


# My Bat Mitzvah



Chabad Jewish Center ♦ Basking Ridge, New Jersey



**B**at Mitzvah marks a very important milestone, a fundamental shift in life: The transition from young girl to responsible young adult. So, a Bat Mitzvah shouldn't just be a party; it's too important. A Bat Mitzvah needs a soul. Such an experience deserves a pivotal place in life's rhythm and a powerful sense of meaning. The young celebrant should certainly feel a sense of relevance and connectedness to this auspicious threshold in her life.

We want your daughter to take pride in her Jewish identity. We want her to feel anticipation, eager to take her place as a full fledged member of the Jewish nation. We want her to recognize her integral part in our beautiful traditions and rich heritage. We want to inspire a sense of responsibility to her self, to her fellow human beings and, above all, to G-d.

It's truly a special time, and our goal is to help your family realize the energy of this powerful moment.

- What is the deeper meaning to becoming a Bat Mitzvah?
- What is its significance?
- How has it been celebrated through history?
- How do we celebrate the Bat Mitzvah at Chabad?
- What does the preparation process entail?
- Where's my place as a parent in the Bat Mitzvah?
- Where does my family fit in?

Please remember: We want this event to meet your specific needs; if you'd like to taper the program for particular reasons, please feel free to consult our Rabbis.

**Mazel Tov! Your daughter is growing up, and she'll be celebrating the biggest event of her adolescent life:  
Her Bat Mitzvah.**

# I

# What is a Bat Mitzvah.....

## A Look at Bat Mitzvah Through the Lens of the DEVELOPMENTAL SPECTRUM



As you watch your child grow into an adult, you are observing the 'unfolding' of his persona. As time passes, developmental stages are reached and actualized, and a new level of identity blossoms. It's the natural flow of life. We can call it the developmental spectrum. At a certain point on this continuum, a child is ready to step beyond childhood. Still short of adulthood, the youth enters a 'post-childhood' phase. At this stage, she is ready to accept responsibility for her actions, and ready to 'step-up' as a reliable functionary in family and society.

In Jewish tradition, Bat Mitzvah is that stage; it's exiting childhood and crossing the threshold into 'post-childhood'. We want to make the most of this stage...

But, for thousands of years, we've seen it as more than the natural unfolding of the psyche. We see Bat Mitzvah as a time when the soul begins to 'blossom', allowing the individual to find 'moral maturity' within herself. It's seen as a point of time when we can begin to find a crystallization/awareness of our values which we know to be correct - and have that awareness guide our conduct.

## In Judaism, SPIRITUAL CELEBRATIONS

### find PHYSICAL EXPRESSIONS

In Jewish thought, 'celebrations of the spirit' also need to be 'celebrations of the body'. A Bat Mitzvah is a multi-dimensional event, celebrating a number of spiritual, psychological and emotional events in the child's and family's life. Therefore a Bat Mitzvah event needs to find TANGIBLE ways to express all these facets. In planning a meaningful Bat Mitzvah, we need to identify the psycho-spiritual facets of celebration and then bring them to tangible expression in our celebration.



## What are some spiritual CONCEPTS we are celebrating?

A Bat Mitzvah celebrates the first 12 years of a child's life; childhood is a formative stage and is a foundation for life.

A Bat Mitzvah celebrates the child's commitment to living her life as a Jewish adult.

A Bat Mitzvah celebrates our Torah, which gives us a world-view and guidance on how to lead a meaningful life.

A Bat Mitzvah celebrates the idea that this girl is now taking her rightful place as part of the Jewish community.

A Bat Mitzvah celebrates the new link in the chain of Jewish continuity.

To think about: How can we infuse these important concepts into the design of the Bat Mitzvah celebration?

# 2

## How we celebrate at Chabad....

Rather than focus on a 'Bat Mitzvah product', or just the 'special day', we emphasize the 'process' of maturation, responsibility and Jewish identity. The readings and Mitzvah projects are direct expressions of this process.

### YOUR DAUGHTER'S CEREMONY INCLUDES:

- Hebrew and English Torah readings
- A speech, with reflections on the meaning of this important milestone, her path in reaching it, etc.
- A representation of the Mitzvah Project that your daughter worked on over the course of her Bat Mitzvah preparation.
- The rabbi's explanation of the process, ceremony and respective readings
- As per your guidance, we call on family-members and friends for readings and/or personal reflections.
- A handout will be prepared for all the guests containing all the above readings and some additional prayers. The handout generally contains a personalized message/s from the family. If you like, you can also design your own cover.
- The parents (and grandparents if you choose) bless the Bat Mitzvah girl. They will also convey the continuity of tradition with a 'Judaic bestowal', e.g Shabbat candlestick, etc.
- A candy throw, in which we shower the Bat Mitzvah with sweetness.

