

## **Bar and Bat Mitzvah Services**

October 3, 1996

"Who reads a verse in its proper season  
promotes the good of the world."

Joshua B. Haninia  
Talmud: Kalla Rabbati, ch. 1.

### QUESTION:

When are Bar and Bat Mitzvah services held at Congregation B'nai Israel?

### ANSWER:

Bar and Bat Mitzvah services are conducted as part of our regular congregation Torah services on Saturday mornings, or occasionally on Friday evenings.

The meaning of Bar or Bat Mitzvah is "one who is responsible for the performance of mitzvot (commandments)." While all Jews over the age of 13 have this responsibility, and are therefore B'nai Mitzvah, it is customary to recognize the coming of age of an individual by calling him or her to the bimah for the honor of performing the mitzvah of reading from the Torah. The service is a joyous life cycle event for the young adult and the family.

The practice of reading Torah in public is an ancient one. Moses commanded that the Israelites should read the Torah on the Sabbath, on festivals and on new moons. The Mishna shows that by the end of the second century C.E. there were regular Torah readings on Monday, on Thursday and on Sabbath, as well as the special readings for the festivals and fast days.

Thus, through the centuries, the reading of Torah at a public service has become a profoundly Jewish act, signifying an understanding and acceptance of the Law and a recognition of its central place in Jewish life. By inviting its young adults to read from Torah, the Congregation is affirming and celebrating their new status as active participants in the Jewish community. As a communal celebration, the service has deep meaning for the young adult who is called to the Torah, for the family, for the entire congregation.

The raising and education of a Jewish child is a shared effort undertaken by the family and the Jewish community. The moment when the new Bar or Bat Mitzvah ascends the bimah to take up the mantle of Judaism is the fruition of the labors of many who have served the congregation. The simcha (joyous occasion) is a central part of congregational life. The essence of the mitzvah, assumption of the duty to read Torah, achieves its full meaning in the context of community and thus is realized in a regular congregational Torah service. Thus, while the service strengthens the bonds of the young adult to Judaism and the congregation, it also strengthens the bonds of the congregation to our faith and to one another.

In the Reform Movement, and at our Congregation, Torah is read at Saturday morning services and occasionally on Friday evenings. B'nai Mitzvah will be called to the bimah as part of our communal reading of the Torah.

Affirmed by the Temple Board on  
October 3, 1996, based on  
recommendation from the  
Religious Practices Committee and the Rabbi