

"It's a time to be before God by yourself and talk to Him"

"God thinks more of me up there - I'm something extra special"

"This is the day!"

"You promise everything to God."

"It is the first time you ever speak to God."

"I felt closer to God."

"You have your day with God."

These responses indicate very clearly that something happens to the boy on the pulpit during the ceremony. He is reading "God's word," as one said, and feels particularly close to Him. The entire phenomenon is filled with anxiety. It is interesting to note that these responses came from youths who experienced the rite in large synagogues and it is here suggested that the 'trappings' add to this "mystical experience," i.e. the large sanctuary, the magnificent ark filled with Torahs, the full choir, robed rabbis and large congregation. Several respondents mentioned that "the music made me tingle," while one said "it was like angels' voices coming from the choir."

The service serves, apparently, as a vehicle bringing the participant closer to God, creating in the youth feelings never before experienced. These feelings were brought about by the above, and by the symbolic meaning attached to the Torah by the youth and by the rabbi.

#### HYPOTHESIS

In most cases the Bar Mitzvah represents the end of formal Jewish education.

This was borne out by the majority of responses, as well as by current statistics of Jewish religious schools. Several things go to bring about this result:

- 1) in a large number of Jewish homes Bar Mitzvah is something that the youth is expected to do--in many parents' thinking, every Jewish boy has a Bar Mitzvah, and this feeling carries over to the boy. This suggestion was borne out by the research.
- 2) many parents think no further than the Bar Mitzvah. They fulfill their responsibilities to the child and to the Temple as far as the Bar Mitzvah but stop there.

Several reasons are proposed as to why this happens:

- 1) parents are too involved with secular activities to care about their children's continuing religious school
- 2) the students themselves have no time for religious school past Bar Mitzvah because of public school pressures, and various lessons and appointments which intrude upon their time
- 3) the religious school curriculum prior to the Bar Mitzvah and during the Bar Mitzvah year itself, plus poorly trained and ill prepared teachers, does not create a positive student attitude toward continuing religious education
- 4) there is little if any reinforcement by the rabbis in encouraging students to continue

All of these points were borne out by the research.

#### HYPOTHESIS

Bar Mitzvah solidifies the youths' feelings, though ephemerally, toward Judaism.

It is important here to stress the word 'ephemeral' because the research showed that the feelings toward Judaism are solidified only briefly, and most likely are brought about by the emotion-packed ceremony which leaves its mark upon the boy. However, there seems to be very little carry-over after the Bar Mitzvah judging from the paucity of boys who are affected seriously enough to continue their Jewish education formally. Though many of the respondents talked about an increase

of feeling for and concern about Judaism, their deeds belied their words.

Students who said:

"You should now be able to teach people about your religion"

"The Bar Mitzvah shows that you care about your religion"

"With the Bar Mitzvah you really belong to the Jewish religion"

"I know more about my religion and am a proud Jew"

"You should respect your religion"

"Don't pretend you're not Jewish, don't be ashamed of it"

"I felt closer to the Jewish religion"

either dropped out of religious school immediately after the Bar Mitzvah or concluded their studies at the end of the year. Further, few of them attend religious services, and the majority say they do not know enough about Judaism yet to consider themselves knowledgeable Jews. What seems to have happened is this: that the youths are stating what they think Bar Mitzvah should do, but because it does not at all fulfill these functions (though they do not realize this) the results of the experience have only ephemeral value. This statement is illustrated by the post Bar Mitzvah actions of the respondents.

#### HYPOTHESIS

Many Jewish youth leave the synagogue after Bar Mitzvah because they had no personal relationship with Temple figures when they most needed them.

Psychologists report, in their studies of adolescent youth, that the phenomenon of identification forms a significant part of teen life.

This emotional tie with a subject or object, the wanting to be like another, the admiring of another other than the parent, is often the desire of the adolescent youth. In our country today this is obvious in the teen age identification with singing groups, types of music, movie stars and athletes. This strong identification with these subjects and objects serves often as a support of the teen in a difficult period, enabling him to go more easily from childhood to adolescence and then on to adulthood. Within Judaism at the time of Bar Mitzvah, in many communities, there is often no figure with whom the adolescent can identify because he, the rabbi, is unavailable. The strong ties that are created in these same youngsters with figures in other areas of life, and which often have lasting influences on their lives, are not formed with rabbis because the rabbis rarely come in contact with these students. Because this happens, and because there is often little other way for a relationship to be established between a youth and his Temple, the youth fulfills his responsibility at Bar Mitzvah time and leaves the synagogue. At a time when positive figures are needed with whom adolescent youth may identify, there are few available. As a result, the youngsters turn, in unity, to what many adults consider negative influences.

If these youths are to remain positively oriented toward Judaism and Temple life, Jewish leaders, both rabbinic and lay, will have to realize the needs of their adolescents and attempt to meet these needs. That our leadership today is either oblivious to or ignorant of these needs is illustrated in the significant number of respondents who do not know their rabbi, who are not familiar with rabbinic functions, and who are not stimulated to continue their religious education. The results

of the research also suggest that our Jewish youngsters want to know their rabbis and want to associate more actively with their synagogues. At this stage, they do not know how to go about it, because the leadership does not know how to go about it.

THE PRIMITIVE PUBERTY RITE AS UNDERSTOOD BY ARNOLD VAN GENNEP  
AS COMPARED WITH THE FINDINGS OF THIS STUDY

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Arnold van Gennep's "The Rites of Passage" is to date the most inclusive work on the subject. Studying and analyzing every kind of passage rite, it was, when written, far ahead of its time. Much of this material from van Gennep has been presented in chapter two - here the results of later research into a modern puberty rite will be compared with van Gennep's conclusions.

Van Gennep observed in every rite of passage the three fold stages of separation, transition and incorporation, already explained. This development within primitive rites follows very rigid lines, particularly in the puberty rite. It was suggested earlier that the Bar Mitzvah has followed this same development; however, the assumption of the primitive influence loses its rigidity in the Bar Mitzvah. Whereas, in studying the charts in chapter two, one notices distinct kinds of rituals which must be performed in one phase before the neophyte is allowed to move on to the next phase, this strictness is not as obvious in the Bar Mitzvah. The reason for this difference is clear - the primitive rite had as its 'raison d'etre' admittance into the society of men. If the young man



flunked the test, he was excluded unless special provisions were made. Consequently, the rules for admission were very strict because the requirements of male adults within the primitive tribes were stringent. The Bar Mitzvah, however, is not mandatory, and its reason for being is only as a symbolic entrance into the society of men, not as an actual admission with adult responsibilities. This accounts for the more relaxed approach to the requirements within the three stages of the rite.

All of the aims of primitive puberty rites express the notion of severance from the past and entrance upon a new life. This is not true with the Bar Mitzvah, not even symbolically. Within primitive tribes, the incorporation was a formal induction into a different strata of life, and the youth could look forward to new responsibilities as childhood was officially past. The Bar Mitzvah, however, takes place in a small group within a larger society, and formally grants but a few religious responsibilities. Other than these, the life of a newly Bar Mitzvahed child is not substantially any different from what it was previously--he still lives at home, attends school and conducts his life very much as he did prior to the Bar Mitzvah. The Bar Mitzvah is only a reminder, as are many other signs in today's culture, that the youth is approaching adolescence.

The findings of Jacob Arlow as compared with the findings of this study

Jacob Arlow, a New York psychiatrist, in his monograph entitled "A Psychoanalytic Study of a Religious Initiation - Bar Mitzvah" has tried to determine the meaning of Bar Mitzvah in its relation to character and

symptom development during the pubertal period. One often feels that this material is concerned more with adolescent problems generally than with the problems of the Bar Mitzvah itself, that Arlow sees the Bar Mitzvah as the focal point around which the problems of adolescent Jews revolve, when this is not, in fact, the case. In earlier generations, where almost every Jewish boy was Bar Mitzvahed and where the religious significance of the rite was greater than it is today, ones becoming an adolescent centered almost completely on the performance of the rite. These meanings attached to the Bar Mitzvah were explained in chapter one, where the history of the Bar Mitzvah was traced. Today, however, in a society whose world view is so much broader than it was generations ago, other additional factors go together in helping the young man achieve adolescence. The Jewish youngster does not become an adolescent simply by virtue of his becoming a Bar Mitzvah; rather, it is a process which occurs over a period of a few years. Physical and emotional changes, family life, teen-age friendship patterns, and exposure to many different people and ideas, all help the young man go from childhood to adolescence. The Bar Mitzvah is just one of the high points, among many, which helps the youngster to realize the changes he is undergoing in his development.

Though we are aware of adolescent rebellion against parents in the early teens, the respondents in this study did not refuse to participate in the entire process of Bar Mitzvah, as Arlow suggests may happen, and only a few regarded the need to prepare and to participate in the Bar Mitzvah as an imposition. This feeling of being imposed upon was felt only in the initial period of preparation and subsided completely as the event got closer in time. There are anxious moments, but imposition is

displaced by positive anxiety.

