Making Meaning of Bar/Bat Mitzvah: A Family Spiritual Journey

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Introduction

The bar/bat mitzvah experience from preparation through celebration is often the target of discussion and ridicule by Jewish education professionals. Many observe that students and parents are detached from the religious and educational component of this life cycle moment and the party is the focus of energy and priority. As Harold Schulweis has termed it, the bar/bat mitzvah experience of contemporary Jewish Americans has become a riteless passage and a passageless rite.[1] The pro forma memorization of Torah, haftarah and tefillah seems unrelated to the inner life of the child and the parent.

While some families seem to be just going through the motions, in other cases the bar/bat mitzvah experience may serve as a catalyst for the parent to begin the journey of spiritual seeking.[2] The bar/bat mitzvah experience can become a moment in the life of the parent when they connect back, or for some for the first time with Jewish tradition and seek fuller meaning and significance in their lives. In response, rabbis, cantors and b'nai mitzvah educators have sought over the last twenty-five years to embrace not only the child but also the entire family through education and experiential programming during this significant period.

Some of the questions parents may be asking at this life stage may include: What is occurring with our son or daughter at this stage in their lives? What is the new phase that I am entering into as a parent to this evolving Jewish adult? How can Jewish tradition help prepare my family for this moment of transition in their lives? Providing meaning and answers to these questions is the challenge to Jewish educators.

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[1] Schulweis, Harold. *In God's Mirror*. P. 120.
[2] Schulweis, p. 120.

This thesis explores how Jewish parents navigate the struggle for meaning in the contemporary bar/bat mitzvah experience. I understand this struggle to be the result of the tension within modern Judaism between, on the one hand, the focus on the sovereign self and the desire for the seeking out of personal meaning and, on the other hand, the need to see one's own life and the life of one's family as having a context within a covenantal community where meaning is achieved through shared group experiences.

In order to address this issue, I have undertaken a study of some of the sociological, familial and educational trends in the development of the contemporary bar and bat mitzvah experience in American liberal (Reform, Conservative and Reconstructionist) congregational settings. My primary but not exclusive focus has been on the baby-boomer generation, a broad spectrum in the American population, who have in general been characterized as a generation of spiritual seekers crafting their own brands of religious expression within the larger frame of organized religious communities.

This paper explores some of the general and Jewish literature that addresses the topic of spiritual " journeying and seeking" among adults, and specifically among adults identified as the baby-boomer generation. Over the past twenty years much has been written about this population, in particular the religious or spiritual habits of this population. As we have learned in the study of Jewish history, the predominant culture of a society finds its way into and influences the habits and behaviors of the Jewish culture. Contemporary Jewish American culture reflects this concept, as we will see in the review of the general literature on the religious trends in American culture.

This paper examines this topic by reviewing the current sociological literature on adult faith formation in contemporary American and Jewish society in order to obtain a clear understanding of the spiritual journey of parents of bar and bat mitzvah children. Then, I will examine how various educators have constructed bar and bat mitzvah curricula to respond to the parent's search for Jewish spiritual meaning in their planning and experiencing of their child's life cycle celebration. Finally, I will offer my own curricular plan to address how I believe Jewish parents can be guided to construct religious meaning during this process. This curriculum reflects my conviction that Jewish educators can both address the needs for individual meaning and expression, and direct and affirm that the bar/bat mitzvah needs to be a meaningful affirmation of Jewish adulthood celebrated within the community.

Chapter I

Bar and Bat Mitzvah As Part of Jewish Life Cycle

Every life cycle moment marks a passage from one stage of development and identity to another. At each life cycle event dual actions occur: an act of continuity and an act of separation. This duality is true for both the bar/bat mitzvah child and the parents. Children are to let go of their complete status as minors and assume new responsibilities as adult members of the Jewish community. Parents must let go to allow their children the room to accept these responsibilities while at the same time holding on to the child in order to help continue to shape her/his identity and being. This notion is evident in Jewish tradition when it became the custom of the father of a bar mitzvah to make a public pronouncement after the boy was called to the Torah by saying the following: "Praised be He who has released me from the responsibility of this one."[3] The parent must step back in order in order for the bat/bar mitzvah to move forward in life. At this moment parents become aware that they have fulfilled one of the pronouncements they made at the birth of their child to raise the child and bring her/him to the study of Torah and in so doing connect to that first creative life cycle moment.

Bar/bat mitzvah can be a moment of transcendence for the child and for the entire family. Ideally this central life cycle event generates something Jewishly significant in the life of the family which has been described as "moving beyond oneself at the

[3] *Barukh SheP'tarani-Art Scroll Siddur* p. 444

cognitive, moral and affective levels." [4] This moment sometimes serves as a catalyst to stimulate reflections about God for the child and for the parents. Parents may seize this experience as an opportunity for further exploration and clarification of their spiritual questioning.

A critical examination of the bar/bat mitzvah experience raises many types of questions about the spiritual journey families embark on through this life cycle event. To understand bar/bat mitzvah as a spiritual journey, Jewish educators need to explore the social and historical context of this life cycle event in twentieth and twenty first century America. Although my study focuses on the late twentieth and early twenty first century struggle between the sovereign self and the demands and expectations of the Jewish community, an exploration of historical factors shaping the history of bar/bat mitzvah in America provides the necessary background for understanding the recurring tensions between the public and private dimensions of bar/bat mitzvah experience for Jewish families today.

A view of the historical development affords the opportunity to look at theories about assimilation and secularization while highlighting a life cycle event, which is part of the early adolescent experience of many American Jewish families. Bar/bat mitzvah usually requires synagogue affiliation and generally these institutions establish an articulated minimum of Jewish educational standards in order to celebrate the bar/bat mitzvah within a congregational setting.

A look at the creation of these educational requirements and their functions earlier in the twentieth century provides a clearer understanding of the relationships between

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[4] Blumberg, Sherry. *Teaching About God and Spirituality.* ARE Publications: Denver (2002) p.27.

American Jews and their institutions.[5] The distinction between the terms "folk" and "elite" religion is utilized to understand the imposition of minimum requirements in context and to relate it to a greater framework for the interpretation of Jewish life in America.[6] To this day there exists an elite-folk struggle over bar/bat mitzvah standards. Charles Liebman who describes elite religion as the rituals, symbols and beliefs, which the leaders acknowledge as legitimate, articulated the contrast between elite and folk religion in Judaism.[7] Elite religion is the religious institution itself, its structure, the authority of the leaders and their sources of authority, and the rights and obligations of the members of the organization and its leaders.[8] Folk religion is usually the majority of the members who participate in the institution and who generally ignore the standards set by the elite. For the elite, the folk are thought of as a subculture. Liebman warns:

> It is a mistake to think of folk religion as necessarily more primitive than elite religion. While its ceremonies and sanctums evoke emotions and inchoate ideas associate with basic instincts and primitive emotions, it is also more flexible than elite religion. Hence it is also capable of developing ceremonial responses to contemporary needs which may be incorporated into the elite religion. [9]

Folk religion is expressed primarily through ceremony, rituals and symbols. These rituals may emerge from a need on the part of the people for sanctification of certain social and/or economic activity which elite religion refuses to legitimize. This notion is the foundation for the experience of creativity, innovation and spiritual questing that we may examine in contemporary American Jewish life. We see this in the candle

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[5] Schoenfeld, Stuart. "Theoretical Approaches to the Study of Bar and Bat Mitzvah" World Jewish Congress Volume II pp. 120-122.
[6] Schoenfeld. pp. 121-122.
[7] Liebman, Charles. *The Ambivalent Jew.* Philadelphia: 1976, p. 46
[8] Liebman. p.46
[9] Liebman. p. 47

lighting ceremony that takes place at the bar/bat mitzvah reception, an invention of American caterers.

> Many caterers, presenting themselves as religious specialists expanded their repertoire to include ritual matters, not just culinary ones...Anyone who has attended an American bar mitzvah in the past fifty years is certain to have encountered it. The high point of the evening, this established folk (or catering) ritual rivaled the traditional synagogue service in meaningfulness and emotional intensity. There is the march, the bringing in of the Bar Mitzvah cake, the lighting of the thirteen candles, or of fourteen – one for luck. So much importance is now being attached to this commercial hall ceremonial, that we have heard of cases where it has replaced the synagogue ritual completely. This affecting ritual transformed a widely performed activity – cutting a birthday cake – into a quasi-sacred event. The bar mitzvah boy, flanked by his parents, called upon various relatives, one by one to step forward and light a candle.[10]

When families prepare for the candle lighting ceremony, the creation of clever personalized scripts for this ceremony elicits the same level of intense stress for the family as the bar/bat mitzvah child experiences studying to participate in the synagogue service for his\her own day of celebration. For many families, the folk creation, rooted in the personal, is as important as the religious observance, framed by the synagogue competence requirements of the historical Jewish community, i.e. chanting haftarah, leading Torah Service, etc.

Historical evidence indicates that at the turn of the century standards of Jewish education were low, expectations were low, and teenaged boys who were shomer mitzvot were not the norm.[11] However, the bar mitzvah was still an important and significant celebration in the life of the boy and the family taking place within the synagogue. The folk values gave priority to a successful performance rather than to understanding. In

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[10] Joselit, Jenna Weissman. *The Wonders of America: Reinventing Jewish Culture, 1880-1950.* New York: Hill and Wang. P.100.

[11] Schoenfeld. p. 79.

1885 an elite critic of the religious practices of American Jews called bar mitzvah "the greatest of holidays among our Jewish brethren' and described the conspicuousness of the emphasis on the reception.[12] Rather than being a moment acknowledging full participation of the boy in Jewish ritual life, bar mitzvah became a ritual of disconnection from an organized educational and religious institution. It became a ritual where traditional commitments were made and then subsequently ignored. Personal anecdotes on bar mitzvah ceremonies in the early part of the twentieth century report varying experiences. "There was the humble Thursday morning ceremony, a nod to the immigrant parent or grandparent who would have been hurt had not a young man been called to the Torah honoring this rite of passage."[13] Sam Levenson, the comedian and writer recalls reading a speech "before a packed house of menfolk, womenfolk and kinfolk" and realizing that the Jewish view of adult "rights" was that they were not only responsibilities, but "privileges, for which I had to be grateful."[14]

The sumptuous and extravagant pattern of folk observance of the bar mitzvah was distressing to those who considered themselves among the elite practitioners of Judaism, whose values and beliefs about the future of Jewish life were committed to raising the standards of Jewish education and strengthening synagogue membership in America. In America, elite Judaism took the organizational form of rabbinic seminaries, rabbinic organizations, federations and congregations. Although each movement shaped their own versions of American Judaism, the development of an American pattern of bar

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[12] Sarna, Jonathan. Translated and edited. *People Walk on their Head: Moses Weinberger's Jews and Judaism in New York.* (1981) p. 76
[13] Howe, Irving and Libo, Kenneth. *How We Lived* (1979) New York.. (1979) p. 122.
[14] Levenson, Sam. *In One Era and Out the Other.* (1973) New York: p. 189

mitzvah observance combining a lack of religious commitment with a lavish celebration was a source of criticism among the elite practitioners of Judaism, across denominational lines.

The Reform and Conservative movements tried to establish national standards for bar mitzvah, bat mitzvah and confirmation, the number of days, hours and years of required study in a denominational institution in order to become bar mitzvah, (later bat mitzvah) and confirmand.[15] However the autonomy of each congregation and the differences between branches of Judaism ensured continuing diversity and competition and many institutions were unable to enforce the requirements and maintain and grow their memberships.

Many factors contributed to the failure to firmly implant this pattern of development. For many synagogues, affiliation grew out of a desire for social connection with other Jews. Moreover, the civil religion of American Jews proclaimed a kind of ethnic Judaism rooted in history, and not theology. Much of post-World War Two Judaism emerged out of a response to the Holocaust, and to the establishment of the State of Israel. An intensification of Jewish identity arose in reaction to these important mid-century Jewish historical events but this heightened Jewish identity often lacked grounding in traditional Jewish religious affirmations. Indeed, many Jews lost faith in the aftermath of the Holocaust and identified with the highly intensive but non-religious claims of modern Zionism. Supporting Israel and remembering the Shoah became important, non-religious ways to affirm the Jewish story in one's life. Clearly, all of

[15] Schoenfeld, Stuart. p. 2.

these factions contributed to a distinction between Jewish ethnic pride and Jewish religious commitment.

In addition, the urban and suburban sprawl of post-war America contributed to the fluidity of membership. People moved frequently and competition for members became a key aspect of synagogue survival. The highly ethnic nature of suburban Jewish life and the significant changeability of people's affiliation with synagogues worked to subvert the establishment of clear Jewish educational standards relating to bar and bat mitzvah.

Establishing minimum educational requirements for bar and bat mitzvah set a pattern for compromise between elite and folk. For the elite, a bar or bat mitzvah ceremony was not an important part of Jewish identity. For the elite life cycle rites have meaning only because they are integrated into the life of the Jew and of the community.

The importance placed on bar and bat mitzvah by folk Judaism offered an opportunity to pursue elite goals. While the elite control the setting and the service, the folk craft and execute the celebratory reception. The conspicuous consumption of bar/bat mitzvah celebrations may be called into question, but the behavior of American Jews, a community still finding its way, continues to evolve and change, just as the celebrations reflect new elements that have been added to the synagogue service. Changes in the synagogue service have emerged out of the tensions and struggles between the elite and folk to set standards while simultaneously adding personal and meaningful elements to the service. These elements do not necessarily come into conflict with the actual components of the synagogue service but are additions to it, for instance the passing of

the Torah from generation to generation (l'dor vador)[16] or the presentation of the tallit to the bar/bat mitzvah child by a member of the family.[17]

Bar and bat mitzvah are major rituals of Jewish identification for the family that require lengthy preparation for the entire family. The content of bar and bat mitzvah ceremonies varies, but the continuing popularity and presence of this event has not diminished in American Jewish life. In fact the bar and bat mitzvah experience has in many respects come to supplant the parents' planning of a wedding for their children. As the tendency for Jews of the baby boomer generation is later age childbearing, the bar/bat mitzvah is a moment when families seize the opportunity to celebrate with all the family: the grandparents and even the parents may not live to celebrate the weddings of their children and maybe the only opportunity for a Jewish event given intermarriage.[18]

In 1951, Judah Pilch, then Executive Director of the American Association for Jewish Education (AAJE) wrote in 1951:

> In the past several decades Bar Mitzvah has come to be considered merely a rite, and preparation for Bar Mitzvah has tended to become preparation for the ceremony itself...As a consequence, the education of the child was in all too many cases restricted to the narrow requirements of the rite...Bar Mitzvah represents a powerful motivation, a goal which children and their parents readily understand, and will work to attain.[19] (Engelman 1951)

Recognizing the value of this motivation, increasing numbers of rabbis and Jewish educators have sought to direct bar/bat mitzvah preparation from mere coaching for a performance, to education for living as American Jews. This preparation has

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[16] Personal observation at four Reform congregations on four separate occasions where this 'ritual' was part of the service for taking out the Torah from the Ark during the bar and bat mitzvah observance on Shabbat morning.
[17] Schoenfeld. p. 73.
[18] Stephanie Alexander 2003.
[19] Engelman, Uriah Z. "Educational Requirements for Bar Mitzvah." Department of Research and Information of AAJE. December 1951. pp.6-8.

increasingly motivated and stimulated parents to begin and/or further their own Jewish education and spiritual seeking. In some cases, the bar/bat mitzvah experience becomes the access point for the adult towards articulating their own existential understanding of life through the prism of the Jewish experience and study.[20] Sherry Blumberg comments:

> Bar/bat mitzvah can be a moment of transcendence for the participant and for the whole family. It is often a moment when something special, something Jewishly significant, occurs. Transcendence can be defined as moving beyond oneself at the cognitive, moral and affective levels. [21]

Planting the seeds for receptivity to this special moment, helping the family, and in this paper specifically the parents, to be mindful and conscious of the religious and familial significance of this event is the challenge for all Jewish educators and clergy.

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[20] Based on 25 years of observation and direct involvement with families of bar/bat mitzvah.

[21] Blumberg, Sherry H. "Reflections on Bar/Bat Mitzvah" in *Bar and Bat Mitzvah Education Sourcebook.* Denver: (1993) p. 27.

Chapter II

The Sociology of Religion as a Means of Understanding Adult Spiritual Development in Contemporary America

The modern American sociologists of religion, Wade Clark Roof and Robert Wuthnow, create a useful interpretative framework to understand the spiritual struggles of contemporary Jewish parents. Roof focuses specifically on the religious life of baby boomers whereas Wuthnow looks beyond this group in order to understand the general trends in American spirituality since 1950. As the baby boomer generation (men and women born between 1946 – 1964) has matured, finding a meaningful relationship with religion has become one of their primary concerns.

