

**Models for Adult Jews**  
**(Message to Adult B'nai Mitzvah)**

**Rabbi Melanie Aron**

**December 12, 2020**

In a moment it will be our privilege to bless you with ancient words, but before we do that, I want to say a word about Joseph, Hanukkah, and the importance of what you have chosen to do.

Joseph is the first Diaspora Jew. That is not only because he lived most of his life outside of Israel, but because of how he lived his life.

Joseph was married to someone who wasn't Jewish. He had a secular name, Zaphenath Paneah, in addition to his Hebrew name. His sons were assimilated enough that their grandfather initially didn't recognize them at his deathbed. God wasn't chatting with him every Monday and Thursday like Abraham and Isaac.

And yet, Joseph always identified himself to others as a Hebrew. Without speaking with God, he saw God of the source of his ability to interpret dreams, and of the behind-the-scenes power that got him to Egypt in time to help stave off starvation during the famine. His children had Hebrew names, and when the Land of Israel was apportioned in the time of Joshua, they were two of the twelve tribes, Ephraim and Menashe.

And what about Hanukkah, when we always read about Joseph? It celebrates events that took place within the land of Israel, but like Purim it has become a holiday about survival in the Diaspora. And while Purim is about physical survival,

Hanukkah is about cultural, spiritual survival. As Mattathias responded to the request that he as a community leader model obedience to the King's command:

Though all the nations that are under the king's dominion obey him, and fall away every one from the religion of their fathers, and give consent to his commandments: Yet will I and my sons and my people walk in the covenant of our fathers. God forbid that we should forsake the law and the ordinances. We will not hearken to the king's words, to go from our religion, either on the right hand, or the left.

In committing to the preparations for this Bar and Bat Mizvah, you have shown that Judaism will not be a passive identity for you. You have committed to learning and to making Judaism central in your life.

We are so proud of you this morning, of all that you have accomplished, and of all your thoughtfulness along the way. May you go always from strength to strength.