Arlow reaches seven conclusions, already stated in chapter two, some of which will now be interpreted in the light of this research. He concludes that "two elements are fused in the Bar Mitzvah ritual, a conscious religious component of induction into Judaism and a more general unconscious component of transition to sexual maturity."<sup>1</sup> The results of this research indicate that Bar Mitzvah serves rather tangentially as an induction into Judaism, particularly within Reform, which has done away with many of the specific rites previously associated only with Bar Mitzvah. This study noted that more secular responsibilities were assumed after the Bar Mitzvah than were religious responsibilities, that if there is an induction into Judaism, its effect is only ephemeral. This study cannot report definitely any data which suggest that the transition to sexual maturity is facilitated by the Bar Mitzvah ritual.

Arlow sees the Bar Mitzvah as one of the turning points in the vicissitudes of the oedipal conflict. In so doing, he seems to make much more of father-son conflict than this study notes and places greater emphasis on the Baruch Shepatarani blessing than seems warranted. In twenty student interviews, no mention was made of father-son conflict within the family group as a result of the Bar Mitzvah rite, and only one respondent implicitly mentioned the Baruch Shepatarani when he said, "My father doesn't have to pray for me any more." This interviewee did not interpret the Baruch Shepatarani as freeing the father from his parental responsibility; rather, he saw it as granting himself a distinct religious responsibility.

This study points up the ephemeral effect of the Bar Mitzvah on the student. Arlow reaches the same conclusion, but for different reasons, when he states that "Generally speaking, in our cultural context in which religious observance is minimal, the most common reaction is for the boy to adhere to some of the rituals, notably praying in the morning with phylacteries, for a period of weeks of perhaps months. At the end of this time in a spirit of rebellion he proclaims that he is fed up with this burdensome task and puts aside his phylacteries forever, thus becoming the equal of his father in the nonobservance of the commandments. As his father had defied the authority of his elders, the boy now does the same. In the exceptional situation where the father adheres strictly to religious practice, this act of repudiation on the part of the boy is much more dramatic and weighty in its significance."<sup>2</sup>

This study notes the short-lived impact of the Bar Mitzvah on the student but does not see it happening in "a spirit of rebellion." That children follow parental patterns in religion as well as in other areas of life is certainly a fact to be considered, but this study tends to place the onus for the Bar Mitzvah phenomenon on the clergy and religious educators. It is also important to remember that this study was made more recently than the Arlow study, with students just immediately past the Bar Mitzvah. Arlow's material was obtained from eleven adults, all under psychoanalytic treatment and all recalling events from earlier years. This difference of setting and personnel may account for the variance in results obtained in these two studies.

Arlow noted one instance in which a temporary allegiance to an idealized substitute father image, the rabbi, served as a transitional

figure in the process of detachment from the authority of the father, which he states is a rather common phenomenon in the psychology of adolescents. This study suggests that the rabbi as an idealized image, but not as a substitute father image, is a necessary adjunct to the permanent influence the Bar Mitzvah can and should have, but that in many areas this purposeful role and function of the rabbi is neglected.

In realizing the progressive deterioration of the religious significance of the Bar Mitzvah, Arlow notes in contrast that the demand of Jewish parents to have their sons undergo Bar Mitzvah has only slightly abated. He says "it seems plausible to suppose that we must attribute the persistent vitality of the institution of Bar Mitzvah to this sexual element, to the representatives of the conflicts connected with arriving at sexual maturity. These conflicts are universal and are experienced from one generation to another with undiminished intensity."<sup>3</sup> In the light of Arlow's research with only eleven respondents, it seems more plausible to suggest that he has given a correct assessment of the problem, but with wrong, or at least misleading reasoning. That the religious significance of the Bar Mitzvah is progressively deteriorating has been noted by rabbis, laymen, educators and the students themselves. The reasons seem to be rabbinic conflict about the ceremony, curricular problems in the religious school, and the diminishing importance and meaning of religion in Jewish homes. These reasons have not brought about a significant decrease in the number of Bar Mitzvahs held, not because "of this sexual element, the representatives of the conflicts connected with arriving at sexual maturity,"<sup>4</sup> but because it has been understood that most thirteen year old Jewish boys just naturally have

Bar Mitzvahs--in many families this phenomenon is simply assumed as a matter of course, just as it is a matter of course that the youth attends public school. Social pressures within specific peer groups and communities also account for the maintenance of the Bar Mitzvah phenomenon.

In his last conclusion Arlow states that "clinical material demonstrates that the Bar Mitzvah assertion of religious manhood is unconsciously understood by the Bar Mitzvah boy and the members of the community in terms of physical, sexual maturity."<sup>5</sup> This continuing emphasis on the sexual aspect of the Bar Mitzvah is a favorite tool of the psychiatrist, though perhaps used wrongly; one should be hesitant to concentrate so much meaning on such an ephemeral ceremony. Instead it would appear that these psychoanalytic findings might better be applied to the entire adolescent constellation, rather than to the Bar Mitzvah alone. Unwarranted significance seems to be attached to the Bar Mitzvah--everything that happens to the adolescent seems to reach its fruition in the celebration of this rite. This study suggests instead that the Bar Mitzvah, along with many other elements which are a part of the adolescent growth experience, all combine to help the youth reach "physical, sexual maturity."

It is difficult to relate other of Arlow's findings to this study because of his psychoanalytic orientation which is not the direction here. Rather this effort is phenomenological and social-psychological--an attempt to record the data of concrete experience, and then to interpret the data in the light of that experience. To assume a psychoanalytic stance is beyond the scope of this thesis.

CONCLUSIONS DRAWN FROM THE INTERVIEWS AND THEIR RELEVANCE  
TO THE WORK OF THE RABBI

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The conclusions of this study have timely relevance for the American rabbinate in the mid-sixties. They illustrate vividly the work yet to be done in order that Bar Mitzvah might take its rightful place as a significant ceremony within Judaism. That the significance of the Bar Mitzvah as a rite of passage has moved in a different direction than desired has been illustrated herein time and again. In entering the Jewish community as a scientific researcher and deriving data from it which described the significance of the Bar Mitzvah in today's world, the researcher was able to detect specific trends which the Bar Mitzvah is following. Some of these patterns and developments are following more general societal trends of the mid-sixties.

As our society becomes more secularized and automated, religious rites tend to follow suit. As people become more concerned with bigness, religious rites tend to follow the same pattern. As restlessness and the desire for instant satisfaction increases in today's world, and as material pursuits tend to overshadow spiritual pursuits, religion and the rites associated with it tend to lose their former significance. Instead, our religious rites assume the "secular image" as society moves forward and religion stands still. These generalizations assume specificity in assessing the significance of the Bar Mitzvah as a rite of passage. In several cases, for example, it is a rite of passage out of the synagogue and further religious training rather than into adult Jewish life. In the majority of instances cited, the Bar Mitzvah leads

not to continuity in Jewish life, but to cessation of interest and schooling. It is a terminus rather than a beginning, and the future of Judaism, of Jewish survival, begins to look less bright with these defections.

However, there are positive associations with the Bar Mitzvah as well. The youths interviewed realized that the Bar Mitzvah was one of the many focal points in their development from childhood to adolescence. It helped them to realize that their advancing age meant an increase in responsibilities. Parental expectations were greater, more mature thinking was expected. Jewishly, many respondents felt that the Bar Mitzvah made them more a part of their religion, though the research indicates very clearly the ephemeral aspect of this phenomenon.

Psychologically, the Bar Mitzvah affects the student in a number of ways. The phenomenon of anxiety is very much a part of the total Bar Mitzvah experience, appearing from the beginning of preparation until the completion of the ceremony. In the student responses, the trial aspect of the rite was stressed often. It appears obvious that the fear of failure in this very public trial has an overwhelming influence in one's attitude toward the Bar Mitzvah. Often, the anxiety overrides everything else--the religious significance of the Bar Mitzvah is lost in one's desire to "perform" well, to pass the test. Thus, the Bar Mitzvah for many is an anxious ordeal, overriding the more significant aspects of the rite.

Seen by both parents and students, the Bar Mitzvah purposes do not coincide. Parents interviewed viewed the rite as a significant



intellectual accomplishment, while students viewed it as it was viewed in the past--"today I am a man"--as well as in numerous other ways described earlier. Few students saw the Bar Mitzvah as a positive educational milestone leading to further training, and few thought of it as indicative of Hebrew language skill. This variance of responses about the purposes of the Bar Mitzvah may indeed account for the problems Bar Mitzvah poses to American Jewish leadership.

The significance of the Bar Mitzvah as a rite of passage no longer seems to exist only in its religious aspect. In fact, it often is a rite of passage "out of" rather than "into" Judaism. Herein lies the problem. The general tone of the student responses seemed to indicate that Bar Mitzvah is wanted by our young Jewish youth. But revisions need to be made in many areas associated with the Bar Mitzvah before it can again assume its place as a meaningful ritual for the Jewish youngster.

Religious school curricula need to meet the needs of the students, religious school teachers need to be better trained and prepared to handle both the scholastic material and the students. The Bar Mitzvah training itself must be revised, so that the experience does not continue to be so mechanical. Purpose must return to the rite. And rabbis must realize that their function with Bar Mitzvah students is to train them wherever possible, and not to farm these youths out to tutors whose main motivation is financial. If our Jewish youngsters are to have a positive orientation toward the synagogue and toward Judaism, then they need to associate with and identify with the rabbi during their adolescent years. It is time our rabbinic leadership realized the importance the Bar Mitzvah can serve as a significant rite of passage into positive Jewish identification.