What characterizes the baby boomer generation's struggle with religion? According to Roof, the religious struggles of this generation reflect the historical experiences of this group. This broad generation includes people who grew up in unique and turbulent times especially in terms of development of new religious ideas and expressions. Each decade which characterized the period of maturation of the baby boomer generation is characterized by its singular expressions: the upheavals of the 1960's – the Age of Aquarius, the mid-to late 1970's – a period of charismatic and evangelical revival, the 1980's with its array of New Age movements and the 1990's with its search for personal and spiritual meaning. It is very difficult to generalize about the life styles of this generation, yet the freedom for individual expression is at the center of this distinct group.[22]

According to Roof, baby boomers in the midst of childrearing have shaped unique family and parenting styles. The baby boomer generation has tended to create a personal

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[22] Roof, Wade Clark. *A Generation of Seekers.*(1993) Harper SanFrancisco. p. 8.

social reality rooted in egalitarianism, tolerance and cultural diversity in civil and religious practice. Opportunities for this generation have been opened that were unprecedented in their parents' times specifically career options, changing gender roles and lifestyle choices.[23]

In all aspects of life, the baby boomers have shown a kind of restlessness and longing. This personal turmoil stimulates the search for meaning; the asking of questions about the significance of their lives; and the search for some clarity about what they want for themselves and their children. Part of this questioning leads to the exploration of spiritual themes. The search for meaning has lead baby boomers towards the exploration of Eastern religions, in mysticism and New Age and other religious rituals. Long established churches and synagogues have had to reinvent themselves into institutions that provide opportunities for personal healing and individual transformation.

According to Roof, we cannot understand the spiritual development of baby boomers without an understanding of the psychological dynamics governing their lives especially as they evolve towards mid-life. Developmental psychologists see midlife (40's) as a transition from early adulthood to later adulthood a point in time when people reexamine and reflect on their lives, their past, present and future. They revisit what they have held as values and commitments.[24] Uncertainty and emotional pressure often characterize this period of human development. Yet, self-enrichment and personal growth can also characterize this period as well. Adults can experience the capacity for growth at any time but as their children reach adolescence this inner motivation frequently occurs.

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[23] Roof, Wade Clark. *A Generation of Seekers*. (1993) pp.4-5.
[24] Roof. pp 5-6.

Since Jewish parents are usually at mid-life when their children reach bar/bat mitzvah age, Roof's insights shed light on the faith development of Jewish parents at this critical life cycle moment. For parents of bar or bat mitzvah children, this rite can be a significant moment of religious insight as they seek to affirm the meaning of life and deal with their spiritual lacunae in order to move forward in their spiritual growth. On this spiritual journey, they are rethinking who they are as spouses, as parents, as children, as part of an extended family, as friends and as members of a greater community.

Generally, the generation of baby boomers sees religion as more than just inherited ritual and doctrine. Instead they see it as a spiritual quest for connectedness and unity, and for a vision that encompasses body and spirit, the material and immaterial.[25] The bar mitzvah and bat mitzvah experience in the life of a contemporary Jewish family can be such a spiritual quest. Using Roof's understanding, Jewish educators must recognize that when they engage Jewish parents at the time of bar and bat mitzvah, they are encountering these adults at a critical moment in these adult Jews' spiritual development when they are trying to find their way home, to some spiritual center, in order to make meaning out of their lives.

The centrality of the spiritual quest in the life of adult American Jews represents a shift in Jewish self-understanding. Immediately following World War II, Judaism in America was dominated by institutional growth and development. As Jews became suburban dwellers, the synagogue movements of America flourished. Rabbi Arthur Hertzberg described this as an American Jewish "edifice complex."[26] As Jews moved to

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[25] Roof. p.26.

[26] At an address given in 1988 at a convention of the Rabbinical Assembly of America. Concord Hotel, Lake Kiamesha, New York.

the suburbs, the central act of Jewish affirmation was joining a synagogue. By joining congregations, Jews held on to their Jewish ethnicity and part of this ethnicity was a Jewish education for their children leading to bar\bat mitzvah.

What made up this Jewish ethnic identity? In the general Jewish community, the twin axis of Holocaust remembrance and the civil religion of Israel characterized the emotional and religious life of mainstream Judaism. Yet, this is only one part of the Jewish historical narrative of post-World War Two Judaism. The American Judaism of the baby boomer generation grew beyond institutional affiliation and Jewish ethnicity towards a serious search for a spiritual dimension to life. Roof clarifies this distinction by articulating the dissimilarity between spirit and institution.

> The distinction between "spirit" and "institution" is of major importance. *Spirit* is the inner, experiential aspect of religion; *institution* is the outer, established form of religion. This distinction is increasingly pertinent because of the strong emphasis on self in contemporary culture and the related shift from objective to subjective ways of ordering experience. Boomers have grown up in a post-sixties culture that emphasizes choice; knowing and understanding one's self, the importance of personal autonomy, and fulfilling one's potential-all contributing to a highly subjective to religion.[27]

According to Roof's understanding of adult religious identification in contemporary America, religious institutions seems extraneous to the inner religious quest. The rituals, the languages, the prayers and the doctrines seem stale and worn out because they do not relate to the desire for "first-hand" religion: a religious identification rooted in an individual's own personalized religious journey. For contemporary seekers, the religious truths that they come to on their own have superiority to the traditions that they receive from the historical traditions of their group.

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[27] Roof. p. 30.

For Jewish educators, Roof 's analysis is highly suggestive and has broad implications about the kind of religious experiences people seek. Many contemporary adult Jews in mid-life believe that privacy and solitude are the essential elements in a religious life.

Jewish educators cannot over emphasize how important this insight is to the understanding of modern Jewish religious practice. Historically, we Jews experience God through the group experience. The centrality of the Temple in biblical and post-biblical Judaism illustrates that experiencing God always took place as a shared, group experience. In the book of Deuteronomy, creating individualized altars outside of the centralized cult was prohibited. The formation of institutions to worship and study with the group emphasized fellowship and communal connectiveness. In rabbinic Judaism, the minyan is the common religious denominator of Jewish life. Yet, in striking contrast to that religious inclination in various phases of Jewish religious history, the majority of Roof's respondents regardless of their religious tradition of origin preferred " 'to be alone and to meditate.'"[28]

> One question we asked was" for you, which is most important to be alone and to mediate, or to worship with others? The purpose of the question was to distinguish between spirituality associated with aloneness versus that arising out of worship in a group. Fifty –three percent said it was more important to be alone and to meditate, 29% indicated worship with others, and 18% said either both were important or they were unable to choose between them. Four percent indicated that the actually practiced some type of meditation.[29]

In my work with bar/bat mitzvah families over the course of twenty-five years, privatization of the ritual itself is a key element in how many contemporary families view the event. The privatization of this experience manifests itself in many different but

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[28] Roof. p. 70.
[29] Roof. p. 70.

significant ways. Instead of finding meaning in rituals and traditions that evolved over time or even accepting the framework and minhagim that individual synagogues have developed, parents often want "designer" ceremonies. In fact, some rabbis and cantors even encourage this form of familial self-expression. Contemporary Jewish families want unique prayers and rituals.

Moreover, the idea that bar mitzvah and bat mitzvah is taking place within the context of a community, which functions week-in and week-out often escapes them and even appears to them as an impediment to their self-expression. I have witnessed countless families who seek ways to shut off the communal participation in what they see to be their private event. Many even seek non-synagogue venues for the bar\bat mitzvah ceremony to "protect the family" from outside interference. On countless occasions, parents will express concern about the intrusion of regular daveners who are seen as people who have "nothing else to do but to come to synagogue on Shabbat morning for a free Shabbat luncheon." In my experience with this group, I have heard, more often that I would like to admit, parents say rather dismissively: " why do I have to invite the regulars to my Kiddush? Why do I have to pay for them?" Privatization has subverted traditional notions of community. The traditional idea of seudat mitzvah is threatened in such an environment of privatization. There is another side to this though, many b'nai mitzvah families do invite all the regular worshippers to join in their in-synagogue luncheons.[30]

Wade Clark Roof is one of a group of distinguished sociologists of religion who are trying to map the inner dynamics of the faith lives and development of contemporary

[30] Grant, Lisa. Comment.

Americans. Robert Wuthnow's work covers similar ground but seeks a broader understanding of American spirituality than does Roof.

Robert Wuthnow's *After Heaven: Spirituality in America Since the 1950s* surveys historical changes in American spirituality over the last half century. This scientific study of American religion can help Jewish educators to understand more fully the ideas of religious journey and privatization that characterize how people practice religion in our non-orthodox congregations. According to Wuthnow, American society was traditionally rooted in communities built around houses of worship, that were stabilizing forces in American life, against a rootlessness that characterized much of the American experience. "Indeed, the place where Americans could know God best was the local congregation."[31] This "dwelling-oriented" spirituality in which "organized religion extended its monopoly over spiritual practice" reached its peak in the 1950s.[32]

Beginning in the 1960s, religious practice changed and became seeking-oriented. Thus, a congregational-based spirituality diminished in importance. Wuthnow charts the transformation of the sacred into something fluid, an access to the holy more likely to be found in the God within us rather than in the church or synagogue.

While many Americans have abandoned their synagogues and churches, Wuthnow notes that Americans have not lost the desire for a spiritual dimension in their lives. The sacred, however, has moved from houses of worship into the inner precincts of the self. Faith is no longer inherited but negotiated. A spiritual grounding is sought not within a single religious tradition but patched together from many.

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[31] Wuthnow, Robert. *After Heaven: Spirituality in America Since the 1950s*. University of California Press: Berkley. (1998) p. 53.
[32] Wuthnow. p. 65.

Wuthnow asserts, as does Roof, that contemporary religionists value diversity and personal exploration. Increasing consumerism produces the expectation for variety and asserts the right of individuals to make their preferences sovereign. The result has been a new definition of freedom, individual autonomy that revolutionizes American religious expression.[33] Wuthnow suggests that during the 1960s and its aftermath the ability to practice one's inherited faith and the notions of religious freedom came to mean the consumer's right to let desire be one's guide. The religious question, in effect, began to look a lot like a spiritual shopping mall. [34]

Although Wuthnow concedes that American spiritual life has been enhanced by its diversity he identifies the trend toward spiritual journeys as "low maintenance" spirituality, a faith that demands little from the faithful. Post 1950s and 1960s spiritual seekers looked to spirituality less for moral guidance than for reassurance or emotional adjustment. This type of spirituality emphasizes a change in attitudes rather than behavior, a spirituality that demands not self-transformation but mere self-acceptance.

Jewish educators confront this understanding of religion all the time especially when we focus on the issue of observance. Teaching religious obligation in a non-Orthodox setting is burdened with great challenges. Reform Judaism struggles with this directly in trying to explicate the notion of mitzvah for liberal Jews. In the 1999 Pittsburgh Platform, the most recent summary of Reform Jewish theological certainties, the term " sense of mitzvah" is utilized.[35] A "sense of mitzvah" implies autonomy, choice and not obligation, definite boundaries and clear commandments.

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[33] Wuthnow. p. 110.
[34] Wuthnow. p. 66.
[35] Central Conference of American Rabbis Web page (www.ccarnet.org)

Is there a middle ground for contemporary American religionists between a dwelling-oriented approach to religion and a seeking-oriented approach to religion? And does this middle ground help contemporary Jewish educators in developing strategies for working with bar\bat mitzvah families? Wuthnow proposes what he considers to be a more promising alternative to the spiritualities of dwelling and seeking that combines the virtues of both. Through "practice-oriented spirituality" – prayer, meditation or some other means of communing with the divine – the individual retains the freedom for personal exploration while participating in a tradition that lends coherence and moral value to the search. "Practice –oriented spirituality" offers the proper mix of rights and responsibilities, challenging the individual to aspire to **doing** good as well as **feeling** good.[36]

Wuthnow suggests that unfortunately, seeking-oriented spirituality often leads to little more than dabbling in different spiritual practices, when not to downright silliness. The 1980s initiated a reaction to this permissiveness, reassessing the claims of traditional morality. Still, there has not been a return to dwelling-oriented spirituality, which according to Wuthnow, is at odds with the transience of modern life and with our complicated social realities.

As a Jewish educator seeking to understand the bar/bat mitzvah experience for families in general and the impact of bar/bat mitzvah on parents in particular, it is intriguing how Wuthnow's practice -oriented spirituality can inform curriculum development. When we as Jewish educators say we want the bar/bat mitzvah experience to be transformational for the parents perhaps this is what we are longing for: *The ability*

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[36] Wuthnow. p.183.

to harness the energy unleashed by the bar/bat mitzvah experience as a catalyst for deeper reflection on Jewish affirmation and religious meaning. However, because we articulate expectations does not mean that those expectations translate into internal transformations. In my experience, people will fulfill the standards in order to achieve the goal. For example, if synagogue attendance is a prerequisite for bar/bat mitzvah celebration people will fulfill the requirement but what about the week after the bar/bat mitzvah? Has anything really changed in the interior recesses of the adult Jews' souls? [37]

In a 1999 review of Wuthnow's work in the Jewish weekly, the *Forward*, David Sampliner explores the limitations of this work for Jewish understanding. He asks the question as to whether Wuthnow's theoretical schema is inherently Christian. Sampliner suggests that Wuthnow's work would have come to different conclusions if American Jews had been its primary focus. Clearly, the 60's were a time of cultural upheaval for the Jewish community. Central figures of the counterculture were Jewish. Nevertheless, the Jewish community as whole does not reject Judaism. In fact, it compelled many Jews to embrace Judaism from a counter-culture perspective. Yes, many Jews sought insights from Eastern religions and contemporary pseudo- religions. Jews of all denominations embraced the more romantic aspect of Jewish tradition. A counter-culture Judaism signified by the publication of the *Jewish Catalogues, Response Magazine*, havurot, and neo-hasidic and neo-kabbalistic traditions also influenced Jewish life. As the National Jewish Population Study of 1990 indicated: many Jews retain Jewish ethnicity but have lost their connection to Judaism as a religious discipline. But overwhelming, we are living during a period of reconnection. Forays into other

[37] Wuthnow. p.16.

tradition, the JuBus and Jews deeply influenced by Hinduism often leads to Jewish return or at least, a strong residual feeling about Jewish connection. Sampliner makes an important clarification of the Wuthnow work for Jewish application:

> Even the most cursory survey of this "Jewish renewal" suggest that, among Jews, Mr. Wuthnow's spiritual ideal---the blend of "wings and roots"-has flourished. As Judith Linzer's 1996 study "Torah and Dharma" suggests, trying on Eastern religious traditions has often inspired Jews not simply to assume a spiritual discipline but to return to Judaism, Mr. Wuthnow himself makes brief reference to a Jewish woman whose experimentation with Eastern mediation inspired greater Jewish observance. Jews. It seems, have often used their wings to find their own roots. [38]

Even though contemporary studies of the sociology of religion enlighten our work as Jewish educators, the unique character of contemporary American Judaism and the inherent resilience of Jewish tradition to shape the behavior and family life of American Jews cannot be underestimated. Contemporary American Jews especially baby boomers understand their religion as something very dynamic and personal and thus share many characteristics with the general population. However, Cohen and Eisen illustrate in their work ***The Jew Within*** that contemporary Jews are autonomous and sovereign in a uniquely American Jewish way. The Jews that they study, our congregants and parents, retain a fundamental desire for some communal dimension to their Judaism which must be understood by Jewish educators as they partner with them in their pursuit of spiritual fulfillment and Jewish connection.

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[38] Sampliner, David. The Forward. February 28, 1999

Chapter III

How Do Jews Construct Meaning in Liberal Jewish Life: The Insights of Steven M. Cohen and Arnold M. Eisen In *Jew Within: Self, Family and Community in America*

Building on the sociological studies of Roof and Wuthnow, Steven M. Cohen and Arnold M. Eisen, in their work *Jew Within: Self, Family and Community in America*, construct a rich and comprehensive profile of the way American Jews actually live their faith and identity. They avoid subjective judgments about the identity of moderately affiliated Jews and instead try to describe the actual trends in American Jewish life by listening and observing as a non-judgmental sociologist and philosopher (respectively) of American Jews. Moreover, they try to understand how the individual tendencies of American Jews are affecting the shape and viability of institutional Judaism in America.

Our review of the central ideas in the work of Roof and Wuthnow prepare us to grasp the essential insights of Cohen and Eisen. These authors consciously attempt to utilize the ideas of Roof and Wuthnow in a Jewish context. Although they do not discuss in great detail the impact of bar mitzvah and bat mitzvah as a venue for adult Jews to construct Jewish meaning in their lives, we can extrapolate insights and understandings that can be readily utilized to explore the impact of bar and bat mitzvah on the life of moderately observant Jewish families who inhabit the overwhelming majority of Reform and Conservative congregations in America.

