

RABBI LI-PAZ'S THOUGHTS ON BAR/BAT MITZVAH

Psychologists speak of a specific moment in an infant's development in which he or she realizes that he or she is not, in fact, the center of the world. The infant learns that when Mommy goes out of sight, she has not ceased to exist but needs to be elsewhere at that moment. Our hope is that by means of a meaningful journey to Bar and Bat Mitzvah, our children will mature in their perspectives and realize that they are in a world that requires something of them. We want them to see their relationships to family members, friends and strangers as sacred encounters and as opportunities to bring light where it is dimmed, peace where there is conflict. Our hope is that our children will be enriched by their Jewish heritage so that they can enrich the world in their lifetimes.

Nineteen hundred years ago, the sage Judah ben Tema found that life would be defined by action and that the responsibility for one's actions would coincide with physical maturity. He, like the countless sages and rabbis after him, did not want a child's body to evolve from child to adult without the heart and mind following suit. Judah ben Tema decided that thirteen was the appropriate age for a spiritual shift from boy to man. It is only in the twentieth century that girls and women began to celebrate coming of age religiously with a *Bat Mitzvah* ceremony, after Reform Judaism in Germany pioneered the inclusion of women in an equal role in synagogue life in the early 1800s. Some communities conduct Bat Mitzvahs at age thirteen in the interest of gender equality and others recognize the differences in adolescent development by conducting Bat Mitzvahs at age twelve. At VOS, we follow the latter and will guide a girl to become Bat Mitzvah at age twelve.