The conclusions presented herein, the results of first-hand interviews, suggest strongly that Bar Mitzvah remain in Jewish synagogue life. However, if it is to remain, the rite must be thoroughly re-assessed, so that the ephemerality of the experience as it now stands may be replaced by an experience of lasting value, tying the youth firmly to his synagogue, his religion and his God. "Ours is not to finish the task, but neither are we free to desist from it."

FOOTNOTES

Chapter One

- 1 - "Age of Majority," Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences. (1933 edition), X, 53.
- 2 - Ibid.
- 3 - Hayyim Schauss, The Lifetime of a Jew (New York, 1950), p. 114.
- 4 - "Majority," The Jewish Encyclopedia (1904), VIII, p. 270.
- 5 - Baba Mezia 96a
- 6 - Rabbi Dr. I. Epstein, editor, The Babylonian Talmud, Seder Nezikin, Baba Mezia 96a (London, 1935), p. 556.
- 7 - Pirke Avot 5:24
- 8 - R. Travers Herford, editor, Pirke Avot The Ethics of the Talmud: Sayings of the Fathers (New York, 1962), p. 114.
- 9 - Ibid.
- 10- Rabbi Dr. H. Freedman, translator, Midrash Rabbah Genesis II (London, 1939), p. 565.
- 11- Israel Abrahams, Jewish Life in the Middle Ages (London, 1932), pp. 45, 46, 47.
- 12- Solomon Schechter, Studies in Judaism Series One (Philadelphia, 1896), p. 300.
- 13- Ibid., pp. 302-303.
- 14- Soferim 18:5 - This Talmudic treatise was finally redacted about the middle of the eighth century, though its contents are older. JE, XI, p. 426ff, article "Soferim."
- 15- Sefer HaLikkutim - Greenhut's edition, part 1, page 3, paragraph 6. (This is assigned by Zunz to the 10th century. It is quoted as early as the middle of the 11th century as a recognized authority).
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APPENDIX  
THE INTERVIEWS

## Respondent One -The Significance of the Bar Mitzvah as a Rite of Passage

### Biography

This respondent is thirteen years old, was Bar Mitzvah just prior to the interview in a large Conservative synagogue in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.

### Bar Mitzvah and the Possibility of Change in Family Attitudes

This respondent was able to notice several added responsibilities which came his way at the time of his Bar Mitzvah. He began cutting lawns, shoveling snow, has money in the bank, can baby sit for his younger siblings, and works part time in his Dad's shoe store helping out. The parents feel this is good for him and that he should begin learning the value of money and earning some of his own. This respondent also noticed "voice changes" which he said occurred on the day of his Bar Mitzvah as he was singing his portion.

If asked to give advice about the Bar Mitzvah to a younger, but uncooperative brother, he would say, "You have to do it no matter what. And you will want to do it again as it makes your parents so happy."

### Preparation and the Bar Mitzvah

This student spent several years in Hebrew school but questioned the validity of the training. He was unable to recall either the content of his Torah portion, did not know the difference between the Torah and the Haftarah, and said that it was never taught to him. The Bar Mitzvah experience was one of total memorization, with no emphasis at all on an understanding of the meaning or significance of the ceremony. He was not able to translate the words 'Bar Mitzvah'. The preparatory period was simply perfunctory meetings with the cantor, never with the rabbi. This student had no contact at all with his rabbi until the week of the Bar Mitzvah.

"Because I am starting to reach adolescence" is the reason Bar Mitzvah is a part of Jewish ceremony. One notices the difference between adolescence and adulthood here. "I am now the same as I was before my Bar Mitzvah."

### The Bar Mitzvah and its Deeper Meaning

"I was hoping I wouldn't make a mistake. I did notice some of my relatives crying, and I felt particularly close to God right before going up to the pulpit."

### Jews and Judaism

A good Jew knows history, Hebrew, goes to Temple, contributes to funds and helps unfortunates."

### The Rabbi

This youngster had no relationship with his rabbi. It was instead with the cantor who trained him completely for the Bar Mitzvah and who did not take the time to teach him the meaning of anything that he was doing. This youngster was interviewed closer to the time of his Bar Mitzvah than any of the others, and did not remember the Torah blessings or any of his portion. He also did not know any of the rabbi's functions.

## Respondent Two - The Significance of the Bar Mitzvah as a Rite of Passage

### Biography

This respondent is thirteen years old, was bar mitzvahed just prior to the interview in a large Conservative synagogue in Toronto, and was interviewed at Camp White Pine.

### Bar Mitzvah and the Possibility of Change in Family Attitudes

This respondent noticed several changes in or additions in responsibilities assigned to him at the Bar Mitzvah time - he could "stay up later, engaged in baby sitting, had authority over his baby sister, got ~~be~~ paid for baby sitting, had his allowance raised, and started his own bank account." His younger brother looked upon him as "superior" and he "looked up to me more."

When asked what advice he would give to a younger brother about Bar Mitzvah, he said he would tell him that "he should be proud of his religion, will have a feeling of accomplishment, and will be able to teach people of his religion."

### Preparation and the Bar Mitzvah

The respondent did not feel that the preparation was too difficult, remembered what the Torah portion was about enough to sing several lines from it, likewise with the haftarah. Though he was scared of his first lesson, he enjoyed the preparation. He felt that he was ready for his Bar Mitzvah two months before the actual ceremony, and felt that he wanted to get up and quit it all "when I was called up for my aliyah." During the service he "felt different, like I'd like to do it again. I liked the tune of my portion."

### The Bar Mitzvah Service and its Deeper Meaning

When the rabbi spoke to this respondent in the rabbinic charge, he reminded the boy of his responsibility "to take part in the minyan." Standing up in front of everyone was hard - he was "nervous as anything, nervous, shaky," and worried about "goofing and tripping." The most important moment for him was when he was "called up for his aliyah."

He noticed that Dad was crying, because he was proud."

The Bar Mitzvah gives you an opportunity "to learn more about your religion, means a lot to the boy, and helps you to understand what the feelings of Jews are - be proud." It gave me more guts, more self confidence - don't pretend you're not Jewish - don't be ashamed of it.

### Attitudes toward Bar Mitzvah, Jews and Judaism

"The purpose of Bar Mitzvah is to know more about religion, and gives you a feeling of accomplishment." The Bar Mitzvah helps you "to understand the Jew and his feelings."

A good Jew has "some obligations, should go to schul, knows, and won't back away from his religion."

## Respondent Three - The Significance of the Bar Mitzvah as a Rite of Passage

### Biography

This respondent is fourteen years old, was interviewed at Camp White Pine, and was Bar Mitzvahed in Toronto, Ontario, in a large Conservative synagogue.

### Preparation and the Bar Mitzvah

This respondent thoroughly enjoyed his entire Bar Mitzvah experience. He did not feel that his preparation was too difficult, enjoyed it thoroughly, and never complained about his preparation. "Bar Mitzvah is really a religious occasion, no big parties." "I enjoyed my Bar Mitzvah so much that I was re-affirmed just before I came to camp." This meant that he went through his Bar Mitzvah completely a second time, had to go over his Torah portion again. By the look on his face, it was easy to see that he was very proud of this accomplishment.

### The Bar Mitzvah Service and its Deeper Meaning

"Mother said I was white. A tingle went through me. I felt cold and ate Life Savers. I was really nervous. ...The most important moment of the service was the reading from the Torah. It was a thrill to see it....Some of my relatives were crying because they were happy.....The hardest thing for me in the service was going up, with the people looking on.

"The Bar Mitzvah does not make you a better Jew. It didn't change anything in my life....I'm still going to Hebrew school. Been going for seven years...all that suffering."

Then why are you going?

"My Dad thinks I should go. He thinks it's good for me that I should know Hebrew. Right now I can't see it but I know that when I'm older I'll appreciate it."

Is it so bad?

"No...and here he smiled.

He thinks it is the Jew's responsibility to know the history and background of his people. He will be confirmed. This student also took an active part in the camp religious programs, which were completely voluntary.

### Attitudes toward Bar Mitzvah and toward Judaism

"My Bar Mitzvah was a thrill. Its purpose is that I'm now older and ready to have more responsibilities." ... "Jews are different from other people in their ways of life, in keeping kosher, keeping the shema, and in going to school."

If asked to explain Bar Mitzvah to a non-Jewish friend, he would "mention the ark and the Torah. That you are called to it to read from it."

"No, I don't know my rabbi. But I do know that he is very famous and smart. He writes newspaper articles. I'd never met him before my Bar Mitzvah, just the Friday before."



Respondent Four \* The Significance of the Bar Mitzvah as a Rite of Passage

Biography

Respondent four is thirteen and half years old, was bar Mitzvahed in a Conservative synagogue in Toronto. He was interviewed at Camp White Pine.

Bar Mitzvah and Possibility of Change in Family Attitudes

This respondent noticed that "my parents were nervous, there were lots of preparations." They did not have a car and this hindered them. "It was either getting a car or my having a Bar Mitzvah. We didn't get the car."

He noticed and worked at his attitude toward his younger brother, was given more household duties, like helping to clean the house.

When asked what advice he would give to a younger brother, he said he would tell him "that there's nothing to it - it isn't that hard. Your parents will be pleased and you will show that you care about your religion."

Preparations and the Bar Mitzvah

This respondent did not feel that his preparation was too difficult, had 8 months of preparatory time, and enjoyed this period. He said "there is no difference between the Torah and Haftarah."