Cohen and Eisen are clear as to what they believe are the defining characteristics of Jewish modernity. "More and more, the meaning of Judaism in America transpires

within the self."[39] American Jews have individualized and subjectively crafted their Judaism. " American Jews have drawn the activity and significance of their group identity into the subjectivity of the individual, the activities of the family and the few institutions (primarily synagogue) which are seen as extensions of this intimate sphere."[40] Relative to the previous generation, Cohen and Eisen suggest that American Jewish baby boomers are finding less meaning in large organizations, political activity and connection to the state of Israel – today's American Jews are more individualists and less collectivists. Jews are interested in personal meaning more than affirmation of their peoplehood. Their patterns of belief and practice are more idiosyncratic. They celebrate the autonomy of choosing and they welcome change in the pattern of Jewish practice as a new stage in the lifelong personal journeys.

Cohen and Eisen's approach is particularly significant for the work of the Jewish educator since these scholars concentrate on our population of interest: the moderately affiliated American Jew:

> ...We have defined "moderately affiliated Jews" as those who belong to a Jewish institution (a Jewish community center, synagogue or organization) but are not as involved, learned, or pious as the most highly engaged 20-25 percent of American Jews...And precisely because they are neither firmly committed to active Jewish life nor firmly ensconced in non-involvement, they are for our purposes the most interesting, exhibiting both thoughtfulness and fluidity as they chart their way to Jewish attitudes and behaviors with which they feel comfortable.[41]

Cohen and Eisen focus their study on those Jews asserting an unquestionable right to choose their Jewish practice. The term they use to describe this phenomenon is the

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[39] Cohen, Steven & Arnold M. Eisen. *The Jew Within: Self, Family, and Community in America.* Bloomington, Indiana University Press: (2000) p. 183.
[40] Cohen and Eisen. p. 184.
[41] Cohen and Eisen. pp. 5-6.

sovereign self.[42] In their analysis, the self becomes the ultimate authority of Jewish expression and Judaism becomes an "inner thing."[43]

> American Jews enact and express their decisions about Judaism primarily in intimate spaces of love and family, friendship and reflections – faith is considered a private matter. [44]

Wuthnow's assertions about religion obviously influence their analysis: "religion is practiced in the recesses of personal life." [45] The principal authority for contemporary American Jews in the absence of compelling religious standards and communal identification has become the sovereign self. Just as we have learned from Wuthnow that American gentiles speak of their religious commitments and beliefs as a journey of ongoing questioning and development, Cohen and Eisen affirm in their demographic studies that individual Jews reserve the right to choose how "to do" Judaism for themselves.

In their work, Cohen and Eisen found that middle range American Jews are seeking significance in their lives that goes beyond the activities and practices of daily life. They assert that many were on a path of personal seeking for transcendent meaning and for a belief in God. They reported a strong desire to find a sense of direction. The interviewees were looking to create enduring family relations and lasting spiritual meaning in their lives. Decisions relating to Judaism are wrapped up in the search for personal spiritual meaning. Jews in search of personal spiritual meaning are refashioning tradition in various ways. By picking and choosing among new and inherited practices

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[42] Cohen and Eisen. P.184.
[43] Cohen and Eisen. p. 185.
[44] Cohen and Eisen p. 2.
[45] Cohen and Eisen. 178.

they attempt to synthesize disparate commitments and craft new expressions of their Jewish spiritual narratives.[46]

Cohen and Eisen concentrate on how Jewish families construct individualized home rituals around Shabbat and Festivals. My impression of the Cohen and Eisen study leads me to believe that there are parallels between how American Jewish families fashion home rituals and how they address the construction of the bar mitzvah and bat mitzvah " ritual" in their lives. Thus it is important we fully grasp what Cohen and Eisen are saying about the construction of home rituals.

Ritual practice is the key way in which moderately affiliated Jews express their Jewish commitments. The means through which "the Jew within" goes outside the self in the company of family, into times and spaces sanctified by centuries of tradition are the frameworks for shaping these experiences and connections to family and Judaism. The Judaism practiced by American adults is primarily connected with family relationships and rites of passage supported by memories that are marked by emotion and ambivalence. Cohen and Eisen found that "memories were tokens of present commitments and signals of the future they hoped to build."[47] Memories associated with being Jewish are most often powerful and deeply charged.

Memories, say Cohen and Eisen, are significant factors of the Jewish journeys of their interviewees. The sentiments of one interviewee named Molly are particularly poignant:

> I remember at my bat mitzvah having a thought, a prayer and saying: Let me never leave this. I also remember being surprised, because that was a time when I

[46] Cohen and Eisen. p. 185.
[47] Cohen and Eisen. p. 14.

> couldn't imagine Judaism *not* being important to me – it was almost like knowing what was coming. I remember thinking it and being surprised I was thinking it.[48]

What Molly and the other interviewees remember of their Jewish journeys, and more importantly how they remember it, provides the clues to a new sort of Jewish self emerging in America in recent decades. It is interesting to observe that the first thing Molly remembers is a significant moment in her development as a person and a Jew – her bat mitzvah. Molly recalls "a thought, a prayer" that crossed her mind on the day of her bat mitzvah: a reflection on how important her Judaism was to her a that moment, a desire that it remain that way, and an awareness, even then that it might not remain important.[49] Molly, a physician in her 40s, recounted this event and her feelings at the time, moved from childhood attachment, to alienation as a young adult, to renewed commitment as she raises her own children. As we have noted in Roof's profiles of baby boomers, this is a pattern that holds true for a great many Americans of this generation, Cohen and Eisen's study underscores the Jewish experience of this group.

Molly, as an example of other American Jews of her generation, has made many choices concerning her Jewish belief and practice. The Judaism that she currently attaches herself to is not one that she has inherited, but a Judaism that she has fashioned herself, from the large repertoire of possibilities that exist. Molly is still choosing from among the possibilities and as she states her "Judaism may well change further in coming years."[50] Molly sees her Jewish life as a journey. That is true of the majority of those interviewed, as well. Cohen and Eisen remark that the pasts people remember, the places

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[48] Cohen and Eisen. p. 13.
[49] Cohen and Eisen. p. 14.
[50] Cohen and Eisen. p. 15.

they have been, are necessary to their own understanding of where they are right now. They could not get at what matters to them about Judaism by discussing organizational affiliations or synagogue attendance, but only through hearing these personal narratives about their own Jewish and personal journeys can we understand the Judaism wrapped up in those stories. Personal Jewish memories are essential to envisioning the possibilities that lie ahead, for the individual and for the American Jewish community. [51]

These personal and individual stories are basic to American Jews and their characterizations of themselves and are much more important than the history of their own institutional affiliation and membership. Jewish identities are not defined by denominational boundaries or institutional loyalties, but rather by the powerful memories and experiences that mark their personal journeys. As Wuthnow states, "a traditional spirituality of inhabiting sacred places (e.g., churches and synagogues) has given way to a new spirituality of seeking."[52] This notion is characterized by American Jews in how they negotiate among competing glimpses of the sacred, experiences of partial knowledge, and a preference for practical wisdom. [53] Personal journeys and experiences if shared with other family members are the stuff out of which Judaism is imagined and enacted, Judaism constructed and performed by one individual at a time. The places and spaces in which these experiences occur are predominantly intimate and private – homes and families, yet some of the most significant Jewish actions takes place deep inside the self, where meaning is reflected upon and imposed.

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[51] Cohen and Eisen. p. 15.
[52] Wuthnow, Robert. p 8.
[53] Cohen and Eisen. pp. 3-4.

Interestingly, many of the interviewees Cohen and Eisen met reflected that they find meaning in expressing their Judaism in private space (home) and with family. They prefer to be in control of the setting and in constructing and choosing ritual themselves. The Jew is sovereign in his/her own home. By contrast when one enters the synagogue it is seen as a space where what is enacted is predetermined and prescribed. This explains how many families look at the congregation and its regular worshippers as intruders in to private celebration. Rabbis, cantors, educators and regular worshippers are appalled by this attitude towards the community. It seems to them completely contrary to historical Judaism and its understanding of community. But, this attitude is totally consistent with the inner understanding of Jewish identity for our generation. The synagogue is only a venue for a private event. The sharing of it with strangers makes no sense from the point of view of bar mitzvah and bat mitzvah as a communal celebration. This dissonance between the private Judaism of post-modernity and the public Judaism of the post World War Two community of the fifties and sixties highlights our earlier discussion of the gap between elite and folk understand of the bar mitzvah and bat mitzvah experience.

As Cohen and Eisen indicate, the importance and centrality of the family looms large in respondents' personal accounts of their Jewish spiritual journeys. Cohen and Eisen consider in great detail the impact that children make upon their parents' Jewish identity and seeking. "One thing we know about the presence of children in Jewish homes is that they elevate Jewish practice of all sorts." [54] One factor, which was clearly indicated in this study, is that children make observance of holidays and festivals more meaningful for their parents. The Seder, in particular, illuminates another crucial

[54] Cohen and Eisen. p. 63.

consequence of having children in the household: it forces parents to assume actual responsibility for teaching their children to function as Jews. This has two additional consequences: parents see themselves as role models; and parents will often turn to synagogues and schools to educate their children, most often with the tacit understanding that they will become prepared for bar/bat mitzvah.[55]

Children serve to engage their parents in both Jewish practice and the organized Jewish community. For a few short years while their children are still young most parents are capable enough to provide Jewish experiences in the home, yet between the ages of seven and nine parents begin their children's formal Jewish education and these involvements in religious institutions encourage activity in the home, the school and the synagogue community. These new networks connect the parents to other Jewish parents: other adult Jews who likely possess similar commitments and who are facing similar choices about their children's Jewish education and their own engagement in Jewish life, both personally and communally.

Jewish educators are constantly struggling with the challenge of getting Jewish families to connect with institutional worship. Why is there such a struggle? This difficulty underscores the incredible alienation of moderately committed Jewish adults to normative religious practice.

Cohen and Eisen believe that the most provocative part of their study relates to the God ideas and synagogue connections of their subjects. American Jews are believers. Atheism and agnosticism does not characterize moderately committed Americans Jews. The problem of theodicy that troubled the post-Holocaust Jewish

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[55] Cohen and Eisen. p. 64.

community does not seem to have impacted the faith commitments of baby boomers. Moreover, Cohen and Eisen discovered that there is a real attachment to synagogues. And yet, what is expected from the synagogue encounter?

> "…. they told us time and again that they do not come to synagogue expecting to find God there, or stay away because they do not. The words in the prayer book do not particularly interest them. The God described and invoked in those prayers is very different from one in which they believe----too commanding, for one thing, and in ways we shall explain, far too ' Jewish'. They are distinctly uncomfortable with the act of prayer."[56]

In many cases when asked about God, respondents did not have "God concepts" as part of a well thought out repertoire to discuss. In fact even for the most Jewishly educated and knowledgeable, the discussion of Jewish notions of God was a difficult enterprise for many respondents who simply lacked the vocabulary to engage in God talk.

Interestingly Cohen and Eisen found that for those who became regular synagogue attendees, prayer and God did not necessarily or naturally connect to each other. Prayer and the time spent in synagogue services became a time for self-reflection, and resolution concerning self-improvement. These are private moments in the communal group setting.

> People ask me why, if I'm not religious, I go to shul…I came to the conclusion That it was very important for me to do something for myself, and it's the only time of the week that I truly get lost in thought for three hours and let my mind wander and get caught up in the melodies, singing the melodies, which I truly enjoy. I don't really know Hebrew, I can't read it, but I sing the songs by heart…My week is not complete unless I go to shul on Saturday morning. [57]

This anecdote is striking in this subject's individualist formulation of the purpose of prayer, as well as a commitment to Jewish community and to its institutions. This

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[56] Cohen and Eisen. p. 155.
[57] Cohen and Eisen. p. 159.

subject describes himself as "non-religious," yet he chooses to spend three hours a week in synagogue services engaged in self-contemplation while also caught up in the melodies that are familiar to him.

For these subjects of the Cohen and Eisen study, belief is not a duty; rather it is something that one explores, and chooses whether or not to hold. Their study reveals that generally there is no need to construct a coherent theology rooted in texts or philosophies of the past. Eclecticism is the rule[58]

What is new, once again, is the degree to which our subjects speak a combination of these Jewish religious languages, seeing no need to choose among them. Indeed, they resent the exclusion or criticism of some Jews by others because the former have chosen to believe or practice in ways that the latter find inappropriate. To them, religion is supposed to be a private matter, even when practiced in a collective framework.[59]

The following statement summarizes the thrust of Cohen and Eisen in the area of ritual life:

> (Moderately affiliated Jews) *choose what to observe and what not to observe*; they also decide, and take it for granted that they have the right to decide, with no one able to tell them any decision is wrong, *when* to observe, *how* to observe, and *how much* to observe.[60]

This sense of radical autonomy impacts the personalism that is central to religious meaning. Whereas so much of traditional observance connects the person to the greater historical narrative of the Jewish people, the contemporary religionists of this study are adamant that every observance, every ritual, take on a " meaning which the person

[58] Cohen and Eisen. p. 180.
[59] Cohen and Eisen. p. 180.
[60] Cohen and Eisen. p. 91.

observing it has supplied."[61] Unless you feel a personal connection, rituals are generally alienating and pointless.

Cohen and Eisen offer a compelling understanding of ritual and observance which has profound implications for adult meaning making through bar mitzvah and bat mitzvah:

> If they have come to a particular observance, it is because of *an experience of its meaning.* In most cases, that significance is highly personal in the most basic sense: wrapped up in biography and family. If the meaning disappears over time, the observance will cease. Attention will either come to focus elsewhere in the tradition a different ritual serving as the occasion for the experience of Jewish meaning—or it will wander outside the framework of Judaism to a different setting altogether.[62]

But there is always a tension between keva and kavannah. In order for ritual to retain its meaning, it must balance a connection to the historical script of the tradition and the need for the creation of originality that infuses a ritual with meaning, and immediacy. One of the subjects of the study, Sarah, understood this dilemma when she worried that observing something in her own way could lead to the act lacking significance for us. The balance between the individual and the collective is an on-going tension in the life of post-modern Judaism.

On one family trip to Israel, I came face to face with how the search for meaning of the bar mitzvah and bat mitzvah experience can undergo radical transformation in the quest for new meaning. I was visiting a secular kibbutz near Caesarea, *Sdot Yam*, which is known in Israel for its sailing school on the Mediterranean. Seeking to find new meaning for the bar mitzvah and bat mitzvah on the kibbutz, the educators of the kibbutz

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[61] Cohen and Eisen. p. 93.
[62] Cohen and Eisen. p. 94.

create a "sailing program" which ends up becoming a "ritual" initiation into Jewish adulthood. The young people are taught to sail in their " bar mitzvah year " Being able to demonstrate adult independence on the rather rough water of the Eastern Mediterranean becomes the right of passage. Haftarot are replaced with the ability to master difficult skills and conditions. This transformation of bar mitzvah and bat mitzvah underscores two elements: the danger of detaching a ritual from its historical roots and the radical attempt to find relevant meaning rooted in the individual life experience. My question as a Diaspora centric Jew is what actually do these parents who support this program believe about their own connection to the historical experience of the Jewish people?

In trying to present broad statements about the dynamics working in adult Jewish meaning making, Cohen and Eisen emphasize that the countervailing forces of the tradition and community moderate sovereignty and individuality. The sovereign Jewish self is never completely autonomous. The moderately affiliated Jews of their study retain "powerful ties to their personal collective ancestors. [63] These Jewish adults retain a deep connection to Jewish peoplehood and community. They are in affect "Reconstructionists" not in terms of affiliation but in terms of sociological inclination: they are always trying to find new meaning in the inherited tradition. Cohen and Eisen emphasize two important dimensions of this phenomenon. First, Jews feel connected to their childhood Jewish experiences. As much as Jews complain about their Jewish upbringing, especially Hebrew School, childhood Jewish experiences remain key factors in adult Jewish identification. Most often, Cohen and Eisen found adult Jews returning

[63] Cohen and Eisen. p 193.

to Judaism as adults, not discovering Judaism as adults. Early experiences have an impact and cultivate a kind of Jewish latency.

> Children raised in the same household by the same parents, now a before, grow into very different kinds of Jews as adults. Nonetheless, homes populated by parents and grandparents to whom Judaism mattered, effective role models such as teachers and rabbis, positive experiences in school and summer camp, Jewish friends and dating partners-all play a part in nurturing adult commitment.[64]

The second dimension of this phenomenon, emphasized by these sociologists, are the rather conventional nature of Jewish identity. New forms of Jewish identity could have emerged: a new Judaism rooted in new forms of Jewish affirmation. But, this development does not emerge.