### 12 TORAH PASSAGES:

Twelve passages of Scripture, Talmud and Jewish Spirituality will form the core of your daughter's readings. We have selected these passages because they each articulate a developmentally-appropriate message for your child. They are not just religious texts for a Bat Mitzvah event; they are messages for life, and we hope that these values will become 'tools for a meaningful life' as your daughter matures into adult life.

Please see page 11 for more details.

# 3

## Ceremony Options.....

The celebration described above is not a formal prayer service per se; it's a free-standing, Judaic celebration of your daughter's Bat Mitzvah. We can schedule this ceremony and shape its schedule in a way which will maximize the Bat Mitzvah meaning and celebration. Families have typically chosen these times/models:

### SUNDAY, LATE MORNING OR EARLY AFTERNOON

The ceremony revolves around the Twelve Passages mentioned above and including other readings for family and friends. The ceremony will typically last under an hour.

#### If you choose to celebrate the Bat Mitzvah this way:

- ◆ The rabbi welcomes everyone and describes the Bat Mitzvah service.
- ◆ The Bat Mitzvah girl reads the 12 Passages mentioned above.
- ◆ You may invite family and friends to read prayers or share thoughts.
- ◆ The Bat Mitzvah girl addresses the audience, incorporating lessons from her readings and Mitzvah Project.

NOTE: Please schedule service after 11:30 a.m. as not to disrupt the Hebrew School schedule. Hebrew School students who are guests of the Bat Mitzvah are expected to attend school that morning.



## FRIDAY NIGHT CANDLE LIGHTING SERVICE

We launch the Shabbat on Friday evening with the women's/girls' traditional candle-lighting. The congregation then recites prayers to welcome the Shabbat. This service places great emphasis on the 'Shabbat Bride' (sometimes referred to as the Shabbat Queen), emphasizing the feminine dimension. Through the liturgy's sensitive eyes, we attempt to review the past week's events, struggles, successes and failures, to bring meaning to a hectic world. We then recite the Kiddush and partake in the traditional Shabbat Meal.



### **If you choose to celebrate the Bat Mitzvah this way:**

- ◆ The Bat Mitzvah girl leads the women and girls in the candle lighting and blessing
- ◆ The Bat Mitzvah guests partake in the Bat Mitzvah ceremony (as detailed in the side bar and tailored to as per your discussions with the Rabbis)
- ◆ The prayer service will be conducted by Rabbi Herson and our cantor, Rabbi Choni Teitlebaum
- ◆ After the service, the Bat Mitzvah girl can recite the Kiddush
- ◆ The Bat Mitzvah girl reads the 12 Passages mentioned above.
- ◆ You may invite family and friends to read prayers or share thoughts.
- ◆ The Bat Mitzvah girl addresses the audience, incorporating lessons from her readings and Mitzvah Project.
- ◆ The family of the Bat Mitzvah girl may opt to host a dinner or dessert reception

NOTE: During the winter months the Bat Mitzvah celebration will begin with candle lighting, and then progress into the evening prayer service and ceremony. During the summer months, when sunset is later, the Bat Mitzvah celebration will begin with the Bat Mitzvah ceremony, followed by candle-lighting and the Shabbat prayer service.

Please bear in mind that videos and cameras are welcome **until** the Candle Lighting Service, which signals the beginning of the Shabbat.

## SATURDAY EVENING - HAVDALA



Jewish tradition calls for a ceremony, known as Havdala, every Saturday evening. The Havdala serves as a transition between Shabbat and the weekdays, and incorporates blessings over wine, fragrances and candles, respectively. The ceremony typically lasts an hour. Separate seating is not necessary during this ceremony.

### **If you choose to celebrate the Bat Mitzvah this way:**

- ◆ The rabbi welcomes everyone and describes the Havdala service.
- ◆ The Bat Mitzvah girl then begins her Bat Mitzvah ceremony, reciting the Havdala, honoring close family members by having them participate in parts of the service, and using various parts of the service on page (as per your discussions with the Rabbis).
- ◆ Guests can hold their own candles and spice packets, if desired.
- ◆ The Bat Mitzvah girl reads the 12 Passages mentioned above.
- ◆ You may invite family and friends to read prayers or share thoughts.
- ◆ The Bat Mitzvah girl addresses the audience, incorporating lessons from her readings and Mitzvah Project.