He felt that every Jewish boy should be Bar Mitzvah, and once one has been Bar Mitzvah, your "father isn't supposed to pray for you any more."

Attitudes toward Bar Mitzvah, Jews and Judaism.

"A good Jew would die for his religion, puts on tefillin, and goes to synagogue. As far as Bar Mitzvah is concerned, "to tell you the truth, I never thought about what Bar Mitzvah means, though the Bar Mitzvah made me feel big, as if I could take responsibility into my own hands."

Relationship with rabbi/tutor during Bar Mitzvah experience

"The rabbi should set the example for the community." His relationship with his tutor was "great." The tutorial "cost \$20 a month, 3 times a week." Though he enjoyed working with his tutor, "the rabbi may have been a better teacher."

## Respondent Five - The Significance of the Bar Mitzvah as a Rite of Passage

### Biography

This respondent is fourteen years old, was bar Mitzvahed at Holy Blossom Temple, Toronto, with one other student. He was interviewed at Camp White Pine.

### Bar Mitzvah and the Possibility of Change in Family Attitude

When asked if he noticed any change in parental attitudes, he said that "I'm more on my own now and can stay up later." This statement was repeated - "I'm more on my own now." He said, "I need less help - and they give me less help."

### Preparation and the Bar Mitzvah

When asked if he felt that he really accomplished anything, he said, "I mastered my Torah portion and know more about my background. I am a proud Jew." This same youth did not remember what his Torah portion was about, did not know the difference between the Torah and the Haftarah, and when asked this question said, "Would it be the newer translation?"

He said that during the service "feelings of satisfaction and pride" ran through his mind.

He also said that he did dream about his Bar Mitzvah and that the content was "I was afraid I might muck it up." He felt that every Jewish boy should be Bar Mitzvah, that "parental expectations are important, it is important to know your background."

The respondent said he complained about his preparation, "because it was too short." Also, "my parents bothered me to study."

He said that "a year before the Bar Mitzvah I wanted to quit, because Hebrew study is stupid, wasting time and expense." "My portion was too short, - wasn't I capable of doing more - though I want to do it again. ...I remember my mother planning long before the ceremony."

### The Bar Mitzvah Service and its Deeper Meaning

When asked if he was afraid of anything, he said, "I felt like killing myself, I couldn't take it, I was shaking." His mother and his grandmother were crying. He also said, that he received \$1700 for his Bar Mitzvah, and especially enjoyed reading the books on Jewish art and Jewish legends.

He is continuing in religious school, because "I want to be confirmed, I want to be satisfied that I know enough about Judaism." Interestingly, his conception of a good Jew is "one who knows his historical background."

### Relationship with rabbi/tutor, during the Bar Mitzvah experience

The rabbi is the leader, whose responsibility it is to help, teach, but he is no closer to God. Is he God's cousin?

"The tutor forgot my name."

Respondent Six - The Significance of the Bar Mitzvah as a Rite of Passage

Biography

This respondent is thirteen and a half years old, was Bar Mitzvahed in Toronto at a Conservative synagogue with two other boys. He was interviewed at Camp White Pine.

Bar Mitvah and the Possibility of Change in Family Attitudes

This respondent said that "your parents look on you as older." He was given more responsibility for his brother and sister. Now that he has been Bar Mitzvah, he feels that his "parents should treat me harsher because I need it." During the Bar Mitzvah period his parents told him - "make us proud."

When asked what advice he would give to a younger brother about Bar Mitvah, he said he would mention "reading from the Torah, the fact that the Bar Mitzvah can be a change in life, because you really belong to the Jewish religion."

"My grandmother feels I am much older. I can tell by the way she acts. She told me - "Now you are a man."

Preparation and the Bar Mitzvah

This respondent had six months to prepare for his Bar Mitzvah. When asked if he felt that he had accomplished anything, he said he felt older. He did not know the difference between the Torah and the Haftarah.

When asked if he ever dreamed about his Bar Mitzvah, he said "yes, about making my parents proud, and also about the presents."

Though he did not look on his preparation as an ordeal, he did not want to go to his Bar Mitzvah lessons.

Every boy should have a Bar Mitzvah "because they ARE Jewish. If you don't care, you shouldn't have it."

He felt he was ready for his Bar Mitzvah a month before the actual date, and never wanted to quit - "I want to do it over."

He said he saw the rabbi the Thursday before the Bar Mitzvah, and that he had to wait to see the cantor.

The respondent took great pains to describe the celebration - the "cake was in the shape of a hockey arena because I like hockey. At the candle-lighting ceremony that afternoon at the Primrose club, each of my relatives came up and lit a candle, moved the puck one space until it was my turn to come up - I made the goal. The cake was then sent to Sick Children's Hospital. I think you shouldn't have such a big celebration - reading from the Torah is enough. We had dancing for 125 people in our living room that night for adults only, and brunch the next day for them. The Bar Mitzvah went too quickly. It is a once in a lifetime and you should have more to ~~more~~ read and do. \* There are no Peter Pan's in the Jewish religion @ you have to grow up."

Respondent Six - continued

The Bar Mitzvah Service and its Deeper Meaning

The respondent said he "was nervous, excited and couldn't sleep in the early morning." When he got to the temple, he was "a little nervous" standing in front of everyone. As he ran through the service he thought to himself "I can't make a mistake." During the service he was "thinking about my parents, how they brought me up."

The most important moment for him was the reading of the Torah as I'd never been that close" and it is a "privilege" to read from the Torah."

His aunts and his mother were crying.

The hardest thing in the service was "getting up in front of all those people."

The "Bar Mitzvah does not really make you a better Jew. I'm the same now."

"Five minutes was not enough"

About religious school - "I really couldn't care if I continue as the teachers are not adequate."

Attitudes toward Bar Mitzvah, Jews and Judaism

When asked what he got out of his Bar Mitzvah, he said, "my brothers look up to me. And now there's nothing to look forward to except my wedding."

A good Jew believes in God, goes to school, services."

"Thirteen is not the proper age for Bar Mitzvah and the statement that 'today you are a man' is not a true statement. It should be sixteen or eighteen when you are old enough to understand what you are learning."

This student is concerned about Israel, the Jewish-Arab problem, talked of the Jordan River and referred to "Israel, my brothers."

## Respondent Seven - The Significance of the Bar Mitzvah as a Rite of Passage

### Biography

This respondent, fourteen years old, was interviewed several after his Bar Mitzvah. He was Bar Mitzvahed at a Conservative synagogue in Toronto, and was interviewed at Camp White Pine.

### Bar Mitzvah and the Possibility of Change in Family Attitudes

The respondent noticed some changes in his grandfather toward him during the Bar Mitzvah period, but not by his parents. Though he was not kidded by anyone, he often thought, "I'll never know it by then." He would want his parents to treat him "more maturely" and has noticed that his "brother relationship has gotten better." Now that he has been Bar Mitzvah, his parents give him "the right of way," -

If he had to explain Bar Mitzvah to a younger brother, he would tell him that "it is a part of your religion, an honor, and that Bar Mitzvah is very necessary."

### Preparation and the Bar Mitzvah

This youth was vehement in his condemnation of the religious school system. He said "they drive kids away, teach only history, the curriculum is out of date, and I am not continuing. They should have plays, movies, filmstrips, and it should only be one day a week."

One of the requirements for his Bar Mitzvah was that he had to "write a thesis." After seven years of Hebrew he is leaving the temple - it took him six months to prepare for his "Bar."

When asked if he felt that he really accomplished anything, he said that it is "the first step into manhood, an incentive," but he did not know the Torah books, or the difference between the Torah and the Haftarah. During the months leading to the actual ceremony, he was "nervous, thought I would crack up."

### The Bar Mitzvah service and its Deeper Meaning

The student had butterflies in his stomach the morning of the service, and went over his portion at home before he left for the synagogue. His parents were "proud" of his accomplishment.

This student did remember what the rabbi said to him during the charge - he spoke about "Jewish education and the religious school." The student did not return the next year.

He hoped "I wasn't making any mistakes - I looked at the tops of their heads, and had a good feeling as I was participating in the service. The most important part of the service was the rabbi's blessing."

Will he live up to his Bar Mitzvah? "Well, I have a responsibility to my parents, an obligation to my religion, and a duty to the commandments."

This student lays tefillin.

When asked if Jews are different from other people , he said that "they have a better attitude - the others are putzes"

A bad Jew "abolishes Torah from his life," while a good Jew "adheres to the Ten Commandments." He also has "faith in other people."

Do you know what is right and what is wrong? "Dont do anything that you wouldn't do in front of your father."

"I didnt get any really big gifts - just a tape recorder and a membership in the golf club."

Respondent Eight - The Significance of the Bar Mitzvah as a Rite of Passage  
Biography

This respondent was bar Mitzvahed in Holy Blossom Temple, Toronto, with one other boy. He is thirteen years old and was interviewed at Camp White Pine.

Bar Mitzvah and the Possibility of Change in Family Attitudes

This respondent feels that he "should act my age now, not be immature, act more like a man."

When questioned about his grandparents, he said "It's pretty exciting for them to be around."

He noticed no big changes in his parents attitudes toward him, but he can now "stay up later, go out at night, and is treated more as a young man."

Preparation and the Bar Mitzvah

The requirements of his religious school were that he had to attend "for four years, two times a week. During his preparation he was "taught to read and translate, and I could have learned it in a year." He only had six verses in his Torah portion.