> .... the presence of others in the set; the coherence of beliefs, ritual observance, communal affiliation, informal ties (in-marriage, friends, neighbors,etc.) and subjective commitment to being Jewish persists and endures.[65]

Cohen and Eisen offer the Jewish educator essential data and insights. The adult American Jews that Jewish educators are addressing reflect interesting contrast. They very much reflect the individualism of adult Americans as a whole as they confront religion and spirituality. Yet, Cohen and Eisen show that tradition and community still has a limited but real impact on identity and faith development. How does this affect the Jewish educator and curriculum developers in real terms. This area is the next step for our investigation.

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[64] Cohen Eisen 194
[65] Cohen Eisen 194

Chapter IV

The Application of Sociological Theory to Bar\Bat Mitzvah Education

Our examination of the sociological literature relating to modern religious identity in America is meant to gives us guideposts to evaluate whether American Judaism as a whole and Jewish religious educators specifically are fully grasping the search for meaning that is part of bar and bat mitzvah experience for Jewish parents. Instead of approaching the bar and bat mitzvah experience with cynicism that often includes a critique of American Jewish materialism and religious minimalism educators need to create ways for adults to find relevant meaning in Jewish tradition (We need more mitzvah and less bar in bar mitzvah.)

It is my contention that with a fuller and more generous understanding of the dynamics of adult Jewish identity, we can craft and influence the bar and bat mitzvah experience to be a highly important moment for adult Jewish meaning making. Thus, what I will do now is critique some of the literature and curriculum that have arisen to assist teachers and parents in bar and bat mitzvah preparation. In light of these sociological findings my questions include:

a) Why were they written? What is their goal?

b) How are these curriculum writers aware of the issues raised by modern sociologists of American religion?

c) Do they address the issue of adult Jewish meaning making in any specific or constructive way? In what ways do they acknowledge the highly individualistic and journey-oriented understanding of Jewish spirituality that have been described by Roof, Wuthnow and Cohen & Eisen?

In the end, I will suggest one curricular exercise in Jewish meaning making which I believe responds to the issues raised by Roof, Wuthnow, and Cohen and Eisen.

Chapter V

Review of Curricular Materials Relating to the Impact of Bar/Bat Mitzvah on Adult Jews Spiritual Development

As students enter the sixth grade the Jewish family enters the arena of bar and bat mitzvah preparation. Preparation for the bar and bat mitzvah entails many components for both the student and the parents. Jewish educators have an opportunity to play an active role in helping the family set priorities and guide what meaning the family derives from the bar/bat mitzvah experience. As we will see family bar/bat mitzvah programming and curricula present opportunities for bringing parents and students together for values transmission, text learning, community building, participation in synagogue life beyond the reception, within the synagogue setting and social action or mitzvot. Some curricula attempt to prepare students and parents together and separately for the spiritual nature of the bar/bat mitzvah experience, while some present the importance of the concepts of *mitzvah, tefillah and tzedakah* and responsibility in becoming bar/bat mitzvah. Several curricula try to touch on all of these essential aspects of functioning as a Jew beyond the actual rite of bar/bat mitzvah.

In reviewing some curricular materials that are available for bar and bat mitzvah preparation several trends emerge. Curricula have been created to address the mechanical and choreographic aspects of the bar/bat mitzvah. Family education programs where parents and children learn together and separately generally focus on becoming 'responsible' adult members of the Jewish community and what that entails. Learning about the real meaning of mitzvot and how mitzvot are actualized in the lives of students and parents is why Vicky Kelman's *Windows* curriculum is an intriguing and

highly useful Jewish Family program designed for sixth and seventh graders and their families and *Bar and Bat Mitzvah (an ARE mini course)* by Kerry Olitzky and Audrey Friedman Marcus. These are two notable curricula that we will examine and explore. Much of the material embedded in these curricula has been used to create newer programs of family study. How these programs of study and experience affect the parents' spiritual development is the 'big idea' that will frame this exploration.

A. Windows: Together 2

Family education during the b'nai mitzvah years (sixth and seventh grade) can mean many things. Successful programs of family education target the cognitive, spiritual and affective areas for all learners; parents and their children, as well as the facilitators or educators of these family programs. The bar/bat mitzvah year is an opportune moment in the lives of families to create a sense of community among and families and between families and congregations. Intergenerational study and experiences can offer an opportunity for much exploration both personally and Jewishly, and becomes a very meaningful dimension to families' bar/bat mitzvah experiences.

The curriculum *Windows: Together 2* developed and written by Vicky Kelman for the Melton Research Center for Jewish Education was (when it was first written in 1990) and still is an innovative Jewish family education program targeted for bar/bat mitzvah students and their families. It is a series of programs designed to finds ways into (windows) various aspects of Jewish tradition. The four lenses through which participants view and explore Judaism are: *being* (how one acts as a good person/Jew); *becoming* (growing into an independent person and adult Jew); *believing* (having and

cultivating faith); and *belonging* (being part of a community). The program was created to work on two levels: participants explore themselves as individuals, and participants explore and hopefully deepen their understanding of Jewish tradition. These four windows are four distinct programs that can and are suggested to be adapted for the context of the individual congregation.

The introduction to the Leader's Guide expresses succinctly the goals of the *Windows* program.

> A window is an opening in the wall of a building or the side of a vehicle which lets air and light in, permits those inside to look out and those outside to look in. *Windows*, this series of programs, is designed to provide windows on different aspects of Jewish tradition. They provide some light and some fresh air for thinking about four important issues: *becoming* a grown-up; *being* a good person; *believing* and having faith; and *belonging* to a community. Just as windows provide a way to look in and look out, Windows is designed to provide a guide for helping participants to look into Jewish tradition and into themselves. It family format also provides a window through which the generations can come to see each other more closely.[66]

Each theme of *Windows* has its own goals and objectives. In the big picture the entire curriculum should be adaptable for individual congregations' goals. The program does seek to build a youth community within the institution that will continue their Jewish studies together, spend informal Jewish time together (camps, youth groups, Israel travel), as well as building a community of families where all the bar/bat mitzvah students and their parents know each other and a sense of being part of a community that takes pride in itself and celebrates this life cycle milestone as a community.

The themes *Believing* (God spiritual exploration); *Being* (ethics and morality); *Becoming* (bar/bat mitzvah); and *Belonging* (community) were chosen because of their centrality in the experience and life of the Jewish adult. This program design was

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[66] Kelman, Vicky. Windows. Melton Research Center: New York (1990) p. 1

selected because it was felt that it suited the dynamics of pre-adolescents and their families, as well as addressing the social and psychological development of pre-adolescents themselves.

Each window/program is comprised of four parts: 1) an in class component; 2) an at home component where parents and children do some inquiry together; 3) community component where various groupings of students and parents study or discuss together and 4) private reflection (journaling) and sharing with the group

The materials reflect a liberal sensibility towards accessing Jewish tradition and Jewish knowledge. All text-based materials are provided in English translation, which makes *Windows* a user-friendly program. *Windows* is usable in Conservative, Reconstructionist and Reform settings. It is to be used ideally in the synagogue setting, though the programs can also be adapted for a retreat-type environment. Each session or program will last for approximately two hours.

The materials are presented in a way that comfortably moves the participants from general thoughts, questions and discussion to more focused examination of both classical and contemporary Jewish writings and their relevancy to their lives. Issues that are presented clearly encourage the participants to see how Jewish tradition informs and impacts the community, society and environment at large. For example, the *Believing* section asks questions about the future of human endeavors on this earth and about whether the world is an inherently good place? There are many ways that the discussion and exploration can proceed from each of the booklets/programs. The materials suggest a framework for understanding the world and the individual's place, value and importance in it, through Jewish eyes.

The facilitators' responsibilities for each of the *Windows* programs are unique. Each program is slightly different and requires staff to learn more about the subject matter than offered in the Leader's Guide. There are supplementary reading lists for each program and it is recommended that the staff use these readings as a basis for preparation for the programs and staff training prior to the programs. The staff produces or provides instruction, guidelines and follow-up that take the booklets from being the raw materials into the creation of a family education program. The Leader's Guide provides fairly detailed instructions on how to guide the programs, how to time them, how to segue from segment to segment of each program. The author gives detailed suggestions for the type of facilitators needed for the programs (i.e., a person with a very loud voice who can rally a noisy group) and the numbers of facilitators needed for the various activities. There will be a program leader who trains/works with staff to act as program facilitators for subgroups that are formed within each program. The materials do give specific strategies for implementing the programs, while offering the facilitator latitude and personal judgment at certain moments during programs. The staff, certainly, must be well prepared in all text study that will take place and this requires staff training well in advance of the programs. In many cases, the facilitator/leader of these programs really needs to be directing the flow of each segment of the program, at other times the facilitator needs to act as a knowledgeable resource. Each of the programs, as stated before, has specific teach/staffing/leading needs. The materials are very helpful in directing the leader's role in each activity. In general, *Windows* does not require the facilitators to be the sole resource for Jewish knowledge because part of the mission of the program is to encourage independent reading and learning.

For the parents of bar and bat mitzvah children who seek to clarify and articulate the complex of competing ideas and issues surrounding this life cycle events, *Windows* can be a helpful vehicle. The four topics of the program aid the adult who is trying to make meaning of the bar\bat mitzvah and its place in their lives, as well as serve as a stepping off point for serious reflection and directed exploration about personal belief and what it means to have faith. This program forces the individuals and families to see themselves within the broader context of community and gently nudges the participants to enact Jewish behavior. The *Windows* program puts a Jewish lens on behavior, human development and ideas that participants may have previously characterized as good or ethical—devoid of a Jewish imperative or framework.

Windows has staying power. The four themes are central to the life of the adult and are presented in ways that pre-adolescents can begin to grasp. It seems that families' Jewish lives and intergenerational understandings can be enhanced if parents and their pre-bar/bat mitzvah children can study these topics and talk about them together. Perhaps the children of Jewish parents who are navigating their spiritual journeys will be better equipped to discuss issues of belief having been introduced to the idea at an impressionable and important moment in their own Jewish life journeys.

B. Bar and Bat Mitzvah: A Family Education Unit ARE Mini Course

Like all rituals, bar/bat mitzvah must be invested with meaning. Without understanding its underlying intentions, the value of the moment may be lost. In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries the bar and bat mitzvah has become a salient reminder of the unique place of each Jew in the *shalshelet hakabbalah* –the chain of tradition. Kerry Olitzky and Audrey Friedman Marcus in their family education unit on bar and bat mitzvah originally published in 1983 address the historical, ritual, familial and communal roots and understandings of this family milestone.

In this mini course families learn together about the history and importance of bar and bat mitzvah and its accompanying rituals, as well as learning about other cultures' rites of passage. One of the stated goals of this curriculum is the emphasis on making each bar and bat mitzvah a meaningful event that is deeply understood, appreciated and enjoyed by all family members. This mini course is intended for the entire family: brothers; sisters, parents; grandparents. Families are brought together for intergenerational study and interaction. This may be the first time families in a directed fashion have the opportunity to share information, thoughts and feelings about bar and bat mitzvah in a supportive environment.

The curriculum developers suggest and outline a nine -session course of study with a minimum of 14-18 hours. They encourage a variety of venues for this program; one suggestion is that this program be offered in *havurah* groups of bar/bat mitzvah families to take place in peoples' homes. Each institution would certainly have to gauge the appropriate setting for this program.

Olitzky and Marcus articulate both cognitive and affective objectives for this family education unit. The cognitive behaviors and understandings families will demonstrate are related to history of bar/bat mitzvah, understanding the order of the service, knowledge of *tefillin, tallit and kippah*, identifying textual sources related to bar/bat mitzvah and be able to "create alternative life cycle ceremonies based on the bar/bat mitzvah ceremony."[67]

The affective objectives suggest that participants be able to feel as links with generations of Jews past, present and future, express what bar/bat mitzvah means to them, demonstrate in words or artistically their feelings about Jewish tradition, Torah reading , the service, *tallit, tefillin and kippah* and be able to create a celebration that will be meaningful for them. Each session has the participants encounter Jewish texts, has the family talking with each other about their feelings and readiness for bar/bat mitzvah, creates opportunities for different types of learners, they show films, do art work, work in groups and work together as families. Though this is a thorough and well-constructed curriculum with much thought given to the overall experience, it does not address the adult learner's specific needs.

It is interesting to see that in the list of both cognitive and affective objectives the families would be able to create their own unique celebration of bar/bat mitzvah. The notion of the privatization and uniqueness of the experience is encouraged by this curriculum. In line with Cohen and Eisen's findings, this curriculum reflects, historically, the sociological trends in American Jewish culture and American culture writ large.

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[67] Kerry M. Olitzky and Audrey Friedman Marcus. A Family Education Unit on Bar and Bat Mitzvah. 1983 p. 1.

The ARE curriculum is still being used in many Reform congregations, in some form. The seventeen rabbis and educators that I spoke with utilize the basic outline of the curriculum and supplement it. However, it is being used to teach b'nai mitzvah students for 6-8 sessions and bring in the parents in the final session; it is used less as a total family educational unit and more as a curriculum unit for the children. Frequently parents are included only in the last session.

C. Rabbi Jeffrey Salkin's Putting God on the Guest List

In *Putting God on the Guest List*, Rabbi Jeffrey Salkin recognized the visceral need of Jewish families who consciously affiliate with synagogues to find meaning and significance in the experience of bar/bat mitzvah. Salkin acknowledges that the issues surrounding the bar/bat mitzvah experience transcend denomination, even though he writes from a Reform perspective. In many Conservative settings clergy and educators will find Salkin's observations and responses applicable and useful. Salkin challenges the parent (and the educator) to deepen the meaning of bar/bat mitzvah. He did not write this book as a theological or theoretical exercise, but based on his years of experience working with b'nai mitzvah families. He captures the desire of all participants involved in this process to capture the spiritual and religious awakenings set in the ritual of Jewish tradition and enhanced by the public and sacred setting of the synagogue.[68]

Additionally, Salkin is keenly aware that we are dealing with individuals who are making choices on how to meaningfully observe this rite and sometimes that bar/bat mitzvah will take place outside the walls of the synagogue, in a more private and intimate

[68] Salkin, Jeffrey K. *Putting God on the Guest List: How to Reclaim the Spiritual Meaning of Your Child's Bar or Bat Mitzvah.* Jewish Lights: Woodstock: (1996) p. xiv.

setting. He is, and encourages us to be sensitive and responsive to the fact that there are those who want to exercise their autonomy in creating personal experiences for this sacred moment in the life of the bar/bat mitzvah and his/her family. As Cohen and Eisen report, society not only supports and accepts individualization but also encourages individual expression. The private observance of the bar/bat mitzvah is not just a Jewish phenomenon but is an expression of the American milieu. It has become normal for the individualization of what has been considered public; this has become sanctioned to an extent in Jewish ritual life. These are not vicarious experiences meant to replicate the synagogue, but rather are attempts at creating something new and personally significant and meaningful.

As Salkin points out "bar/bat mitzvah has only grown in importance; it has also come to mirror trends in American Judaism."[69] Bar/bat mitzvah then celebrates the diversity of Jewish expression. It is a custom with no authority or force of law. The danger of the privatization of bar/bat mitzvah is that it focuses on the individual and diminishes the importance of religious community. In Reform Judaism the Shabbat morning service will often **only** take place when there is a bar/bat mitzvah celebration. This not the case in Conservative, Reconstructionist or Orthodox Judaism, where the Shabbat morning service is held whether or not a bar/bat mitzvah is being celebrated. This idea of privatization or individualization is evidenced in the growth of Saturday evening bar/bat mitzvah ceremonies – the so-called *Havdalah* service. The *Havdalah* option also allows families and synagogues to avoid having doubles ore even triple b'nai mitzvah observance at one service. The Saturday evening service, which would

[69] Salkin, Jeffrey K. p. 11.

ordinarily not take place (in many congregations) if there were no bar/bat mitzvah, again convinces people that the service is in fact *theirs* and again lessens the importance of community in Jewish life.

Salkin addresses the notion of the American Jewish civil religion, which Cohen and Eisen describe as well. American civil religion has little to do with theology, but is concerned with ambiguously defined goals that are different from other Jewish values and beliefs. Celebration of bar/bat mitzvah can become in these instances responses to historical, political and emotional events, such as the Holocaust, civil rights, Israel and other political and sociological circumstances.