NOTE: This service only takes place after nightfall. Thus, this option only works practically speaking in the Fall and Winter months.

## SUNDAY OR WEEKDAY MORNING OR EVENING CEREMONY

These are possible to arrange in consultation with the Rabbi.

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## Preparation Time Line.....



### PRELIMINARY MEETING:

Approximately 8 months prior to your daughter's Bat Mitzvah, we will have our first meeting (Rabbi Yitzchok Mouly, our Bat Mitzvah Coordinator, will call you to schedule the meeting). The primary objective of this first meeting is to get to know each other and for you to share what you envision the Bat Mitzvah journey to be like. Rabbi Yitzchok Mouly and Rabbi Mendy Herson will facilitate this discussion with you and your daughter. At this meeting, we will present our special **BAT MITZVAH KIT**. This kit will include questionnaires so that we can better get to know each other. (We ask that you bring these completed forms to the following meeting.) We

will also begin discussing the possibilities for the ceremony and readings (as described in Part 2, 3) for the event. Your daughter will be assigned a **READING COACH**, who will help her hone her Hebrew reading skills.

### OVER THE NEXT 8 MONTHS:

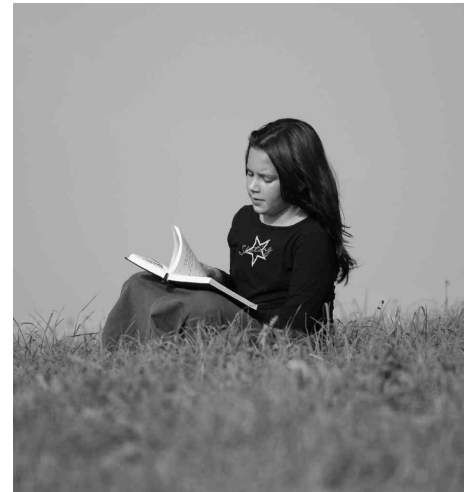
- Your daughter will be meeting with her coach and/or the rabbi once a week over the course of this preparation process. Each meeting will be approximately ½ hour.
  - Three out of four appointments will be devoted to perfecting your daughter's **diction/cadence** with regard to Bat-Mitzvah ceremony's text(s).
  - The fourth will be devoted to **study and discussions** with Rabbi Herson about the lessons and meaning behind the readings.
  - During the appointments with Rabbi Herson, the Bat Mitzvah girl will discuss her choice of a **Mitzvah Project**. The Mitzvah Project has two dimensions: one of a 'social consciousness' nature and the other of a 'ritual' nature (e.g. Tefillin, Mezuzah).
  - For six of those weeks, your daughter will partake in a special '**Bat Mitzvah Discovery Course**'. (There will be no personal coaching during those weeks, but we will schedule 'telephone appointments' to ensure that the reading remains on schedule.)
  - Rabbi Herson will **meet with your family** to discuss the ceremony and its significance, and a second time to explore the Mitzvah project and its significance.
- Your daughter's preparation will be scheduled so as to have her ready with her readings two weeks in advance of the Bat-Mitzvah.

### TWO WEEKS BEFORE THE BAT MITZVAH:

- Two weeks before the event, when your daughter has absorbed the readings and their messages, the Rabbi and she will begin to chart her Bat Mitzvah **speech**.

### ACTUAL DAY OF THE BAT MITZVAH:

- Regardless of when you schedule your ceremony and party, the actual 'Bat Mitzvah day' is your daughter's twelfth birthday on the Jewish calendar. With your permission, the Rabbi will **visit your daughter at home** on that day - perhaps for just a few minutes - to celebrate the day's unique character.



# & Preparation Components.....

individualized:

## FORMAL INSTRUCTION

The Bat Mitzvah girl will embark on a one-to-one course of study designed to prepare the Bat Mitzvah girl for her big day. The meetings will focus on perfecting your daughter's diction/cadence with regard to Bat Mitzvah ceremony's text(s) and with discussions about the lessons and meaning behind the readings. Towards the end of the process, the rabbi will work with your daughter in her crafting of a meaningful, personalized and relevant Bat Mitzvah speech.