During the months leading to the Bar Mitzvah, he was "really excited, it was more exciting as it got closer, lots of tension, hectic, hectic." As it got closer, he had trouble with his portion. ....They asked him to go thru this "because you should respect your religion, and shouldn't just say you are Jewish, it is a privilege to be Bar Mitzvah." His parents "were mugging" during the preparatory time. Every Jewish boy should be Bar Mitzvah because Bar Mitzvah is a part of being Jewish. During the Bar Mitzvah, the people pray with you, not you with them. It also makes your parents be proud.

Though he did not want to quit it, he "felt I'd never get through it and I could have used two more weeks time."

On your Bar Mitzvah day, "you go up before God, and it doesn't matter if you make a mistake as long as you say something - you stand up before God and read by yourself. I wanted to do it again - it was exciting."

"Without God there could be no Bible & God taught and teaches - the Torah tells about the ancient Jews and is our basis."

The Bar Mitzvah Service and its Deeper Meaning

"I was really nervous - thought I would hit the ceiling. Really excited, and thought I might trip and tear some pages. ...If you goof the congregation doesn't notice it. I never looked out and can't remember ever seeing the congregation. I thought it was going too quick and that I might make a mistake." The most important moment was reading from the Torah - it was the first time and I was really excited."

The Bar Mitzvah makes you "even more Jewish." "God thinks more of me up there, something extra-special - you go up before God by yourself and talk to Him."

During the service I felt close to God - you feel it in your heart - the shema was so touchy - I was warmer inside - beside God.

## Respondent Nine -The Significance of the Bar Mitzvah as a Rite of Passage

### Biography

The respondent is the only girl interviewed. She was Bat Mitzvahed in Holy Blossom Temple and was interviewed because of her desire to become a rabbi. She had heard about the interviews at camp and asked if she might be a respondent.

### Bar Mitzvah and the Possibility of Change in Family Attitudes

Though the respondent did not notice any parental attitude changes, she said there was conflict between grandparents, one set being orthodox, the other reform. This conflict she described as "relative conflict" but did not do anything to spoil the ritual. ....She felt that her younger brother and sister were "jealous of the presents I got."

"Once someone is Bar or Bat Mitzvah, the Temple respects you...my parents played it up. They expected more responsibility and placed greater trust in me."

When asked to give advice to a younger brother or sister reluctant to become Bar Mitzvah, she said she would say "that it's useless after  $4\frac{1}{2}$  years of Hebrew not to be Bar Mitzvah. It would be a disappointment to my family as my brother is the only boy in the family. It is necessary in a Jewish boy's life. The family gets together. It is the tradition of a minority group, and reminds a thirteen year old boy that he is Jewish."

### The Bar Mitzvah service and its Deeper Meaning

"I was sick the week before - it was nerves. I kept thinking 'I don't want to have one.'....."I felt obligated to the rabbi not to make a mistake."

"What was it like standing in front of everyone? It was too much of a performance. I was saying words.....By the way, I had never seen the Torah in four years of Hebrew school."

The most important moment of the service was when they lifted up the Torah and sang "Su Sh'areem."

### Attitude toward Jews, toward the rabbi

"I was afraid of the rabbi, and felt inadequate. The rabbi stands for perfection, and is a source of strength. He is a human being."

"Being a good Jew means growing as a Jew by studying Judaism."



## Respondent Ten - The Significance of the Bar Mitzvah as a Rite of Passage

### Biography

Respondent ten is fourteen years old, was bar Mitzvahed several months before the interview in Holy Blossom Temple, Toronto, and was interviewed at Camp White Pine.

### Bar Mitzvah and the Possibility of Change in Family Attitudes

This respondent, when asked if he noticed any changes in his parent's attitudes, said that he did not but that he feels he "should act more grown-up." He noticed no attitude changes on the part of his parents during the Bar Mitzvah time, but did say that his older brother was helpful and encouraged him during the time of preparation.

When asked what advice he would give to a younger brother about Bar Mitzvah, he said he would tell him that "Bar Mitzvah is not really the turning point of your maturity, and that you should take your Bar Mitzvah like a man, because deep down inside your heart you will want to be Bar Mitzvah."

### Preparation and the Bar Mitzvah

This respondent prepared for his Bar Mitzvah for four months. Though the requirements were not too difficult, he "didn't enjoy it." He remembered that his Torah portion was from Leviticus and his Haftorah from II Samuel, though he does not know the difference between the words "Torah" and "Haftorah." - When asked directly, "Did you enjoy your preparation, he said "No." During the preparatory period, he often thought that he did not want to be Bar Mitzvah because it was a "drudge" and he "wanted to play". This respondent is an excellent athlete, and felt that his hockey time was taken from him.

He did not feel that too much was demanded of him, and thought they made him go through the Bar Mitzvah because "it is a stage in life." - If one belongs to a synagogue, he should "certainly be Bar Mitzvah."

At the beginning of his preparation he felt that he was being forced and wanted to quit.

### The Bar Mitzvah Service and its Deeper Meaning

This is the day! I gotta do it," he said. He felt "really nervous," and took the "whole first blessing in one breath." His "main worry" was goofing, but he didn't at all. Though he said he "didn't notice" everyone in front, one of the thoughts that ran through his mind during the service was "all the people." He felt that "a good showing is important."

The most important moment in the service is the Torah service because of his reading from it.

The purpose of the ceremony is to show "that you have reached a certain age, and that the Bar Mitzvah is a reward for study." The Bar Mitzvah should make you feel "closer to the Jewish religion." - - - This respondent did make a pledge that he would continue but broke it immediately after his Bar Mitzvah when he stopped his religious school completely. He expressed some ill feeling about this and said that he felt "guilty." - He said that he quit because "I despised Hebrew school so much, so much. I'd rather go to shul than school."

Respondent Ten - continued

Attitudes of the Bar Mitzvah toward Bar Mitzvah, Jews and Judaism

The respondent thought that a bad Jew is "any bad person who does wrong," while a good Jew "believes in God, the Jewish way of life, is willing to sacrifice and to be unselfish".

When asked how he would explain Bar Mitzvah to a non-Jewish friend, he said he would explain "the translation of the words and go from there, and also that you are following in your father's footsteps."

Relationship with rabbi/tutor during the Bar Mitzvah experience

This respondent said he did not know his rabbi, that a rabbi is "a teacher," and that he wanted to work with the rabbi because "the rabbi could make it twice as interesting."

He said he quit religious school because he "got bored because of the way they taught."

When asked about any family celebration after the Bar Mitzvah, he said "there was nothing big to celebrate about."

He used some of his gift money to help pay for his summer at camp.

## Respondent Eleven - The Significance of the Bar Mitzvah as a Rite of Passage

### Biography

This respondent is thirteen years old, was bar Mitzvahed in a Conservative synagogue in a small Canadian community. He was interviewed in Camp White Pine.

### Bar Mitzvah and the Possibility of Change in Family Attitudes

Before his Bar Mitzvah this respondent said he had no privileges. After his Bar Mitzvah he "got a paper route, more privileges, got my first house key, act like a man, take more responsibility, keep my room neat, and go out of my way to help others.

When asked what advice he would give to a younger brother, he said he would tell him "that your relatives look up to you, and you've made a promise."

### The Bar Mitzvah service and its Deeper Meaning

"You cant go back on your word to God. ...It was a terrible strain - are the people gonna notice the mistakes?"

He remembers that the rabbi's speech was embarrassing to him because of the overextensive flattery.

During the service several thoughts ran through his mind - what's my party going to be like?"

The most important moment of the service was when he gave his prayer before the ark "and promised everything to God."

The purpose of the ceremony is "the party, drinks and presents."

"The haftorah was the hardest thing to learn - but I proved I could do it."

"The Bar Mitzvah is the first time you ever speak to God - you are praying for yourself."

Before the service began, the rabbi called him aside and said, "Don't disgrace me in front of all those people."

### Miscellany

A good Jew tries to help other Jews, goes out of his way for the Ten Commandments gives to charity, and tries to improve the Jewish situation."

This student knew his rabbi intimately, was able to give his biography, said the rabbi was a close family friend, and that the "rabbi knows the prayers, helps the congregation converse with God."

## Respondent Twelve - The Significance of the Bar Mitzvah as a Rite of Passage

### Biography

Respondent twelve is thirteen and a half years old, was bar Mitzvahed a few months prior to the interview in Holy Blossom Temple, Toronto, and was interviewed at Camp White Pine.

### Bar Mitzvah and Possibility of Change in Family Attitudes

Though the respondent did not notice any parental attitude changes, he did note that his brothers and sisters were "happy with me" and his older sister "helped me with my English."

His parents told him, during his preparatory period, that he "should act more like a man." He himself said "you are not playing the role of a Jew if you are not Bar Mitzvah. It is your duty as a Jew to participate in the service and you don't have the right to participate if you are not Bar Mitzvah."

The new responsibilities that accrued to him were "moving the lawn, working around the house, and a greater freedom in making decisions."

The Bar Mitzvah was "lots of fun," a chance "to show yourself off," and his biggest gift was his "sense of accomplishment."

### Preparation and the Bar Mitzvah

"The Bar Mitzvah was a personal accomplishment, and the idea of Bar Mitzvah was thrilling to me. But I will not continue in religious school because I go to a private school and the demands are too great there."