What is particularly challenging to the parents of b'nai mitzvah is the ability to articulate what the bar/bat mitzvah experience means to them and for their children. In general, this period in the life of the family is one where language and silence come between many parents and adolescents. Many parents lack a vocabulary to discuss God, Torah and mitzvot.[70] How do parents begin to learn to speak to their children and to each other about what all of this means? As Salkin points out, many American Jews have inherited a diluted Judaism that never adequately asked and grappled with these ideas.

Spiritual life is constructed on metaphors, symbols and narratives. Salkin suggests that we need to develop new metaphors for the present. Bar/bat mitzvah reclaims our links in the *shalshelet ha-kabbalah*. Judaism has established a structure for time and events. At bar/bat mitzvah we feel this structure imposed upon us. Rabbi Neil Gillman wrote about *Kaddish,* the prayer recited by mourners in a way that can be applied to the bar/bat mitzvah process, "Precisely at a time of our lives when we are most

[70] Salkin, Jeffrey K p. 25.

easily vulnerable to the threat of meaninglessness and chaos our religious tradition gives us a ritual that puts order back into our lives in a very concrete way."[71] The same can be said for the adolescent years and parents' struggle to communicate with their children. Judaism provides the behavior and models for parents to study and learn from. For many the Torah symbolized divine revelation. Many modern Jews have transformed it into something else –a source of identity; historical memory, and an imposition of order over chaos, the Torah's meaning and lessons can be very profound.

As much as bar/bat mitzvah is the rite of passage for the adolescent, bar/bat mitzvah is a rite of passage for parents entering middle age and having to redefine themselves as parents of emerging adults. Parents need a structure to guide them on this new leg of their parental and religious journey. It is often at this time in their lives when parents are contemplating existential issues and are turning inwards.

Many Jewish parents are asking themselves at this juncture in their lives the following questions: Why are we doing this? What does it all mean? Parents are also confronting existential questions and seeking a way to answer them. Although these are the questions Jewish educators would hope parents are asking, these notions are suppressed and attention is focused on the performance, rather than on the deep significance and beauty of this moment.[72]

Bar and bat mitzvah is a growing up rite of passage: for the adolescent and for the parents. This life cycle event is about ritual and community responsibility- it is about growing up as a Jew. Bar and bat mitzvah is when the adolescent has more responsibilities to the community, to the Torah and to God. It is an access point where

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[71] Gillman, Neil. *Death of Death.* (1997). Woodstock: Jewish Lights Publishing p. 23.
[72] Salkin, Jeffrey K. pp. 16-17.

the family can be guided towards richer spiritual understanding and deeper connection to Judaism.

> The peak moments of life, when we experience the drama of passage, have an uncanny way of bringing us home. They can take us out of exile and show us the Jerusalem of the soul. They remind us that our lives have a rhythm and a purpose. ..To forget that we are in exile from our roots. To reclaim our links to Jewish memory. [73]

At a bar or bat mitzvah, parents and grandparents often think of the past, especially of close relatives who are deceased – the family comes together and that is as much a part of the past as it is the future. On a profound level we know this and yet it is often unarticulated. It is at moments like these when a sense of immortality of our loved ones and of our people is made manifest. The intangible sense of soul is felt – the soul of the Jewish people, the Torah. When we share moments of Torah the immortality of the Jewish people is guaranteed.[74] More than mere identity, the Torah and reading from it at bar and bat mitzvah preserve the Jewish people.

Judaism has two calendars: the personal and the public. Jewish sacred time is the festival calendar – the public observance of Jewish time. The Jewish life cycle calendar reflects the private timeline of the Jew. Except for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, Jewish spirituality has shifted from the observance of the festivals to the observance of life cycle events. Jews experience holiness when they experience the life cycle – brit milah, simhat bat, bar and bat mitzvah, weddings, and funerals.[75]

This shift from the public to the personal expression of spirituality parallels the shift in American society from the group to the self. Individualism has won. The

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[73] Salkin, p. 32.
[74] Salkin, p.34.
[75] Salkin, pp. 36-37.

community one knows best is the community of one's family. Jewish life cycle events are the context in which the Jew experiences sacred moments in life when we are aware that there is a God in the world. It is during these sacred moments when we feel most connected to the Jewish people, to God and to Torah.

Bar and bat mitzvah is a moment that concretizes the family's past, present and future and links that personal history with Jewish history which becomes embodied in the thirteen year-old child. The bar or bat mitzvah is the tangible symbol to the parents (and grandparents) that they are not the last Jews on earth – there is a transcendent and eternal hope that is projected onto the bar or bat mitzvah.

Salkin's book helps the parent/spiritual seeker to make meaning from the array of emotions and questions that they confront during this lifecycle moment. He understands that the bar and bat mitzvah is an access point for parents, as well as teenagers, for growing up in their search for God and meaning. *Putting God on the Guest List* offers spiritual and practical suggestions for bringing significance to each stage of the bar or bat mitzvah and suggests ways to restore a spiritual dimension to this sacred moment in the life of the Jewish family.

D. Bar/Bat Mitzvah Education: A Sourcebook *Edited by Helen Leneman*

Cantor Helen Leneman's *Sourcebook* provides Jewish educators with a plethora of information and understanding of b'nai mitzvah education. It is a collection programs and curricula that give educators a view into the work and creativity of many who are involved in the work related to bar/bat mitzvah. The *Sourcebook* contains descriptions of a wide range of programs, viewpoints, practical and pedagogical approaches from Reform, Conservative and Reconstructionist educators. The *Sourcebook* looks at Bar/bat

education from the perspective of the bar/bat mitzvah tutor to mitzvah programs to family education programs to the social and psychological dimensions of the bar/bat mitzvah experience. Leneman provides a clearinghouse of programs for all involved and/or interested in bar/bat mitzvah education.

Unit V of the *Sourcebook* on family education offers seven chapters detailing various approaches to bar/bat mitzvah family education. Each of the contributors to the family education unit expressed that the primary goal of their program was to enhance for each family the "meaningfulness of their upcoming bar/bat mitzvah through a shared cognitive family learning experience.[76]

Emily Bank director of education at Ivriah, in Flint Michigan a community-based school created a six session program of family study addressing the following topics: sedra study, an exploration of the child's Torah and haftarah portions by each family; structure of the Torah and history of bar/bat mitzvah; geography of siddur; and structure of Shabbat service. This program offers important cognitive learning; it brings the family together for study and research and enables the family to develop a shared vocabulary about various aspects synagogue skills and literacy. What it does not address is the adult as learner.

Rabbi David Lieb developed a program of study similar to Bank's. Responding to his congregation's demographics, that a large number of families included parents who were Jews- by- choice or non-Jews, and did not possess a comfortable level of understanding of the bar/bat mitzvah experience, he crafted a four-pronged family education program. His curriculum is based on the Pirke Avot- Al Shlosha D'varim.

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[76] Emily Bank in *Bar/Bat Mitzvah Education Sourcebook.* p. 213.

There are four sessions that address the following topics: Torah; "the Jewish service"; tzedakah and Jewish responsibility. Children and parents study together. One session is dedicated to discussing the sumptuary laws and the bar/bat mitzvah celebration. This program is another attempt to bring children and parents together yet does not challenge the adult learner independent of the child, nor does this program in any significant way help adult learners uncover meaning for themselves about this event, and how it impacts the family and community.

Chapter 33 of the *Sourcebook* entitled "A Bar and Bat Mitzvah Family Preparation Program" designed by Barry Lutz seeks to use the bar/bat mitzvah experience as a way to move a student and his/her family into the community's "Mitzvah Network," teach parents and children about how to find personal meaning in Torah texts and to put the bar/bat mitzvah into perspective as regards the entire Jewish education process. To this end two *Shabbatonim* are held each year (one for b'nai mitzvah between January 1-June 30 and one for b'nai mitzvah between July 1-December 31). The educational plan for each *Shabbaton* is packed with study, prayer, guided imagery leading to reflection and discussion of Shabbat. This day of family education and experience has one 60 minute session for adults to focus on concerns relating to their relationships to their children, how to deal with adolescent's need for independence, how the synagogue can help with these issues. The parent segment is described as a free-flowing discussion. The experience of the *Shabbaton* is to bring families together for a one-time smorgasbord to taste elements of Shabbat, Torah study, and connecting to a community Mitzvah Network.

Making personal meaning for the adult learner and seeker is not addressed in a deep way in this family education program. Lutz is responding to what his congregation perceives to be the lacunae in bar/bat mitzvah education. Attempts are made to fill in the gaps of knowledge regarding the elements of the Shabbat service, Torah study and symbols of Judaism while trying to create a 'feeling' of Shabbat and addressing the social and psychological needs of the parents. Programs like this aim for meaningful learning to take place. Yet, it seems to me that clergy and educators who are highly aware that there are many educational and spiritual needs of the bar/bat mitzvah parents have missed the opportunity to facilitate focused exploration with parents. Many factors contribute to how and why programs like this are created, among them constraints of time for families and congregations; a one-shot day of experiential learning is an effort to contend with this challenge.

A family workshop program that does try to direct meaningful study, exploration of Jewish values and personalizing the rituals associated with bar/bat mitzvah is a part of the b'nai mitzvah program at Dorshei Emet, a Reconstructionist congregation in Montreal. Three family workshops that take place at the end of an eighteen-session bar/bat mitzvah program focus on the meaning of mitzvah, responsibility to the community and sharpening the concept of Jewish identity for all family members. This is actualized through text study and many activities and exercises aimed at values clarification. The family workshops have parents and children working and studying both together and separately. Theses workshops begin to deal with parents 'meaning making' but take place within the context of the b'nai mitzvah class program. One of the

stated objectives of the program is to develop a stronger sense of community among the peer groups of bar/bat mitzvah students and their parents.

Rabbi Ron Aigen who developed this program bases many of the sessions on the ARE Family Education Unit on bar/bat mitzvah. The "Mitzvah Inventory Checklist" that he includes is a useful tool for helping children and parents distinguish between ritual and ethical mitzvot, as well as identifying which mitzvot help create and sustain community. The strength of this program lies in the preceding fifteen sessions the b'nai mitzvah students spend with the rabbi who teaches this program, though the three family workshops are a positive way to incorporate the family into the educational process and raise their awareness of the objective and commitment to the notion of community responsibility that the program seeks to impart and embed in the psyche the b'nai mitzvah and their families.

Roberta Louis Goodman and Lois J. Zachary developed a family program for a large Conservative congregation for sixth graders and their families. The goals of the program are: to prepare students and parents together both collectively and spiritually for the bar/bat mitzvah experience; to create a sense of community among the families, b'nai mitzvah and the synagogue; to discuss the role of *mitzvah, tefillah* and *tzedakah* and responsibility in becoming bar/bat mitzvah; and to present the history of bar/bat mitzvah, structure and understanding of liturgy of Shabbat services.

In preparing the family sessions, students and program facilitator crafted case studies connecting the concepts of *mitzvah, tefillah, tzedakah, aliyot*, invitations and celebrations to be discussed by small family groups, presented to the full group and then processed. (Case studies were created based on the concerns of the students.) Many

issues raised concerned ethical dilemmas related to the actual planning and visioning of the bar/bat mitzvah experience and reflected true feelings and perceptions of sixth graders. For example, they began a session with a guided imagery for the students about the bar/bat mitzvah experience. Closing their eyes they were asked to consider some of the following questions: What kind of symbols comes to mind when you think about your bar/bat mitzvah? What is the best thing that could happen on your bar/bat mitzvah day? Get a really clear picture of how you would like your bar/bat mitzvah day to be. This exercise precedes the students creating a case study for discussion. A case study could address the concern of who to invite. This generates a lot interest since many families are blended, interfaith etc.

Goodman and Zachary set out to shape a program that helps families find more meaning in the bar/bat mitzvah experience through child/child, parent/parent and parent/child experiences and discussion. According to Goodman and Zachary, the program achieved and exceeded its goals. It initiated a dialogue and educational process between synagogue and home, engendered support for making bar/bat mitzvah a spiritually meaningful experience, built a sense of community and common purpose and provided a format for discussion among parents, modeled how and what parents and children could discuss in making decisions about bar/bat mitzvah.

This model proved to be successful in combining the needs, concerns values and desires of the three parties involved: bar/bat mitzvah students, their parents and the synagogue. The synagogue and educators helped families derive more meaning from the bar/bat mitzvah experience. This program accomplished its objectives in helping families find more meaning and spiritual fulfillment in the bar/bat mitzvah experience within a

large congregational setting. This program has many elements that respond to Cohen and Eisen's articulation of the challenge of finding personal meaning in the bar/bat mitzvah experience, yet it is limited in having families craft a unique and personal dimension in this process.

Leneman's collection of family education programs and curricula illustrates that many clergy and educators are trying to creatively respond to the challenges and opportunities that families preparing for bar/bat mitzvah present. Over the past twenty five years there has a been a significant increase in synagogue-based family education programs for this population reflecting the interest by families and the awareness of Jewish educators to this moment of liminal development. All involved are seeking to use this window of opportunity to spark families to further Jewish knowledge, commitment, identity and spiritual growth.

E. *Bar\Bat Mitzvah Basics: A Practical Guide to Coming of Age Together* By Cantor Helen Leneman

Cantor Leneman's *Bar\Bat Mitzvah Basics: A Practical Guide to Coming of Age Together* published in 1996[77] and reflects an awakening of adult spiritual growth issues and possibilities. Why did she compile this new book? How does it differ from the earlier *Sourcebook?* Although this work addresses the abc's of planning a bar/bat mitzvah, understanding its context within the synagogue community it seems to make a significant shift in focus towards parents, their understanding and their struggles in making meaning for themselves as Jews at this transitional life cycle moment.

[77] The same year that Rabbi Jeffrey Salkin publishes *Putting God on the Guest List.*

Cantor Leneman reflects, "I have become aware of a need to better understand the potential of bar/bat mitzvah preparation for the spiritual and emotional growth of the entire family."[78] *Bar/Bat Mitzvah Basics* helps parents take steps to uncovering why bar/bat mitzvah is so laden with Jewish meaning and emotion. Rabbi Susan Stone in the chapter entitled "The Parents' Rite of Passage" recognizes that although the parents are 'keeping the entire event together' how they view themselves as parents, as spouses and as Jews is not addressed. Rabbi Stone describes one of her roles in this way: "...To make the bar/bat mitzvah experience a less stressful, more joyous experience...to make a positive impact on families so I can work with them in the future."[79] She suggests that it is the synagogue's job to be a source of support at times of stress and that congregations need to see parents as going through a time of transition as their children become more independent and as they face the experience of aging. Stone does not present an agenda as to how the congregation can accomplish this challenge. Yet, there are several contributors who attempt to respond to this in a more tangible manner.

Life cycle rituals help us create moments to recognize and mark moments of transition. Dr. Judith Davis sees rituals (especially bar/bat mitzvah) as therapy for the family.[80] Viewing the bar/bat mitzvah ritual as a drama imbued with meaning that incorporates three important stages of life: separation (preparation for change); transition (the journey which includes the public act that makes manifest the change) and reintegration (private or internal transformation). Davis offers a psychological and family systems understanding to the drama that unfolds within in the family and the community.

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[78] Helen Leneman. *Bar/Bat Mitzvah Basics.* p. xxi.
[79] Susan Stone in *Bar/Bat Mitzvah Basics.* p. 45.
[80] Judith Davis in *Bar/Bat Mitzvah Basic.* p. 49.

The paradox of this event is that we are promoting personal and familial change in a communal system that provides continuity.

Bar/Bat Mitzvah Basics responds to the practical, emotional and spiritual dynamics that each member of the family is experiencing. The uniqueness of this book is that it guides and articulates for parents the affective impact bar/bat mitzvah has on the individual and family. Leneman takes a step in offering advice for the family who wants to create an alternative service outside of the synagogue. Acknowledging that there are those who want to create meaningful and memorable ritual for their families, Leneman provides practical guidelines for do so. Cohen and Eisen's finding that the concept of the sovereign self propels people to create their own religious experiences is made clear in the suggestions that Leneman carefully provides. *Bar/Bat Mitzvah Basics* reflects the shift in focus from b'nai mitzvah child and family to the inner lives of the adult parent.

In 1999 the UAHC-CCAR Commission on Religious Living published "Making It Count: Guidelines for Becoming a Bar/Bat Mitzvah." The guide can be used in conjunction with family education programs, but it may also be used apart from formal programs as a focus of study and discussion for the family.