## MITZVAH PRACTICE & PROJECT

The Torah is a program for life, a 'user's manual' if you will. This isn't just theoretical; the Torah's ideas need to find expression in actual conduct. In light of that, we strongly encourage the Bat Mitzvah girl to adopt specific practices. For example:

- ◆ Regular (even if it's not weekly) attendance at Shabbat Services
- ◆ Lighting Shabbos candles each Friday night.
- ◆ Designating a Tzedaka box in her bedroom and placing a coin there every day (except for Shabbat).

Over the course of the preparation process, the Bat Mitzvah girl will choose a Mitzvah Project; this has two dimensions: one of a 'social consciousness' nature and the other of a 'ritual' nature (e.g. Tefillin, Mezuzah). We will work with your son so that he can incorporate this into his Bat Mitzvah ceremony.

.....  
group setting:

## 'DISCOVERY COURSE'

The Bat Mitzvah girl is required to join an 8-week Bat Mitzvah Discovery Course offered twice yearly at the Chabad Jewish Center. The course serves as a forum for discussion and discovery that will delve into specific Jewish topics relating to Jewish faith and the role of a Jewish woman.

The Discovery Course will explore various female personalities in the Torah, specific mitzvot relating to women and impart a sense of Jewish pride. Each session will also include creative crafts and workshops relating to the material covered.

## DISCOVERY COURSE TOPICS

### 1. WHAT DO JEWS BELIEVE?

Judaism's basic tenets (Based on Maimonides' 'Thirteen Principles of Faith')

### 2. SO G-D CREATED A WORLD, BUT WHY?

What purpose could there be in our existence? An exploration of life's meaning.

### 3. THE JEW. THE JEWS. THE JEWISH LAND.

An analysis of Jewish identity, Jewish nationhood and the Land of Israel.

### 4. THE CROWN OF CREATION - FROM EVE ONWARDS

G-d is gender-neutral, manifesting both masculine and feminine energies. So what is 'Divine femininity'?

### 5. PRAYER AND PROPHECY

Explore feminine spiritual potential, talents and accomplishments.

### 6. 3 SPECIAL MITZVOT - AN IN-DEPTH ANALYSIS

Women are responsible for many mitzvot, but we'll focus on three specific ones which are especially helpful in expressing the feminine dimension.

### 7. 'THE WOMAN OF EXCELLENCE'

A detailed analysis of one of the most famous chapters of proverbs, written by King Solomon more than 2500 years ago. This chapter, written about his mother Batsheva, outlines the special power of the Jewish Woman.

### 8. CLOSING: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF A BAT MITZVAH

A deep appreciation and understanding of this transformational life cycle event.

We will provide a special binder in which will be recorded all the above mentioned studies and accomplishments as they are fulfilled. In addition a certificate will be issued upon completion of the course.

# 5

## Notes.....

### CATERING OPTIONS



**East Side Deli**  
Somerville, NJ  
908.927.0270  
[www.theeast-sidedeli.com](http://www.theeast-sidedeli.com)

**Grand Summit Hotel**  
Summit, NJ  
908.273.3000  
[www.grandsummit.com](http://www.grandsummit.com)  
(must request kosher)

**Jerusalem Restaurant**  
Livingston, NJ  
973.533.1424  
[www.jerusalem-restaurant.com](http://www.jerusalem-restaurant.com)

**Lin's Kosher Chinese**  
Manville, NJ  
908.722.8668  
[www.lin-kosher.com](http://www.lin-kosher.com)

**Martinsville Inn Caterers**  
Martinsville, NJ  
732.469.9000  
[www.martinsvilleinn.com](http://www.martinsvilleinn.com)

**Mosaica**  
Millburn, NJ  
908.206.9911  
[www.mosaicakosher.com](http://www.mosaicakosher.com)

**Pomp n' Platters**  
Morristown, NJ  
973.539.4314

**ShopRite Kosher Experience**  
Bound Brook, NJ  
732.302.9299

We hope you find the following information helpful in your planning:

- ◆ If you have chosen to have your daughter's Bat Mitzvah as part of a regularly-scheduled prayer service, the services will be led in Hebrew, with accompanying English explanation.
- ◆ All prayer books are Hebrew/English. All announcements, speeches and sermons are in English.
- ◆ Jewish Law prevents us from allowing pictures on Shabbat. However, you are welcome to schedule a weekday photo and video session. Photos and videos are permitted at Saturday evening and Sunday events.
- ◆ We will provide assistance and samples for the wording of the Bat Mitzvah invitation. Please submit a copy of the invitation prior to printing.
- ◆ Chabad will help guide your family in planning for the celebration, including a booklet to help guests follow the Bat Mitzvah ceremony.
- ◆ We traditionally have the assembled guests throw candies after your child completes his readings. Chabad will provide candy for the candy throw.
- ◆ Our facility can accommodate your Kiddush. Menus can range from simple to deluxe depending on the family's choice; we are available to discuss the menu and various catering options.
- ◆ The Center has 200 chairs, fifteen 5-foot tables, three 8-foot tables and ten 5-foot round tables. If you need more chairs or if you would like other size tables for your reception they can be rented from a local vendor.
- ◆ All food and liquor served after the service must meet the kosher standards of the Chabad Jewish Center. Please see the list of appropriate caterers for your reception.

**The total fee is \$1,000**

**This includes:**

**Bat Mitzvah 'Discovery Course'**

**Private Training with Tutor**

**Facility Use (including set-up and clean-up)**

**This does not include caterer's fees.**

# the 12 Passages

Twelve passages of Scripture, Talmud & Jewish Spirituality form the core of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah readings. These are not just texts for a Bar/Bat Mitzvah event; they are 'tools for meaningful living,' as they present an empowering world view.

**1** TORAH TZIVAH LANU MOSHE MORASHAH KEHILAT YAAKOV.  
Moshe prescribed the Torah for us; it is an inheritance of Jacob's nation. (Duet. 33:4)

The Torah is an invaluable gift; in it, G-d gave us the 'instruction manual' for life. This very special document is ours, mine and yours; it is our heritage. By appreciating that the Torah is our inheritance, we recognize that our relationship with the Torah is essential; we don't have to earn it. It belongs to each of us equally. It's ours, and now we have to work to open ourselves to the Torah's lessons so that we may become better people through our 'inheritance'.

**2** SHEMA YISRAEL, G-D DO-NOI ELO-HAI-NOO, AH-DO-NOI ECHAD.  
Hear O Israel, G-d is our L-rd, G-d is One. (Duet. 6:4)

In recognizing that G-d is One, we are acknowledging that G-d is One with the world; nothing is outside 'G-d's interest' and the need for meaningfulness. In a world with many competing influences, we recognize G-d as the Ultimate Force in control of the world.

**3** B'CHOL DOR VADOR CHAYAV ADAM LEEROT ET ATZMO KI-EELOO HOO YATZA M'MITZRAYIM.  
In every generation one should feel as if he personally 'left Egypt'. (Pesachim 116b)

As a nation, we owe our existence - and our gratitude - to G-d pulling us out of the Egyptian slavery. G-d gives us so many blessings, many of which we may take for granted. But every day we should take the time to acknowledge our gifts, both to ourselves and to G-d. Also, all of us have obstacles to overcome. Sometimes it's the obvious obstacles to the 'better self', like bad habits. Sometimes it's a more subtle problem like self-satisfaction, which blunts the desire for growth. Every day we need to define, and transcend, our 'personal Egypts.' (The Hebrew word for Egypt shares its root with the word for 'limitation'.]

**4** KOL YISRAEL YAISH LAHEM CHEILEK L'OLAM HA'BAH, SHENE'EMAR V'AMEICH KOOLUM TZADIKKIM, L'OLOM YIRSHOO ORETZ, NEITZER MATO'AIY MA'ASEI YO-DYE L'HISPOER..  
"All Israel have a share in the World To Come, as it is stated (Isaiah 60:21): 'And Your people are tzadikkim (righteous).' They shall inherit the land forever. They are the branch of My planting, the work of My hands, in which I take pride." (Sanhedrin 90a)

G-d takes special pride in us, like a gardener cares for a tiny seedling. G-d's caring and nurture will never cease, and we have a responsibility to analyze our own growth, to make sure we're doing our bit to care for 'G-d's seed', ourselves.

**5** KEE KAROV AILECHA HADAVOR ME'OD B'FEECHA U'VIL'VOV'CHA LA'ASOTO.  
It is within your reach to follow the Torah in speech, with feeling and action. (Duet 30:14 as explained in Tanya)

A young child understands attraction to toys, sweets and fun. While the young child may not see the beauty and attraction in Morality and Holiness, the Torah tells us that it's within reach - entirely plausible - for a person to find deep appreciation in the spiritual and G-dly.