This respondent did not know the difference between Torah and Haftarah.

The "Bar Mitzvah was the fastest day of my life. What will happen if I sneeze, cough or go blank, which actually happened during the rehearsal. My mouth was very wet, my hands perspired, I ate Life Savers during the service, and used Kleenex to wipe my hands. When I saw all the people looking at me, I wanted to say, "What do you think I am, a freak?" As my turn came to be called up, I got shakier and shakier. But after the second aliyah it got to be fun. - - Afterwards I couldn't seem to follow the service. I wished I could do it again."

The "Bar Mitzvah should make you feel more Jewish."

This respondent wants to go to Israel.

### Attitudes toward Bar Mitzvah, Jews and Judaism

"I am happy to be Jewish" -

"a Jew is closer to God than his Gentile friends" and a good Jew "is a good anything who believes in what he does, and who worships God."

Though this respondent is leaving the religious school, he does so reluctantly. He mentioned that he has read several of the books of Jewish interest that he received for his Bar Mitzvah and that he wants to learn modern Hebrew so that he can know the language when he goes to Israel.

This respondent is a "gifted child" attending the University of Toronto School, a special school for the advanced student.

Respondent Thirteen - The Significance of the Bar Mitzvah as a Rite of Passage

Biography

The respondent is thirteen years old, was Bar Mitzvahed in Toronto, shortly before the interview, which was held at Camp White Pine.

Bar Mitzvah and the Possibility of Change in Family Attitudes

"I feel more grown up.....I have a different feeling toward my younger brother. I want to treat him better .....I would tell my younger brother about the Bar Mitzvah that your parents expect it of you. It is a privilege. You get to read in the Torah."

Preparation and the Bar Mitzvah

This youth had five months preparation. In this time he did not learn the difference between the Torah and the Haftorah, did not know what his Torah or Haftorah portion was, and spoke rather puzzlingly of "The Five Books of Noah?"

He thought the Bar Mitzvah is held "so that you can become a better Jew, take on more responsibility and follow the Ten Commandments."

"Every boy should be Bar Mitzvah because it is an honor, particularly reading from the Torah. My father said it is a sin not to look at the Torah." He also thought one of the prophets wrote the Torah and that the Torah is in Yiddish. The Torah means hope and faith to the Jews.."

"I think Bar Mitzvah should be longer." He is in a tefillin club in his synagogue's junior congregation. He also said that he prays daily, and that "I feel stronger afterwards."

"I want to learn conversational Hebrew."

"The purpose of Bar Mitzvah is so you can take on the responsibilities of manhood, be smarter in your acts."

## Respondent Fourteen - The Significance of the Bar Mitzvah as a Rite of passage

### Biography

This respondent is thirteen and a half, was interviewed in Cincinnati, where he was Bar Mitzvahed at the Wise Temple.

"There were very few changes by my parents as a result of the Bar Mitzvah. I can stay out for more late nights, and can be unchaperoned, but I'm not sure these new privileges came to me as a direct result of the Bar Mitzvah. They probably would have come without the Bar Mitzvah. They're simply just part of the whole childhood-adulthood thing which naturally come along at this stage in your development."

When asked ~~if~~ what advice he would give to a younger brother who was reluctant to become Bar Mitzvah, this respondent hemmed and hawed and finally said "I couldn't conceive of this. In our house, it was just naturally assumed that my brother and I would be Bar Mitzvahed."

### Preparation and the Bar Mitzvah

Do you really feel that you accomplished anything? "Yes, I had a feeling of pride, of a tie-in with my forefathers, and I conquered the Torah." This student remembered his Torah and Haftorah blessings, and knew both his Torah and Haftorah portions. He was able to tell the interviewer in some detail the meaning of both sections.

Did you enjoy your preparation? "Yes, because I had the satisfaction of knowing that I understood what I was reading, though I had a fear of not doing it right." "I also daydreamed about what it was going to be like."

### The Bar Mitzvah Service and its Deeper Meaning

"I got gifts at the temple. Friday night when we came to Temple, I wondered if the Torah was set for Saturday morning. I worried about this. Saturday morning, I was up before everyone else and was walking around. I walked with a heavy foot, as I wanted to jar someone awake. I had the shakes. Then when we got to Temple, right before the service, I realized that I didn't have my Bar Mitzvah suit on. In my nervousness I had put on the coat to one suit and the pants to another, and so I didn't get to wear my Bar Mitzvah suit. ....I felt out of place in the Temple with all the people. My thoughts wandered during the service. ...The most important part of the service was the rabbi's charge. I felt closer to God...the hush-hush of the audience.....The purpose of Bar Mitzvah is that it solidifies...you gain religion. Without these ceremonies the interest in religion begins to slip.

### Attitude toward Bar Mitzvah, and toward Judaism

"You had your day with God.....As the choir was singing, there was lots of emotion. With the sun coming through the stained glass windows, the choir voices sounded like angels. I thought of God and the wonders of nature. ...The Bar Mitzvah is the most important individual experience."

Respondent Fifteen - The Significance of the Bar Mitzvah as a Rite of Passage

Biography

M. Was Bar Mitzvahed several months before the interviews in a small town, to which he and his family had recently moved, from a nearby community. He is the second child, has an older sister who was confirmed in the adjacent community. Both his parents work in the family jewelry store.

In reflecting about his Bar Mitzvah, this respondent mentioned at the outset how nice "the rabbi was. He was friendly and made you feel at home. I had a close relationship with..... He was kind of like a school friend, a big brother. Our birthdays were the same."

When he got to the actual service, M. said that he did the entire Torah service, "but I didn't want to do the 'Torat adonoy t'mima'" and I felt guilty about not wanting to do it. I didn't learn my haftarah until the last two weeks. When I got to the Torah portion, I skipped a whole line - 'would you forget that if you goofed?' ...I'm not good at Hebrew. We came from ....., didn't learn anything when I got here, and thought the kids would laugh at me. I was the first in my class to be Bar Mitzvah and should have known more, but I can't pick up Hebrew."

The respondent noticed some family changes or at least was better able to look with some perspective at his family constellation. He mentioned that his parents used some of his Bar Mitzvah gift money to pay for the ceremony, which didn't bother him. "My father knows a little Hebrew, is 'religious' but doesn't like the Hebrew language.....I don't want to be like my father. I want money, and want to help send my father on trips. I'd rather have people wait on my father than have my father wait on other people. ....I feel closer with my father now, we play sports together and he helps me. ....I worry about my father's excessive smoking, and I don't want him to kick the bucket.....My mother doesn't trust me."

When asked about his feelings re and understanding of the Bar Mitzvah, M. said, "Become a man? I don't seek it. I'm glad the Bar Mitzvah is over and glad I don't have to repeat it a year later. I know I couldn't do it. I don't like to be shamed and embarrassed in public, though I wouldn't mind getting the gifts again. ... Bar Mitzvah is a big challenge, but I did it by rote. I didn't have a sermonette, because I didn't feel adequate....taking the Torah out didn't mean anything.... It's too late now to turn back...practise faith or turn aside..."

Respondent Sixteen \* The Significance of the Bar Mitzvah as a Rite of Passage

Biography

This respondent was interviewed in his home in Cincinnati. He is a member of Wise Temple, and was tutored for the Bar Mitzvah by the interviewer.

Bar Mitzvah and the Possibility of Change in Family Attitudes

When asked if he noticed any changes in his parent's attitude toward him, this youth said that he felt "he was actually preparing for a home of his own." He received more responsibilities in the home, was asked to help cleanup, treats his brother more courteously. He said he had to exhibit "self control in his preparation." ~~Prepa~~

Preparation and the Bar Mitzvah

This student had attended the synagogue for eight years prior to his Bar Mitzvah and began his Bar Mitzvah preparation almost a year ahead of time with private lessons, first in modern Hebrew, then in Biblical Hebrew to prepare him more adequately. This was his parent's suggestion as they felt at the time that he was not keeping up with the Hebrew progress of his class.

He "was scared only at the beginning - he was shaking" - and as he read with the pointer, his hand shook so much that the tutor had to steady it to keep it on the proper line in the Torah. He was "very conscious of trying to impress my Feinberg friends - I wanted to look good, to show them that I could do it too." "I was actually doing the Bar Mitzvah in honor of my grandfather so that he would be proud of me.

When one is Bar Mitzvah, he should "be more mature - act like an adult. But I WONDER, is thirteen the right age. Maybe it should be older, so that you can understand better just what you are learning."

"I guess you can compare the Bar Mitzvah to, well you know - just like an Indian would prove he was an Indian by killing a deer, a Jewish boy proves he is a Jew by being Bar Mitzvah. The Bar Mitzvah acts as a door through boyhood to manhood."

Attitude toward Bar Mitzvah, Jews and Judaism

"What did I get out of my Bar Mitzvah? It is a stepping stone to Confirmation and graduation. If you are Bar Mitzvah, you should go on. It gives you a feeling of self satisfaction - the nicest present I got was the feeling of accomplishment."

A good Jew - "you just feel it inside of you, you believe in God, and live a righteous life."



Respondent Seventeen - The Significance of the Bar Mitzvah as a Rite of Passage

Biography

This respondent is fifteen years old, was Bar Mitzvah at the Wise Temple in Cincinnati, and was tutored for the ceremony by a Hebrew Union College student.