Each page is dedicated to a Jewish value, including a text and contemporary interpretations to be read and discussed by all family members. Students and parents complete a *B'rit Torah* for each value in order to articulate and identify in writing commitments that embody the Jewish values in which they will participate. The value concepts upon which this program is based are *Talmud Torah, Avodah, Mitzvah and Kehillah.* The "Guidelines" is a building block towards developing an understanding of these essential four value concepts of Judaism and provide relevant insights into the ideas

they embody. The commentary which follows each section of text offers concrete examples of how to make these values manifest in the world. A very serious and focused family may be able to tackle this together, however I believe it would be better served in a communal setting and facilitated by an experienced educator. This effort does illustrate the sensitivity of the movement and its lay and clergy leaders to address the family at this critical juncture in their lives.

Chapter VI

Background to Curriculum Piece: Why a Bar\Bat mitzvah Seder?

Modern Jewish educators need to address more fully the spiritual needs of the adult parent as children undergo their bar\bat mitzvah education. This study is guided by the conviction that Jewish educators must shape curriculum with a complete understanding of the learner. Adults in the moderately affiliated Jewish community come to their Judaism with a powerful sense of autonomy and individuality. They reflect the tendencies in American religion to see spirituality as something rooted in an on-going personal journey and the search for individual meaning. More importantly, sociologists of American religion point to a disturbing tendency for Americans to privatize the religious experience. Privatization within Judaism impacts synagogue and greater Jewish communal life. Many people see the bar\bat mitzvah solely as a private event, disconnected from the Jewish community. Sociologists have identified a profound spiritual longing in America today. Though traditional faith communities maintain an influence, adult parents are seeking in mid-life to connect the fragmented and disconnected pieces of their lives and they do not necessarily see the Jewish tradition as a source of help to them.

Much work has been done in the Jewish community in the area of bar\bat mitzvah education. However, my survey of bar\bat mitzvah education shows that the primary focus is on the mechanical aspects of the bar\bat mitzvah and\or creating programs to make the bar\bat mitzvah meaningful for the child. The curricula that I have reviewed

are excellent in dealing with the child but I believe that adult parent has been neglected. Bar\bat mitzvah is a time of high Jewish involvement for parents as they support their children. But, I believe that we as Jewish educators should try to utilize this event to help parents begin to create a sense of meaning for their lives.

The bar\bat mitzvah Seder with its four-parent\child workshops is one attempt to model this kind of meaning making. It utilizes the traditional Seder framework in order to help bring together the individual histories of families and connect them to Jewish tradition and the Jewish community. The Seder has several goals:

- To learn that traditional Jewish forms are valuable.
- To create opportunities for parents and children to examine some key elements of Jewish identity.
- To assist parents in crystallizing what the bar\bat mitzvah means to them within the framework of their family.
- To address the issue of privatization by linking the family with issues of religious obligation, community, and *clal Yisrael.*
- To help uncover the relevance of key liturgical elements as sources of Jewish identity.

Each of these workshops has components for parent learning, child learning and parent/child learning experiences. A suggestion for making the experience concrete is to create a scrapbook based on the activities, exercises and reflections of the workshops. For families who are artistically inclined making a scrapbook can be a wonderful family project for commemorating this life cycle event. The scrapbook can be used at the bar/bat mitzvah seder as part of the "maggid" the narrative of the bar/bat mitzvah child's

life experiences and remembrances. For those not artistically inclined creating a taped audio family history or a videotaped photographic montage and oral history can be a tangible project filled with meaning for families.

(For this project most art supply stores can provide the materials needed to compile a beautiful family keepsake. Many art stores offer workshops or classes in scrapbooking.)

The following four family workshops will take place during the last six months of the students sixth grade year. Each workshop will take place on a Sunday morning and last approximately 1 hour 15 minutes to 1 hour 45 minutes. Ideally, the workshops will be lead by the rabbi(s), cantor, family educator and/or teacher. When special projects take place, a specialist will be brought in to instruct that section of the workshop. The goal of these workshops is to stimulate deeper thought about the bar/bat mitzvah experience for the parents, child and Jewish community.

(Light breakfast should be served at each of the workshops)

Chapter VII

Preparatory Family Workshops for Bar\Bat Mitzvah Seder

Creating a Bar/Bat Mitzvah Family Haggadah

Workshop One: Kos Haneshamah-The Cup of Uniqueness

Welcome to the first of four family workshops for learning and creating a family bar/bat mitzvah Seder. We will be viewing the video ***The Journey.*** Think about the following questions for discussion afterwards:

- How does the film answer the question, what does bar/bat mitzvah really mean?
- How does the film's answer compare to your own answer?
- How does Joseph Levenson's attitude toward bar mitzvah change during the movie?
- Does Nikolai's attitude toward bar mitzvah change? How?
- What does the title ***The Journey*** refer to?
- How does learning what it means to become a bar/bat mitzvah compare to being on a journey?

(40-45 minutes including)

Part One---Text Study: (for parents and children together)

Text #1 כו וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים נַעֲשֶׂה אָדָם בְּצַלְמֵנוּ כִּדְמוּתֵנוּ וְיִרְדּוּ בִּדְגַת הַיָּם וּבְעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וּבַבְּהֵמָה וּבְכָל הָאָרֶץ וּבְכָל הָרֶמֶשׂ הָרֹמֵשׂ עַל הָאָרֶץ : כז וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים / אֶת הָאָדָם בְּצַלְמוֹ בְּצֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים בָּרָא אֹתוֹ זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה בָּרָא אֹתָם :

And God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. They shall rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the cattle, the whole earth, and all the creeping things that creep on earth." And God created man in His image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. *(Genesis 1:26-27)*

What do you think it means to be created in the image of God?

_____

_____

_____

How are human beings different than all the other creatures of the earth?

_____

_____

_____

What makes individuals unique and different?

_____

_____

_____

What qualities does God give to human beings that God does not give to God's other creations?

_____

_____

- *Commentary:*

The Hebrew word for soul is neshamah, which means breath. In text # 1, we are told that we all are created בְּצֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים *B'tzelem Elohim – in God's image. This does not mean that God has brown hair and blue eyes; rather it means that we have a breath of God within us,* נְשָׁמָה *a neshamah---a soul. This idea is illustrated in the text below.*

Text #2

ז וַיִּיצֶר יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הָאָדָם עָפָר מִן־הָאֲדָמָה וַיִּפַּח בְּאַפָּיו

נִשְׁמַת חַיִּים וַיְהִי הָאָדָם לְנֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה

The Lord God formed man from the dust of the earth. He blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being.

(Genesis 2:7)

Describe the differences between the two ways the Torah depicts man's creation.

_____

_____

_____

God creates Adam from the earth (in Hebrew adamah), how does this differ text #1? And what do you think it means for Adam to be given the "breath of life" from God?

_____

_____

Part II ——Preparation for Seder.

As part of your bar\bat mitzvah preparation, you will be celebrating as a family a bar\bat mitzvah Seder. You will be writing important parts of it in these workshops to be shared at the Seder.

Children's project:

Photo collection: Go through and select from your family's photo albums or boxes of photographs picture of yourself from infancy to the present that have special meaning or trigger memories. Think about how you would describe these pictures as part of the history of your life. How do these pictures remind you of your specialness? At your

bar/bat mitzvah Seder, you will be sharing these "snapshots" of what makes your life unique.

Read and respond to the following (you will be including this at the Seder)

Before he died, Rabbi Zusya said to his students, "In the world to come I will not be asked, 'Why weren't you Moses?' I will be asked, 'Why weren't you Zusya?'"

What do you think that Zusya wanted to teach his students?

Describe two strengths that make you, You?

How do you build on these strengths to become the best YOU that you can be?

_____

_____

What else can you do in order to become the best YOU?

_____

_____

_____

B) Parents Project: We have learned from our studies something that you already know as a parent: your child is unique. He\she is a gift from God. Our tradition recognizes the idea that we are all created in God's image and that God has given each of us a unique neshama.

At your bar\bat mitzvah Seder, we want you to recognize and to share with Seder participants the uniqueness that you see in your child. To that end, please compose reflections and recollections that answer these two questions:

What unique recollections of your child do you have from the past 12 years?

What do you believe to be unique about their child?

What is unique about his\her neshamah?

What should your child know about himself\herself that will reinforce his\her own sense of uniqueness?

Workshop for the Second Cup

KOS MISHPACHA: The Cup For Our Family

Bar/Bat Mitzvah Seder

Introductory Exercise:

We will view a "trigger" film ***Gefilte Fish*** to generate family and group discussion about families, traditions and connections. (20 minutes)

Questions to think about:

Why is important to keep things alive from one generation to the next?

Is there anything in your family that is similar to the Gefilte Fish recipe?

Text Study # 1: Avot blessing of Amidah:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ וֵאלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ, אֱלֹהֵי אַבְרָהָם, אֱלֹהֵי

יִצְחָק, וֵאלֹהֵי יַעֲקֹב

אֱלֹהֵי שרה, אֱלֹהֵי רבקה, אֱלֹהֵי לאה, וֵאלֹהֵי רחל.

הָאֵל הַגָּדוֹל הַגִּבּוֹר וְהַנּוֹרָא, אֵל עֶלְיוֹן, גּוֹמֵל חֲסָדִים טוֹבִים, וְקוֹנֵה הַכֹּל, וְזוֹכֵר חַסְדֵי אָבוֹת, וּמֵבִיא גּוֹאֵל לִבְנֵי בְנֵיהֶם לְמַעַן שְׁמוֹ בְּאַהֲבָה:

מֶלֶךְ עוֹזֵר וּמוֹשִׁיעַ וּמָגֵן: בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ, מָגֵן אַבְרָהָם ועזרת שרה:

Translation:

Praised are You, O Lord our God and God of our ancestors, God of Abraham, God of Isaac, and God of Jacob, God of Sarah, God of Rebekah, God Leah, and God of Rachel, great, mighty, awesome God, Supreme over all. You are abundantly kind, Creator of all. Remembering the piety of our ancestors, You will lovingly bring redemption to their children's children. You are the King who helps, delivers, and protects. Praised are You, O Lord, Shield of Abraham and Sustainer of Sarah.

Some thoughts to reflect upon:

Jewish tradition teaches that an individual's relationship to God is both personal and historic. Every person has his/her own unique relationship with God, the Jewish people and their families. The Jewish people have a unique relationship with God that is rooted in the covenant made between God and Abraham and Sarah. Let's look at this paragraph together and think about why we include our ancestors' names when praying to God.

In a way we can think about God as an old family friend. We use prayer to make a connection to God, as children of great Jews in our history we affirm that we are part of the chain of Jewish heritage. This idea is known as *zehut avot* or the merit of our ancestors. Identifying with our ancestors and recognizing their importance in our lives and the lives of the Jewish people we symbolically and literally demonstrate that we are worth listening to because we are part of the story of the Jewish people.

Questions for discussion:

What makes Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Sarah, Rebekah, Leah and Rachel unique individuals? List some of their characteristics.

Why must we think about our ancestors as we approach God

If you were creating your own *avot/ancestors* prayer, with whom from Jewish tradition and/or history would you like to be linked and why? (If you need help identifying someone, the books ***Jewish Literacy or Biblical Literacy*** may be helpful or ask facilitator for assistance)

Text 2: **Leviticus Rabbah--Chapter 25 Section 5**

Once the emperor Hadrian was walking along the road near Tiberias in Galilee, and he saw an old man working the soil to plant some fig trees. "

If you had worked in your early years, old man," he said, " you would not have to work now so late in your life."

" I have worked both early and late," the man answered, " and what pleased the Lord He has done with me."

" How old are you? Asked Hadrian.

" A hundred years old, " the man answered.

" A hundred years old, and you still stand there breaking up the soil to plant trees!" said Hadrian. " Do you expect to eat the fruit of those trees? "

" If I am worthy, I will eat, " said the old man. " But if not, as my father worked for me, I work for my children"

Why was the man planting the tree?

_____

_____

How do we benefit from those who came before us?

_____

_____

_____

_____

Who are your own relatives or someone special who have made important contributions to your life?

What have they done to make an impact on you?

Who in your life has made a **Jewish** impression on you? How have they done this?

How would you like to honor these people or person within the context of the bar/bat mitzvah?

_____

_____

Each family member should answer these questions individually. After completing these descriptions reassemble as a family and discuss your responses. Since we are creating a ritual to honor the family, it is suggested that you create a family history narrative describing these central people of your family, including all those you have listed in your answers.

Part II---Preparation For Seder

Parent Writing Project for Workshop:

Write the story of an important family member who no longer is alive but who you want to be remembered.

(For use at the Seder)

_____

_____

_____

(Ideally, each person at the Seder could share a memory or a biographical memory of a person?)

Where were they from?

How are they related to you?

What values or attributes do you cherish in them that you want to be with you and your family in years to come.

What values do they represent?

Family Tree Project for Parents and Children:

Creating a pictorial image or graphic of the family tree showing how everyone is connected can illuminate the *maggid/telling* of your family's journey. Suggestions for the family tree:

Names of all family members going back as far as possible.

Places of birth

Dates of births and deaths

Hebrew or Yiddish names (if applicable)

Marriages

Interesting fact about each person on the tree.

To include in your family story: For whom are your immediate family members named? Explain (if possible) what is special about each of the people for whom you are all named?

Collect photographs and create a collage or scrapbook format of family members.

This will be the first section of your family bar/bat mitzvah *haggadah*.

Getting Ready for the Seder----Another assignment

Bring <u>something</u> with you that you will share at the seder that is valuable or has meaning for you, something you may have received as a gift or inherited from a friend or family member. Write down why this object has significance to you and/ or be prepared to explain what it is and why it does have meaning for you.

Write a prayer

Compose a brief prayer that expresses what you are grateful for as a family. (This text could be shared with the permission of the rabbi at the bar\bat mitzvah ceremony.)

It is not so hard. You can begin by filling in the blank:

O Lord, God of my ancestors and of our entire world, you have blessed our Family in so many ways. .....(Fill in from your heart)_____

_____

_____

Additional Workshop Activities:

Families will practice reciting the *Avot* blessing (utilizing the Hebrew text, transliteration and English interpretation).

Families will learn the Shabbat *nusah* for chanting the *Avot.*

Families will recite the blessing over wine and/or grape juice to sanctify the first cup. Text will be provided in Hebrew, transliteration and English.

Families can begin to organize their family's bar/bat mitzvah scrapbook/haggadah that will be shared at their bar/bat mitzvah seder.

Workshop for Third Cup KOS MITZVAH:

Cup of Jewish Obligation

Bar/Bat Mitzvah Seder

Introduction to Text Study:

Studying Torah is a mitzvah/religious obligation. Prior to formally studying, one recites the following blessing: (Let us recite this together.) בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ

הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו, וְצִוָּנוּ לַעֲסוֹק בְּדִבְרֵי תוֹרָה

Barukh ata Adonai, Elohenu Melekh Haolam, Asher kidshanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu la'asok b'divrei Torah.

Praised are You, Adonai our God, Sovereign of the Universe, who makes us holy through mitzvot and instructed us to study Torah.

Child and parent each answer these questions separately, in writing:

List three things that you enjoy doing alone:

_____

_____

Why do you like to do specific things by yourself?

_____

_____

_____

How does the involvement of other people change these activities?

_____

_____

_____

_____

*Name three things that would be impossible to do without other people:*_____

_____

_____

*Why are other people nececessary?*_____

_____

_____

_____

Of all the things you listed, are there any which are not dependent on other people in any way?

_____

_____

_____

After you have completed these questions discuss with your family.

Parent and Child Text Study #1--Talmud: Shabbat 127 a

אֵלּוּ דְּבָרִים שֶׁאָדָם אוֹכֵל פֵּרוֹתֵיהֶם בָּעוֹלָם הַזֶּה וְהַקֶּרֶן קַיֶּמֶת לוֹ לָעוֹלָם הַבָּא, וְאֵלּוּ הֵן : כִּבּוּד אָב וָאֵם, וּגְמִילוּת חֲסָדִים, וְהַשְׁכָּמַת בֵּית הַמִּדְרָשׁ שַׁחֲרִית וְעַרְבִית, וְהַכְנָסַת אוֹרְחִים, וּבִקּוּר חוֹלִים, וְהַכְנָסַת כַּלָּה, וּלְוָיַת הַמֵּת, וְעִיּוּן תְּפִלָּה, וַהֲבָאַת שָׁלוֹם בֵּין אָדָם לַחֲבֵרוֹ, וְתַלְמוּד תּוֹרָה כְּנֶגֶד כֻּלָּם.

In fulfilling the following commandments one enjoys the yield in the this world while the principal remains for all eternity; honoring father and mother, performing deeds of lovingkindness, punctually attending the house of study morning and evening, showing hospitality to strangers. Visiting the sick, helping the needy bride, attending the dead, praying with devotion, and making peace between individuals. And the merit of Torah study is equal to all of these.

*How does **studying** make a difference in your Jewish life?*

Why do you think the rabbis who wrote this passage chose these mitzvot/religious obligations: honoring one's parents, acts of lovingkindness, hospitality and making peace between individuals as the mitzvot/religious obligations or actions and not others?

What do these mitzvot make us do?

Which ones are the hardest to do and why are they hard?

Adult Text Study #2

I try to walk the road of Judaism. Embedded in that road there are many jewels. One is marked "Sabbath" and one "Civil Rights" and one "Kashruth" and one "Honor Your Parents" and one "Study of Torah" and one "You Shall Be Holy." There are at least 613 of them and they are of different shapes and sizes and weights. Some are light and easy for me to pick up, and I pick them up. Some are too deeply embedded for me, so far at least, though I get a little stronger by trying to extricate the jewels as I walk the street. Some, perhaps, I shall never be able to pick up. I believe that God expects me to keep on walking Judaism Street and to carry away whatever I can of its commandments. I do not believe that God expects me to life what I cannot, nor may I condemn my fellow Jew who may not be able to pick up even as much as I can. –Arnold Jacob Wolf (*An Unfinished Rabbi* 1998. p.121.)

What do you do in response to God's presence in your life?

What jewels in the road of life have you encountered and made a part of your life?

What jewels or values do you want to see embodied in the person your child is becoming?

Think about how you reach out to others (do your children see and recognize your behavior?)

Child Text Study #3

Two Talmudic sages, Rabbi Tarfon and Rabbi Akiva, struggled to determine which is more important – the study of Torah or living according to its laws. Rabbi Tarfon was convinced that it is more to follow the laws of Torah. Rabbi Akiva argued that the only way to know what the laws are is to study Torah. In the end, the sages determined that the study of Torah is greater than all other mitzvot because it leads to them all. (Babylonian Talmud *Kiddushin* 40b)

What is more important studying Torah or doing Torah? Why?

Can you study Torah without doing Torah?

Can you do Torah without studying?

Part II—Preparation for Seder

- *Child Piece for Seder:*

  In your life, have there been any moments when you have felt close to God?

Where were you?

_____

_____

_____

What were you doing?

_____

_____

_____

How did you feel after?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Have you ever felt close to God doing something Jewish?

_____

_____

- Parent Preparation for Seder

Share with child a mitzvah that is important to you and that you care deeply that the bar\bat mitzvah continues as a Jewish adult.

Additional activity:

We find the instruction to study Torah almost everywhere in Jewish tradition. Studying is encouraged not only to sharpen one's mind, but also to serve as a guide for living a moral and ethical life. Taking Torah study seriously can lead people to make correct choices in life. The Torah is referred to as our Tree of Life.

Facilitator will teach song: "It is a Tree of Life" This song can be used when your family celebrates the bar/bat mitzvah Seder.

(This song comes from the book of Proverbs 3:18)

Part III: Judaic Art Project

Watch the video: ***Wrapped: The How and Why of Tallit and Tefillin.*** (30 minutes)

We will then participate in learning how to tie tzitzit. Using wooden dowels and wool participants will learn the process and procedure for tying tzitzit, and learn the gematria for the tzitzit. (20-30 minutes)

Workshop for Fourth Cup

Kos HaAm: The Cup of Our People

Bar/Bat Mitzvah Seder

Guided Imagery: All of us use imagery more than we realize. Every time we close our eyes and try to remember some past event, we are using mental images. Imagery forms in our brain in many forms. Some images are seen, or visualized, and others come to us through hearing, smelling, tasting or touching. Often these images come together. When we use the term "imagery" we mean calling up past memories, or creating new experiences through our five senses.

Many people utilize guided imagery to prepare for events in their lives. Athletes use imagery to imagine and envision how a game will go, how they will respond or react. Business people incorporate guided imagery in training corporate executives in planning, evaluating, improving interpersonal relationships, corporate development and many other creative functions. In recent years educators have begun to utilize guided imagery to enhance their students' capacity to learn better and with more fun and imagination by employing techniques of active and receptive imagery.

We will be doing a guided imagery to motivate our thinking and feeling about a holy or powerful experience. We hope that this guided imagery will make clearer to us that in almost any experience we can find holiness and meaning. So, relax, get comfortable and close your eyes.

In a comfortable room in the synagogue, preferably with couches and pillows, participants will find a comfortable spot for this exercise. This guided imagery will focus on some special, holy memories, which will reinforce our connection to God and to our spiritual self.

Get into a comfortable position, and relax, let all your tension and tightness melt a way. Take a few breaths, and with each breath exhaled, let some more discomfort, tight muscles and mental preoccupation just float away. As you sit for a minute or two, you will find that you can concentrate more easily, and focus your attention more carefully on what we are doing, letting go of all outside sensory stimulation. Pay no attention to who is sitting next to you, where you are, what is going on nearby, or to any noises that might distract you. Just relax, and focus your attention on your own breathing. When you focus on your breathing, you are not changing it by making it slower or faster. You are just paying attention it.

Find the place within yourself that is at peace and tranquil. Remember a time when you felt everything was right. Recapture that moment and feel how good it is...Notice how relaxed and at ease you are...The peace of your life energize every part

of you. Your entire being is exactly the way you love to be-calm, confident, at peace, secure....

Go back into the forest of your memory and find in it a precious moment. A time when you felt very close to nature, or to God, or to another human being. Each of these can be described as holy moments. God wants us to be close and intimate with our environment and with the important people in our lives. God also wants us to be close to the divine part of ourselves... Find one special, holy moment when you felt very spiritually attuned and connected....

Perhaps you are in a house of worship, or out in a beautiful meadow, or by the seashore. Maybe you are having an intimate conversation with a loved one, and sharing affection or other feelings... Maybe you are singing or dancing, praying or eating... Whatever you are doing that feels holy, go back deeply into that experience....Notice all the details of this experience... Who is there with you? What are you doing? What is going on around you? Look all around. ....Remember all the smells, the taste, the touch of things... What is it like to experience the feeling of a holy moment? (long pause)

If you would like, turn now to another holy moment....Capture the image in your mind's eye of some special, sacred time, when you felt that God was in your life in a very deep way.... Pay attention to everything in that experience. (Pause)

What do the experiences have in common? What ways can you bring that sense of the holy back into your everyday life?

Take your time, and when you are ready, come back to this room, and gently, gradually, open your eyes, and be still for a while. (Pause)

Thinking Questions:

What was the experience like?
What was different or special about it?
What did you learn from it?
What surprised you while going through it?
Was it easier or harder than you thought it would be?
What stands out for you about this experience?
(time: approximately 10 minutes)

Text Study #1

Child and Parents Text Study #3---Genesis 12:1-3

[פרשת לך לך] א וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־אַבְרָם לֶךְ־לְךָ מֵאַרְצְךָ
וּמִמּוֹלַדְתְּךָ וּמִבֵּית אָבִיךָ אֶל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אַרְאֶךָּ׃ ב וְאֶעֶשְׂךָ לְגוֹי גָּדוֹל
וַאֲבָרֶכְךָ וַאֲגַדְּלָה שְׁמֶךָ וֶהְיֵה בְּרָכָה׃ ג וַאֲבָרְכָה מְבָרֲכֶיךָ וּמְקַלֶּלְךָ אָאֹר
וְנִבְרְכוּ בְךָ כֹּל מִשְׁפְּחֹת הָאֲדָמָה׃

The Lord said to Abram, "Go forth from your native land and from your father's house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, And I will bless you; I will make your name great, And you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you/ And Curse him that curse you;/ And all the families of earth/Shall bless themselves by you."

Commentary: Everything has a beginning. In the Torah, this passage is the beginning of the Jewish people.

Why is Abraham (Abram) selected?

_____

_____

Abraham is to go into the world, create a new people, and become a blessing. What blessings have the Jews as a nation brought to the world?

Study text #2 (for parents and child)

Repairing the World (from Rabbi Larry Kushner's *The Book of Miracles*)

In the sixteenth-century Tsefat, Rabbi Isaac Luria observed that in his world, like ours, many things seemed to be wrong. People suffered from hunger, disease, hatred, and war. " How could God allow such terrible things to happen? " wondered Luria. " Perhaps,," he suggested," it is because God needs our help." He explained his answer with a mystical story.

Our world is a mess because it is filled with broken fragments. When people fight and hurt one another, they allow the world to remain shattered. The same can be said of people who have pantries filled with food and let others starve. According to 16th century kabbalist, Rabbi Isaac Luria, we live in a cosmic heap of broken pieces, and God cannot repair it alone.

When first setting out to make the world, God planned to pour a Holy Light into everything in order to a make it real. God prepared vessels to contain the Holy Light. But something went wrong. The light was so bright that the vessels burst, shattering into millions of broken pieces like dishes dropped on the floor. The

Hebrew phrase which Luria used for this "breaking of the vessel" is sh'virat ha-kaylim

That is why God created us and gave us freedom of choice. We are free to do whatever we please with our world. We can allow this to remain broken or, as Luria urged, we can try to repair the mess. Luria's Hebrew phrase for "repairing the world" is tikkun olam.

Brainstorm together and come up with a list of issues, people, places that you would consider in need of our "repair." We will need a scribe to write this on the giant post-its.

After the list has been completed, as families review these lists and select four topics/issues/people that you would like to help.

On the tables around this room you will find literature (pamphlets, books, catalogues) with information about the topics you are interested in learning about further. Take a look at these and discuss which topic your family is interested in learning about and possibly volunteering for, or raising money for or raising people's awareness of. One family member (someone other than the bar/bat mitzvah student) will research the cause or issue of concern and report back to family.

Think of one way you and your family can help to repair this cause/issue/people.

Parent and child Text Study #3 (continuation of Kushner text)

As Jews, our most important task in life is to find what is broken in our world and repair it. The commandments in the Torah instruct us, not only on how to live as Jews, but on how to repair creation.

At the very beginning of the Book of Genesis (2:15) we read that God put Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden and told them not to eat from the tree of knowledge. God also told them that it was their job to take care of and protect the garden.

The stories in the Torah tell not only of what happened long ago but also of what happens in each generation. The stories happen over and over again in the life of each person. The Garden of Eden is our world, and we are Adam and Eve. When God says, "Take care of the garden and protect it," God say to us, "Take care of your world and protect it."

According to one midrash, God showed Adam and Eve the Garden of Eden and said, "I have made the whole thing for you, so please take good care of it. If you wreck it, there will be no one else to repair it other than you.

(Ecclesiastes Rabbah 7:13)

The teaching:

When you see something that is broken, fix it.

When you find something that is lost, return it.

When you see something that needs to be done, do it.

In that way, you will take care of your world and repair creation.

If all the people in the world were to do so, our world would truly be a Garden of Eden, the way God meant it to be.

If everything broken could be repair, then everyone and everything would fit together like the pieces of one gigantic jigsaw puzzle.

But, for people to begin the great task of repairing creation, they first must take responsibility.

Part II:

Child Piece:

Think about how, in small ways, you can "repair" a piece of the world. Write your thoughts down to be included in the Haggadah.

At the Seder the child will share with group one thing that you would like to fix in this world.

Parent piece for Seder preparation:

A bar\bat mitzvah is about dreams. We want to impart to our children a hope or vision for them as they embark on a lifetime of Jewish living?

What specific dreams do you have for your child?

What impact do you want your child to have on this world as a human being and as a Jew?

What do you think the world needs most that your child will offer to the world ?

Part III: Judaic Arts Project

Bring in a local Jewish artist to create with families personalized etched-crystal Kiddush cups. This project will require designing and implementation of etching process. This final project will enable families to create a usable family heirloom – to be used at their bar/bat mitzvah Seder and possibly for use at Friday night service in the congregation for recitation of Kiddush.

Chapter VIII

Bar/Bat Mitzvah Seder

The Overall Structure of the Seder

Seder means, "order". The Seder is a ritualized telling of an important story that Jews must not only tell but also experience. Most of us have attended some kind of Passover Seder. But, the Seder is a Jewish device to help us make sense out of an important part of our heritage. In medieval times, Jewish mystics created the Tu Bishvat Seder---the Seder in celebration of the New Year for Trees. In contemporary times, various rabbis and educators have created special Sedarim (plural for seder) to commemorate Yom Ha'atzmaut ----- Israel Independence Day and Yom Hashoah—the day to commemorate the destruction of the six million Jews of Europe. The underlying structure of this Seder and of the Haggadah that you will create with your family is built on the model of the Passover Seder and Haggadah. Each of the major concepts that we will explore and create meaning for is built around four cups.

The Bar\Bat Mitzvah year is a stressful time. Many preparations must be made and deadlines met. But, it is also a time of questions. Why are we doing this? What do I as parent and a Jew want to personally get out of it? What do I want to transmit to my children? What do I feel about Judaism and how it fits into my life? What personal meaning can I bring to this incredible family undertaking called-Bar\Bat Mitzvah? In Judaism, ALL QUESTIONS ARE GOOD AND HOLY. Ideally, we are an Am Sh'eilot---a people of questions. This Seder is intended to be a moment when you as

adult can think about with your family the lasting and unique significance of this life-cycle experience for your family.

Seder Leaders

The leader runs a Seder; in this case, you the parent/s will be the facilitators, narrators and emcees of the Seder. You will direct the flow of discussion, however the Haggadah that we will be creating together will give you clear guidelines and directions for running the Seder.

The central component of the Seder and the Haggadah is the Maggid; the narrative telling of the story. The intent of the bar/bat mitzvah Seder is for you as a family to create a meaningful story of your family, your hopes and aspirations, your understandings of how you and your family connect to and find meaning in Jewish tradition.

You as the Seder leader become your children's parent educator. The biblical origin of the "Haggadah" echoes the commandment: "*v'higad'ta*"- you shall tell your child." (Exodus 13:8) This family bar/bat mitzvah Seder will allow you the parent to become the teacher, the primary Jewish educator for the family, because you are **the** expert on your family story. Not knowledge, primarily, but empathy is required for this task.

Instructions:

Preparation of Table:

- Set table with a special tablecloth
- Wine glasses
- Kiddush cup
- Dessert plates and silverware
- Yahrzeit candle (available in most supermarkets in Kosher food section, or synagogue gift shops and/or the synagogue office)
- Wine
- Grape juice

Food:

You are celebrating your family with all of its uniqueness. Prepare some special dessert type foods that your family loves. If you have time, you may want to find recipes from family or friends that have special significance for you and your family. Oranges, pomegranates, other food products from Israel can be found in supermarkets, specialty food shops.

Time:

Ideally on a Saturday night after sundown, after Shabbat when you and your family can take time to share this celebration.

Attire:

Nice, festive and comfortable clothes. (You want to create a special atmosphere)

Other important items:

- Tallit,
- The family Bar/Bat Mitzvah Haggadah that you have compiled and created.

Guest list:

Invite family and friends with whom you would like to share this meaningful and reflective Jewish moment.

First Cup

Kos Neshamah---the Cup of Our Uniqueness

Leader Recites:

We are excited as a family that we are going to experience together this Bar\Bat Mitzvah.

We feel very blessed that we are able as a family to prepare for this wonderful event.

We are mindful of the various blessings of our lives.

We are each thankful for being alive.

God has implanted with us the breath of life.

We are never allowed to take that blessing of life for granted.

In our tradition, we believe that all human beings are created in the image of God—
B'tzelem elohim.

Although we are all united in God, each one of us is unique, different and special.

This was intentional.

God wants each of us to be different and to recognize our unique gifts

We are thankful for the gifts that each of us brings to this world and to our family.

Each of us has a unique Neshamah---soul----an aspect of God.

Each of us brings something special to this family and to our world.

Let us never take for granted our own specialness.

Ritual act: (created by child at workshop with assistance of parent)

Look at photographs of child.

Pass around for all to see special photos that uniquely capture child.

Include child material from first workshop: see workshop one

Include parent material from first workshop:

We know that you are a special person.

Parents share their unique recollections of this child.

Parents share what they believe to be unique about their child.

Fill the first cup:

וַיִּפַּח בְּאַפָּיו נִשְׁמַת חַיִּים

And God blew into his nostrils the soul of life. (Genesis 2:7)

Before we begin to discuss this idea let's do an exercise to prepare ourselves. In Jewish tradition this preparation is called a kavannah.

Kavannah

Close your eyes. Listen to the sound of your own breathing. Gently hold the tips of your fingers on the inside of your wrist until you can feel your own pulse. Become aware of the blinking of your eyes. This life in you is not your creation. Through it you are given permission to become aware of the interconnectedness of all life and creation. Now open your eyes and look at another person.

The breathing, the heartbeat, the blinking. They are also in the other human being – this is the n'shama – the soul.