Area Number One - Bar Mitzvah and the Possibility of Change in Family Attitudes

This respondent did not notice any change in family attitudes and because he was the only child at home, had no sister-brother responses or relationships. His older sister is married and was away from home.

Even though there were no significant changes vis a vis personalities at the time of the Bar Mitzvah, there were other changes which occurred, said this respondent. At the time of Bar Mitzvah, one "enters the adult world" - he sees Bar Mitzvah as the time for pointing up significant Hebrew knowledge gained, a significant point in one's Jewish education. This student was trained by an HUC student who studied Judaism with him for a long period of time, even after Bar Mitzvah. This relationship with this student made positive his feelings toward Judaism at the time, though at the present time he is going through the teen age doubt about God and the efficacy of religion. He noticed that at and after the time of Bar Mitzvah "parental care" was not stressed as much as formerly.

In discussing the impact of Judaism in the community the respondent made obvious distinctions between what he called "Amberly Village" Jews and "North Avondale" Jews - the former have new money and don't need Reform, or Judaism at all, while the latter stress attendance at religious school, follow rituals more. This sweeping generalization does not seem to hold true.

"Reform Judaism is going to pot" - "religion is frowned on in college - where is the unity of the Jews" - - the unity of the Jews seems to be external, like buying bonds which satisfies all requirements."

"On your Bar Mitzvah day, you are really a Jew! Look at me - I'm Jewish!" "The Bar Mitzvah makes one a better Jew by way of education."

## Respondent Eighteen - The Significance of the Bar Mitzvah as a Rite of Passage

### Biography

This student is fourteen years old, was Bar Mitzvahed several months prior to the interview at Wise Temple, Cincinnati, and was tutored for the ceremony by the interviewer.

### Bar Mitzvah and the Possibility of Change in Family Attitudes

This respondent noticed that he was "trusted more at home, was given home responsibilities, more burdens." When questioned about the word "burdens" he said they are just that - that household duties like emptying the garbage and the like are burdens - "but I'm glad to have them."

Bar Mitzvah "meant a lot to my Mother, who was raised in a good Jewish home." He spoke at length about the influence of his mother on the religious aspect of the home, that she has stressed it because of her background. The husband also spoke at length about the influence of his wife, in the interview with them the same evening.

### The Significance of the Bar Mitzvah

"The Bar Mitzvah gives one a better rounded out Jewish life. It makes you a better Jew. Bar Mitzvah boys are better informed about Judaism than non-Bar Mitzvah boys....The Torah reading itself is not important. It's what it means morally. It makes no difference if you don't understand it when you read it. You should practise it after your Bar Mitzvah. ....The rabbi blessed me and pronounced me 'Bar Mitzvah' - he blessed me with Hebrew words. I wouldn't know what they mean, but that's not important."

### The Bar Mitzvah service

"You've gotta make it good. I was waiting in back of the stage. People shake you up. But everyone was proud of me. And when it was all over I broke out in tears because of joy."

### The Bar Mitzvah and Judaism

"A good Jew is dedicated to his religion, knowing what it is and caring about it. His Jewish education is important. He should be able to recognize the holidays, know why they're celebrated ...that's what makes the difference between Jews and non-Jews - the why".

## Respondent Nineteen - The Significance of the Bar Mitzvah as a Rite of Passage

### Biography

This respondent was interviewed at Camp White PINE several months after his Bar Mitzvah, which was held in Holy Blossom Temple, Toronto. He has a younger sister.

### The Significance of the Bar Mitzvah

This respondent was eager to talk about the meaning and significance of the Bar Mitzvah, as he had discussed this with his parents during his preparation and wanted to share his thoughts. He said that "I think religion needs ceremonies, and for this reason I would like to see Bar Mitzvah stay in our religion. The Bar Mitzvah is a shocking reminder that we are now growing up, even though we will still grow up without it. It helps us realize that we are growing up and in this sense it is helpful. So the purpose is to tell us that we have to assume more responsibility in the home, and to treat our younger brothers and sisters better. It also is a time for the family to work together toward the ceremony if they can help. For example, the parents might be able to help you with your preparation, and in this respect everyone is working together.

### The Actual Bar Mitzvah service

I don't like getting up in front of large groups ever. It makes me nervous and I get embarrassed. I might make a mistake and people will know it, and if they don't know it, I know it....I know I've made a mistake and that's important. I never liked to get up in front of a group.

### Feelings about the Bar Mitzvah

I really don't think that thirteen is the right age. It should be later but that might conflict with Confirmation, and Bar Mitzvah is the only individual experience until your wedding and there really should be an individual experience which the child can go through. If I had my choice between Bar Mitzvah and Confirmation, I'd choose Bar Mitzvah because I think it's more important and more meaningful than Confirmation, when you just get up with a bunch of kids and kind of graduate from religious school.

Bar Mitzvah is also very important for your parents and grandparents - maybe it's more important to them than to us.

If my younger sister or brother didn't want to be Bar Mitzvah, I'd tell him that it's very important for family unity and that he could gain a lot of respect from his friends and from his family. Also that it's part of our Jewish tradition, and that he would regret it later on if he wasn't Bar Mitzvah.

Respondent Twenty - The Significance of the Bar Mitzvah as a Rite of Passage

Biography -

This respondent was interviewed in Marion, Ohio, and was Bar Mitzvah several months before this interview. He is the middle child, and has an 18 year old sister and a twelve year old sister.

This respondent is an ~~ascender~~ relative of one of the most famous rabbis in the Reform movement and feels very close to Judaism and has affinity for the tradition. He feels that his family is totally unreligious and is embarrassed that they do nothing, for example, to welcome the Sabbath in the home. He can be found at Temple services every time the rabbi comes to the community and rebukes his parents for not attending. At times he has talked of entering the rabbinate, much to the chagrin of his parents, particularly his father. He was eager to show the interviewer his "Bar Mitzvah book," and was particularly proud of the religious objects and manuscripts which are in the possession of his family. When his father suggested giving these to HUC, the boy responded that if that's what they want to do with them, they should give them to him because they mean something to him.

The Meaning of the Bar Mitzvah

"I was very close to the rabbi who Bar Mitzvahed me. He really looked like a rabbi in his robe and talis and yarmulka. We used to study at the Temple together on the weekends. I never learned much Hebrew though. I memorized my portion and read the Haftarah in English. Even today I can't read the blessings well - you saw that yourself just the other Friday night. But I felt very close to God and to Judaism on my Bar Mitzvah day. Just being up there - I like being on the pulpit and reading from the Torah or the Bible.

I was very scared that day, I guess like everyone else. I didn't want to make a mistake...wanted to do it perfectly. People said I did it well and the rabbi was thrilled about everything, so I guess it was alright. I thought about my great-great grandfather, Rabbi ..... and wished he could have been there. He was a great man, wasn't he? I've read all those manuscripts and they're very interesting. Maybe someday I'll be a rabbi, though my father laughs at that.

I think every Jewish boy should be Bar Mitzvah - it's part of the tradition. My sister was confirmed and I remember that very well. I wish we had more rituals in our home. Boy, we're going to have them in my home when I'm married. And I wouldn't mind being Bar Mitzvahed again...I liked it a lot.

## Study A - Parent Interview

### The Significance of the Bar Mitzvah as a Rite of Passage

#### Biography

Mr. and Mrs. A. are in the middle-fifties, the parents of two children, a boy sixteen and a girl twenty-four. Mr. A. is a successful professional man in the community and the family are members of Isaac Mayer Wise Temple.

Mr. and Mrs. A. are affiliated with a large Reform synagogue, and celebrate several rituals in their home, among them the Sabbath with the Kiddush and the lighting of the candles, the Passover seder, and the fast at Yom Kippur. Within the home are several works of Jewish art, which the family was delighted to show and talk about. There is also a fairly good Jewish library which is used. The family is acquainted with a number of Jewish periodicals, reads American Judaism, the Bnai Brith monthly, and periodically, Commentary. Both Mr. and Mrs. A. attend religious services frequently and enjoy the service because "it brings warmth, inner comfort, is a time to be with friends, and it is peaceful in Temple."

Mrs. A.'s family was orthodox - her father prayed "all the time", was a "very religious man," and it "rubbed off on me." Mrs. A. seemed to enjoy reminiscing about her father and the way he practised his Judaism. Mr. A. was quiet here. Mrs. A. in speaking about a rabbi, said, "he should have warmth, is a person about whom you should have a high opinion, someone you can feel that you can talk to, and is the most educated man in town - he knows a lot about a lot of things."

When asked what it means to be a good Jew, they responded that it means "thinking of the welfare of the Jewish people, knowledge of Jewish history, tradition, and institutions. Your religion has "to come from inside you." Reform Judaism has both "emotion and depth and is free and open."

When religion in general was discussed, both felt that ~~am~~ people were becoming less religious because of the "many side attractions" which are available to people on Temple nights.

Of great concern to both parents was inter-religious dating and the prospect of intermarriage. Since their son is of dating age, both said they had sat down with him and discussed the problem, their solution: that he will date only Jewish girls, an understanding with which the son agrees. Both had read the LOOK magazine article and were obviously concerned about the increase in intermarriage and the future survival of Judaism - "sure I'M concerned about it and by working out this agreement with our son, and of course by raising him in a positive Jewish home, we're trying to do our part."

In discussing Bar Mitzvah, they felt that "Bar Mitzvah in Reform Judaism is to stimulate Jewish education. It is much more than we could have given him. It gave him an understanding of his Judaism, and is a religious transition, giving a keener introduction into Judaism. We would equate it with an increase in Jewish knowledge." Their son was tutored by an HUC student, not only in his Bar Mitzvah material alone, but in other material as well. Both parents felt that the boy benefited greatly from this association and is fairly knowledgeable as a young Jew.

## Study B \* Parent Interview

### The Significance of the Bar Mitzvah as a Rite of Passage

#### Biography

Mr. and Mrs. B. are in their late forties or early fifties. Mr. B. is a local businessman, active in many Jewish organizations and sits on the Board of the Isaac Mayer Wise Temple. Mrs. B. is the president of a large Jewish woman's organization. They have two sons, one 16 and another 14. Both sons have been Bar Mitzvah.

Mr. and Mrs. B. came to the Reform Temple from the local Conservative synagogue because they were dissatisfied with not being able to worship together. There were other reasons too, but the seating problem was annoying because it meant that their children would not be able to sit with them as a complete family. Mrs. B., who comes from a small New England community, reminisced about her youth, and the difficulties she and her family encountered in practising their Judaism and in being able to go to synagogue. Mr. B. spent some time talking about his boyhood as a young Jew in Cincinnati where he was bar Mitzvahed and confirmed. Both Mr. and Mrs. B. consider themselves positively oriented Jews though very few practises are carried out in their home. Both seemed to feel a sense of guilt for not carrying out more rituals - "I guess we should but we're just lazy," and "Friday night is no different from Wednesday night." The Kiddush, for example, is only done "with company," like "with non-Jewish friends so that they could see how we do it."

When asked what rituals are celebrated, Mrs. B. said "nothing, almost," though the whole family fasts on Yom Kippur and the boys began before they were Bar Mitzvah. The objects in the home of Jewish interest are Kiddush cup, mezuzah, candles, lights, menorah. The usual Jewish periodicals are read - AJ, BB Monthly, the ORT publication.

Both Mr. and Mrs. B. are very active in Jewish affairs, and this is more than a passive or verbal interest. Both are concerned about the survival of Judaism, and when shown the LOOK article on the Vanishing American Jew, expressed surprise and concern about the prospects of Jewish survival in the future. "I didn't know it was that serious and yes, it does concern me, but I don't know what we can do about it."

Both parties attend Friday evening services as often as they can, are very friendly with one of the rabbis, and participate actively in their synagogue affairs. Mr. B. is interested in and concerned with both the religious and business end of the Temple.

When Bar Mitzvah was discussed, both Mr. and Mrs. B. felt that it illustrated a significant amount of Hebrew knowledge gained. Mrs. B. was pleased that her son learned his portion so well in such a short time and that he was able to translate almost word for word both his Torah and Haftarah portions. (He was - this reporter tutored the younger son, who is a fine and thorough student)

After the Bar Mitzvah, the B's had a small family luncheon at their home, buffet style, nothing big. They are against big parties for a rite whose primary significance is a greater understanding of Hebrew.

Both Mr. and Mrs. B. when asked whose idea Bar Mitzvah was in their family, said it was just an accepted fact that when both boys reached thirteen they would be Bar Mitzvah as was their father.

## Study C - Parent Interview

### The Significance of the Bar Mitzvah as a Rite of Passage

#### Biography

Mrs. B. is in her early forties, a native Cincinnati, mother of three children, ages 18, 16 and 11. Mrs. C's husband is a businessman who was out of the country at the time of this interview. Mrs. C's middle child was tutored by this reporter for the Bar Mitzvah.

Mrs. C and her husband are members of the local Reform Temple and have been for a number of years. Only recently Mrs. C and her husband have had financial difficulty and Mrs. C spent considerable time during the interview berating the Temple for deserting her and her husband in their hard luck. She felt that she and her husband were both neglected by the rabbinic leadership and that concern should have been elicited by the Temple. Now that they are non-paying members of the Temple, until they get back on their feet again, Mrs. C said they will, later, give money to the temple to make up for the lack of contributions now, "though I certainly owe nothing to the Temple. What did they do for me?"

Mrs. B's 2nd child was Bar Mitzvah because he wanted to be, only because he had been exposed to a good religious school teacher early and wanted to continue with him. The youngest son will not be Bar Mitzvah because "he doesn't want it, he's not doing well in public school, and so he's not even going to religious school." The eldest child, a college daughter, though not terribly active religiously, was raised "with Jewish values and is going with a Jewish boy. I mean we had no problems about that."

Mrs. C had just read the Life Magazine article on Jean Paul Sartre and said, "I guess that's what I really am, an existentialist. Religion has no meaning for me. I'm an atheist - whatever my kids are, they make themselves. To be a Jew is to improve your mind. Christianity is the lowest form of human life. - - - Most of our Jewish friends are goyish. When my husband left the country, our friends gave a party for him because it was the right thing to do, in the middle class. They all brought the appropriate gifts, you know. But they're phony. My husband and I are different from all of them, always have been. We're kooks, I guess."

Mrs. B. is very proud of her children, who have always been a part of everything the family does and has done. She seemed proud of this, and said that her kids have imposed "upon themselves religious discipline, though 'religion' has been understressed. We just don't pray."

Bar Mitzvah was seen as an educational achievement and little else. She deplored big parties, and mentioned that she had a small family dinner before the Bar Mitzvah and invited the rabbis and her son's tutor.

## Study D - Parent Interview

### The Significance of the Bar Mitzvah as a Rite of Passage

#### Biography

Mr. and Mrs. D. are in their late thirties, parents of three children, ages 14, 12 and 8. Mr. D. is a local businessman. They are members of Isaac Mayer Wise Temple.

Mr. D. began by telling the interviewer how proud he is of his wife, because "it is her influence which has been the most important. She wants the kids to know about their heritage, sees to it that they have always gone to Sunday school, and is the influence in our house which has made Judaism so much a part of it." Judaism is practised in their home, with all the rituals being carried out, "her influence," and they try to get to Temple as often as possible because at Temple "we feel closest to God, though we don't go as much as we should."

In the home the holidays are practised, and the daughter, the youngest child, is a student at Yavneh. This elicited much discussion as both parties said that if they had it to do over again, they would send all their children to the parochial school, "because the classes are smaller, there is more individual attention, and they learn so much about their religion." The daughter reads Hebrew well, better than the parents, and "we're both learning about Judaism from her."

A considerable amount of time was spent discussing the LOOK article, and the interviewer had to relate the information as the family had not seen it. Both expressed concern about its contents, were concerned about the survival of Judaism and concerned about the rising rate of intermarriage, though because of the "Jewishness" of their home and "her influence" they did not express concern that their children would be affected.

On a good Jew and "Jewishness" both said that the practice of rituals and the family way of life, plus the practice of holidays in the home (they were proud of efforts to build a succa in their yard) helped to make one a good Jew. Both were concerned about the double standard of today's life as "the way of life" blots out religion because of social pressures. He one time mentioned that we are God's "chosen people" - but this was not pursued.

On Bar Mitzvah, they said "it is a fine traditional Jewish thing, part of being a Jew, and the main value is educational." It was the son's desire to be Bar Mitzvah. They resented large parties, but were firm in their feeling that every Jewish boy should participate in the rite.



## Study E

### The Significance of the Bar Mitzvah as a Rite of Passage

#### Biography

Mr. and Mrs. E. reside in a small northern Ohio community where ~~Mr~~ they are members of the local small synagogue, served by an HUC student. Mr. E. is a financially successful businessman and Mrs. E. is the great grand daughter of one of the most eminent rabbis in our movement. They have three children, 18, 15, and 13.

Within Mr. and Mrs. E's home, no rituals are celebrated - the Sabbath rituals are not celebrated because their store is open Friday nights and often both parents work. However, they have the usual Jewish ritual objects, plus several memorabilia from the great grandfather in the form of cups and a significant collection of letters. These mean very little to them and Mr. E. said "If it were up to me, I'd give them away - they don't mean anything to me." Mrs. E. wants to save them for her son, who is showing some interest in the rabbinate, to which Mr. E. laughs and says "He'll never be a rabbi."

Mr. E. is somewhat active in Bnai Brith and reads their monthly newsletter regularly. His interest in the Temple is nil - "I can't be bothered with religion. To tell you the truth, I haven't been to one service that hasn't bored me to tears. It's the same service, and I tell you, it's damn boring." On the high holidays Mr. E's main concern was whether he could play golf on Rosh Hashana afternoon.

Mrs. E. is the youth group advisor and seems to derive pleasure from her work with the kids - she is the result of an intermarriage, her mother being a Catholic and living in the same community. Mrs. E's devotion to the Temple and her concern about her children's religious education is evident in her actions and concerns. Mrs. E's mother raised her daughter as a Jew in a large midwestern city, and Mrs. E. has decided that her children will be raised as Jews. Mr. E. is satisfied to "write a check for the UJA and the Temple - that takes care of me." He very plainly, as he says, is "not interested in anything further."

When we discussed Bar Mitzvah, the son showed me his Bar Mitzvah book, with pictures and the like, and the mother expressed great interest in it. She talked fondly of such a pleasant occasion, how good the rabbi was to the son and to them, while the husband was very much outside the center of activity. He "just paid the bills." They see Bar Mitzvah as an opportunity for a Jewish boy to know more about his religion.