Fill cup of Wine

Recite: **Elohai Neshamah**

אֱלֹהַי, נְשָׁמָה שֶׁנָּתַתָּ בִּי טְהוֹרָה הִיא. אַתָּה בְרָאתָהּ, אַתָּה יְצַרְתָּהּ, אַתָּה נְפַחְתָּהּ בִּי, וְאַתָּה מְשַׁמְּרָהּ בְּקִרְבִּי, וְאַתָּה עָתִיד לִטְלָהּ מִמֶּנִּי, וּלְהַחֲזִירָהּ בִּי לֶעָתִיד לָבוֹא. כָּל זְמַן שֶׁהַנְּשָׁמָה בְּקִרְבִּי, מוֹדֶה (לנקבה מודה) אֲנִי לְפָנֶיךָ, יְיָ אֱלֹהַי וֵאלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתַי, רִבּוֹן כָּל הַמַּעֲשִׂים, אֲדוֹן כָּל הַנְּשָׁמוֹת. בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ, הַמַּחֲזִיר נְשָׁמוֹת לִפְגָרִים מֵתִים.

My God, the soul with which You endowed me is pure. You created it. You formed it You breathed it into me, and Your preserve it within me. A time will come when You will reclaim it from me; but You will return it to me in the life to come.

So long as the souls is within me, I thank You, Lord my God and God of my ancestors, Master of all creatures, Lord of all souls, Praised are you, O Lord, who has restored me to a new day of life. (Morning Prayer from the Talmud, Berakhot 60b)

Recite **Borei Pri Hagefen**

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא פְּרִי הַגָּפֶן.

Baruh ata Adonai, Eloheynu meleh ha-olam, **Borei Pri Hagefen**

Praised are You Lord, Our God, Ruler of the Universe, Creator of the Fruit of the vine.

Drink the First Cup

Second Cup

Kos Mishpahah: The Cup For Our Family

Leader:

We are thankful for our family.

Each one of us has an important role in our families.

We are excited that some of our family members are sitting around this table

And we are grateful that many more will share in the Bar\Bat Mitzvah celebration.

Yet, we are not alone.

We are linked to generations before us.

We have a very large family.

Included in our family are Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Sarah, Rebecca, Leah, and Rachel.

We also have many family members who are no longer dwelling on this earth

But still have an important place in our lives and must be remember and present

When we celebrate this bar\bat mitzvah together.

Ritual:

Kavannah: (recited by all at the seder)

Eternal God, reverently, we stand before this memorial light
As we prepare for the sacred family celebration of this bar\bat mitzvah
We remember important people in our lives—who have completed their early journey among them are: (family members to be remembered)

_____

_____

_____

We thank You, O Lord for the gift of memory
Which enable us to hold these dear ones forever in our hearts
Reminded of life's fleeting nature, may we use each day wisely
Living with compassion, generosity, and integrity,
Thus we will honor the memory of our loved ones
Who continue to be a source of blessing.

Light a yahrzerit candle.

Include Child Material from second workshop:

Genealogy

Include Parent material from second workshop:

Tell story of important family member who is no longer is alive

But who you want to be remembered.

(Ideally, each person at the seder could share a memory or a biographical memory of a person.)

Where were they from?

How are they related to you ?

What values do they represent?

Recite special prayer that you wrote in your workshop, which expresses
What you are grateful for as a family. (This text could be shared with the permission of the rabbi at the bar\bat mitzvah ceremony.)

Fill Second Cup:

Family Blessing: From Ron Wolfson –family Shabbat

הרחמן הוא יברך אותנו כלנו יחד בברכת שלום

1. Ha-Rahaman — May the Merciful One
2. hu y'vareikh — Bless
3. otanu kulanu yahad — All of us together
4. b'virkat shalom — With the blessing of Peace

Recite **Borei Pri Hagefen**

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא פְּרִי הַגָּפֶן

Baruh ata Adonai, Eloheynu meleh ha-olam, **Borei Pri Hagefen**

Praised are You Lord, Our God, Ruler of the Universe, Creator of the Fruit of the vine.

Drink Wine

Third Cup

Kos Mitzvah---the Cup of Jewish Obligation

We are blessed with being part of a great tradition.

The Jewish people were a given a great gift---the Torah which describe how

We as a people are to live our lives.

God loves and cares for us but God also wants something from us.

We are challenged by God to build a holy life.

The bricks for this holy life are the commandments---the Mitzvot.

We Jews have the opportunity to build a holy life by

Studying the sacred commandments and trying to live them in our daily lives.

The years before Bar\Bat Mitzvah, a child begins think about building this holy life.

From the moment of bar\bat mitzvah onward, we dedicated ourselves

To actually building this holy life through study, and action.

Al Shlosha devarim haolam omed, al hatorah, v'al haavodah, v'a; gemillut hasadim.

The Jew builds his life on three important acts:

study of Torah

holy service

deeds of lovingkindness

Ritual:

Adult leader places a tallet on his\her shoulders

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו, וְצִוָּנוּ לְהִתְעַטֵּף בַּצִּיצִת.

Baruh ata Adonai, Eloheynu meleh ha-olam, ashe kid-shanu b'mitz-votav, v'tzivanu l'hit-ateyf ba-tzi-tzit

Praised are You, Lord our God, Ruler of the Universe, who has sanctified our lives through Mitzvot, and enjoined upon us the wearing of the Tallit.

Recites the blessing.

By enwrapping myself in this tallet, I affirm my desire to make mitzvot---holy deeds

Part of my life.

Utilize Child piece (from workshop) :

Child shares a moment when he\she felt closest to God.

Utilize Parent piece:

Share with child a mitzvah that is important to you and that you care deeply

That the bar\bat mitzvah continue as a Jewish adult.

This mitzvah can be any of the 613 commandments.

For example, it could be tzedakah, or Shabbat, or visiting the sick.

Kavannah to be recited by leader:

In traditional Jewish worship, immediately before the reciting of the Shema, we are reminded of God's abounding love. In God's love, He gave us the Torah filled with the jewels of the mitzvot. In the Torah, we have found the sustaining purpose for which to live.

Recite Together: **Ahavah Rabbah**

אַהֲבָה רַבָּה אֲהַבְתָּנוּ, יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ
, חֶמְלָה גְדוֹלָה וִיתֵרָה חָמַלְתָּ עָלֵינוּ. אָבִינוּ מַלְכֵּנוּ, בַּעֲבוּר
אֲבוֹתֵינוּ שֶׁבָּטְחוּ בָךְ, וַתְּלַמְּדֵם חֻקֵּי חַיִּים, כֵּן תְּחָנֵּנוּ וּתְלַמְּדֵנוּ.
אָבִינוּ, הָאָב הָרַחֲמָן, הַמְרַחֵם, רַחֵם עָלֵינוּ, וְתֵן בְּלִבֵּנוּ לְהָבִין
וּלְהַשְׂכִּיל, לִשְׁמֹעַ, לִלְמֹד וּלְלַמֵּד, לִשְׁמֹר וְלַעֲשׂוֹת וּלְקַיֵּם אֶת כָּל
דִּבְרֵי תַלְמוּד תּוֹרָתֶךָ בְּאַהֲבָה. וְהָאֵר עֵינֵינוּ בְּתוֹרָתֶךָ, וְדַבֵּק
לִבֵּנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתֶיךָ, וְיַחֵד לְבָבֵנוּ לְאַהֲבָה וּלְיִרְאָה אֶת שְׁמֶךָ, וְלֹא
נֵבוֹשׁ לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד: כִּי בְשֵׁם קָדְשְׁךָ הַגָּדוֹל וְהַנּוֹרָא בָּטָחְנוּ, נָגִילָה
וְנִשְׂמְחָה בִּישׁוּעָתֶךָ.

With abounding love have You loved us, Lord our God; great and overflowing tenderness have You shown us.

Our Father, our King, for the sake of our ancestors who trusted in You, and whom You taught the laws of life, be also gracious to us and teach us.

Merciful Father, have compassion upon us. Endow us with understanding and discernment, that we may study Your Torah with devotion.

May we heed its words and transmit its precepts; may we follow its instructions and fulfill its teachings in love.

Enlighten our eyes in Your Torah and make our hearts cling to Your commandments. Grant us singleness of purpose to love and revere You, so that we may never be brought to shame.

For we trust in Your awesome holiness; may we rejoice and delight in Your deliverance.

Fill the Third Cup of Wine

Recite **Borei Pri Hagefen**

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא פְּרִי הַגָּפֶן

Baruh ata Adonai, Eloheynu meleh ha-olam, **Borei Pri Hagefen**

Praised are You Lord, Our God, Ruler of the Universe, Creator of the Fruit of the vine.

Fourth Cup

Kos Ha-Am: The Cup of Our People

Leader Recites:

Every person on this earth has many identities.

We are citizens of a community, of a state and of a country.

We belong to many organizations, and clubs

We are especially proud to be a member of the Jewish people

With a unique history, language, culture, land, and religion.

We recognize that there are many other peoples on this earth that

God has also created. And each people contributes something special to this world.

But, we are blessed by being part of the Jewish people.

As people, we feel a special connection with Jews throughout the world.

We are bound to each other by a common history and destiny.

We have a responsibility to care for each other because we really are an extended family.

Wherever Jews live on the seven continents of the earth, we feel each others

Joys, pains, and concerns.

We are especially concerned about Jews who live in the Land of Israel

The place where the patriarchs and matriarchs first settled 3500 years ago,

The destination of the Jews who came forth out of Egypt.

The sanctuary for those Jews who survived the Holocaust.

The haven for those Jews who sought freedom from the nations of the former Soviet Union, Yemen, and Ethiopia.

Most importantly, we are people who have mission from God----to repair the world

In the image of God.

To bring peace, wholeness, brotherhood and sisterhood to all of the nations of the world.

We are to be an or legoyim

A light unto the nations.

We hope that each of us in this family will care deeply about being a Jew

And the sacred obligations that we have to repair the world.

Ritual

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם בורא פרי העץ

Baruh ata Adonai, Eloheynu meleh ha-olam, **Borei Pri Ha-aitz**

Praised are You Lord, Our God, Ruler of the Universe, Creator of the Fruit of the Tree.

Eat Orange

Say:

The orange symbolizes the Jewish People's renewal in its own land. The fragrance of the citrus groves is carried all the way from the coastal plane to the Diaspora. It is a source of pride for Jewish communities the world over

Eat Pomegranate

The pomegranate is one of the seven species---one of the original agricultural bounties of the land of Israel. Just as the pomegranate is full of seeds, so too are each Jews full of mitzvot (commandments) and gifted in making a difference in this world By being God partner in fixing the world.

Child piece:

Reports on a contemporary Jewish community outside the United States
Or community from the Jewish past

Or

Share with group one thing that you would like to fix in this world.

Parent piece:

What specific dream do you have for your child?

What impact do you want your child to have on this world

As a human being and as a Jew?

What do you think the world needs most that your child will offer to the world.

Let us say together a prayer for our world

A PRAYER FOR THE WORLD

Let the rain come and wash away
the ancient grudges, the bitter hatreds
held and nurtured over generations.
Let the rain wash away the memory
of the hurt, the neglect.
Then let the sun come out and
fill the sky with rainbows.
Let the warmth of the sun heal us
wherever we are broken.
Let it burn away the fog so that
we can see each other clearly.
So that we can see beyond labels,
beyond accents, gender or skin color.
Let the warmth and brightness
of the sun melt our selfishness.
So that we can share the joys and
feel the sorrows of our neighbors.
And let the light of the sun
be so strong that we will see all
people as our neighbors.
Let the earth, nourished by rain,
bring forth flowers
to surround us with beauty.
And let the mountains teach our hearts
to reach upward to heaven.
Amen.

Rabbi Harold S. Kushner

Fill fourth Cup

Leader recites this Kavannah: *We Jews always long for connection. Wherever Jews live, we feel a connection to them. This sense of connection is called k'lal Yisrael---the unity of the Jewish people. In our unity, we care for each other and seek to heal the world.*

Recite together: (aveinu section of ahavah Rabbah)

וַהֲבִיאֵנוּ לְשָׁלוֹם מֵאַרְבַּע כַּנְפוֹת הָאָרֶץ, וְתוֹלִיכֵנוּ קוֹמְמִיוּת
לְאַרְצֵנוּ, כִּי אֵל פּוֹעֵל יְשׁוּעוֹת אָתָּה, וּבָנוּ בָחַרְתָּ מִכָּל עַם וְלָשׁוֹן.
וְקֵרַבְתָּנוּ לְשִׁמְךָ הַגָּדוֹל סֶלָה בֶּאֱמֶת לְהוֹדוֹת לְךָ וּלְיַחֶדְךָ
בְּאַהֲבָה. בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ, הַבּוֹחֵר בְּעַמּוֹ יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּאַהֲבָה.

Gather our people in peace, O Lord, from the four corners of the earth, and lead us in dignity to our holy land, for You are the God who performs mighty deeds of deliverance.

You have called us from among the peoples, drawing us close to You, that we may praise You in truth and proclaim Your Oneness in love.

Praised are You, O Lord, who lovingly chose His people Israel for His service

Recite **Borei Pri Hagefen**

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא פְּרִי הַגָּפֶן.

Baruh ata Adonai, Eloheynu meleh ha-olam, **Borei Pri Hagefen**

Praised are You Lord, Our God, Ruler of the Universe, Creator of the Fruit of the vine.

After Seder Activities:

Sing Some of Your favorite Songs

Look at additional family albums.

Show some family movies or videos

Pass a round tzedakah box for tzedakah

Recite Shehekiyanu with a kavannah--concentration

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, שֶׁהֶחֱיָנוּ וְקִיְּמָנוּ וְהִגִּיעָנוּ לַזְּמַן הַזֶּה.

Baruh ata Adonai, Eloheynu meleh ha-olam, sheh-heh-heh-yanu, v'kiy'manu, v'higi-anu la-z'man ha-zeh

Praised are You, Lord or God, King of the Universe, who has kept us in life, sustained us, and enabled us to reach this season

Conclusion:

We have come to the end of this Bar\Bat Mitzvah seder

We are grateful to God for the time that we shared together.

Our family is part of a great journey. It began when Abraham and Sarah

Felt the call of God and were willing to take a risk to follow God into the world

To create a new people, to form a new religion, and to work to create

Wholeness and peace among all the nations of the world.

Our family is part of this wonderful journey.

We have so much to be thankful and so much that we need to accomplish.

Each of us is so important to this family and to our world.

We have been reminded at this seder that

Each of us as a unique Neshamah

Each of us as a special place within this family

Each of us as a responsibility to build a holy life with the guidance

Of God's mitzvot

Each of us as a special connection to all Jews and ultimate to all the peoples of the earth.

As we prepare so thoughtfully for this Bar\Bat Mitzvah, let us never forget

What it really is about.

May God bless on our journey.

Final Ritual Conclusion:

(Finish with standing----interlocking arms and singing)

Let us chant together- Oseh shalom

עֹשֶׂה שָׁלוֹם בִּמְרוֹמָיו הוּא יַעֲשֶׂה שָׁלוֹם עָלֵינוּ וְעַל כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל,
וְאִמְרוּ אָמֵן :

Oseh Shalom bi-m'romav , hu ya-aseh shalom Aleynu v'al kol Yisrael, v'imru amen

Chapter IX

Conclusion

American Judaism is a dynamic tradition. Many cultural and historical forces impact traditional Jewish practices. Over the last 50 years, a shift has occurred from a Judaism rooted in identification and membership in a community and its institutions to a Judaism based in and motivated by individual discovery and autonomy.

Bar\Bat Mitzvah is a sacred life cycle event for American Jews. Even Jewish families of marginal affiliation want their child to become bar\bat mitzvah. This desire propels Jews to affiliate with synagogues, to educate their children, and to spend a great deal of money to affirm this tradition.

Yet, Jewish educators must recognize that this ceremony and its associated obligations and celebrations do not exist in isolation. Adult Jews, who are generally experiencing the bar\bat mitzvah of their children at midlife, are searching for meaning and wholeness in their lives.

Jewish educators have an opportunity to utilize the bar\bat mitzvah experience to assist adult Jews in finding meaning in their lives and connection with the Jewish tradition and Jewish community. My research has reinforced my dismay that not enough work is being done in assisting Jewish parents, preparing for their child's bar\bat mitzvah, to make sense of their spiritual and religious heritage. Moreover, we are not doing enough to address the increasing privatization of the bar\bat mitzvah ceremony.

My bar\bat mitzvah Seder is one attempt at trying to find way to connect Jewish parents to their own spiritual needs and to their community. People need more than

direction. They need help with developing meaning. I hope that this project is one positive step towards addressing this important need.

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