**6** V'HEENEI HASHEM NEETZAV ALAV UMELO CHAL HA-ARETZ KEVODO UMABIT ALAV UVOCHAIN KLAYOT VALEIV IM OVDO KARA-DOY.  
G-d is close to each of us and counts on each of us, and G-d searches our minds and hearts for our true intentions. (Tanya, Chap 41)

G-d, in all His glory, is depending on us. We are the ones who have the lives full of moral choices, and G-d is watching and waiting, hoping that we'll make the right decisions. Imagine! G-d is rooting for each of us to be successful!

**7** TORAH TZIVAH LANU MOSHE MORASHAH KEHILAT YAAKOV.  
In the beginning, G-d created the heavens and the earth. (Gen 1:1)

A growing child can already discern that there are 'imperfections' in the world and society. There are saddening elements, inequities etc. So a person should recognize that this world is created and managed by G-d, and that G-d has asked us to use the Torah to engage the world and bring it to its perfect potential. In that way, each 'imperfection' is a call to action on our part.

**8** VE-SHEE-NAN-TAM-LE-VA-NECHA V'DEE-BAR-TA BAM, BE-SHIV-TECHA B'VAI-TE-CHA U'VE-LECH-TECHA V'DERECH U'VE-SHACHBECHA U'VE-KU-MECHA.  
Teach the Torah to your children, and speak about it when you are home and when you travel, before you lie down to sleep and when you wake up. (Duet 6:7)

The Torah wants parents to care for their children, and one of the most important elements of that caring is the transmission of values. A child should recognize that they are fortunate in the fact that people are ready, willing and able to invest their efforts into the child's study. And this obviously needs to go beyond the study per se, permeating the way we are at home and 'on Main Street'.

**9** YAGATEE V'LO MATZATEE AL TA'AMIN. LO YAGATEE U'MATZOTEE AL TA'AMIN. YAGATEE U'MATZOTEE TA'AMIN.

"I exerted proper effort but was not successful." That is not a believable statement.  
"I succeeded despite not having exerted effort." That is not a believable statement.  
"I have exerted effort, thus I was successful." That is believable! (Talmud, Megillah 6b)

When a person recognizes a character flaw and tries to improve that area, it's very possible that s/he won't meet immediate success. At the first 'failure', there may be a tendency to say "I give up. I can't change myself. This is just the way I am." But that is not the effective way to respond. The proper response is, "I didn't try hard enough; let's give it a better shot."

**10** V'AHAVTA L'REI-ACHA KAMOCHA RABBI AKIVA OMER ZEH KLAL GADOL BATORAH.  
Rabbi Akiva teaches that, "Love your fellow as you love yourself," is an essential principle of the Torah. (Lev 19:18, Midrash)

Caring for one's own character improvement isn't sufficient. Our friends have their own struggles too. We must be sensitive to that and try to enable and support our friends' character growth. Just as we are each working on reaching our own 'best self' we want to scaffold our friends' journey.

**11** V'ZEH KOL HA'ADAM V'TACHLIT BREE'ATO U'V'REE-AT KAL HA-OLAMOT ELYONIM V'TACH-TONIM, LEE-HE-YOT LO DEERA ZO B'TACH-TONIM.  
The purpose of our existence is to make a home for G-d in this world. (Tanya, Ch 33)

G-d has given each and every one of us a job to do: Influence ourselves and our environments toward goodness and G-dliness. This purpose is the entire objective of all Creation. No matter our age we can still bring meaning to all of existence.

**12** YISMACH YISRAEL B'OSOV, PAIROOSH SHEKAL MEE SHEHOO MIZERA YISRAEL YESH LO LISMO'ACH B'SIMCHAT HASHEM ASHER SOS V'SAMEYACH B'DEERATO B'TACHTONIM.  
We should rejoice in our Maker (G-d). We should each share in G-d's joy, for He is happy with the reason that He created the world for us. (Tanya, Ch 33)

The idea that we each, on any given day and at any given age, have opportunities to achieve the objective of the entire Creation, should fill us each with joy. What deeper, more substantive, joy can there be that the recognition that we are doing something of cosmic, eternal value?

# Get a Life!

By Yanki Tauber  
Reprinted from Chabad.org

**W**e Jews are a funny people. We celebrate the weirdest things. Everyone's heard of end-of-the-school-year parties, graduation parties, retirement parties. But who ever throws a get-to-work party?

Let me explain. Imagine that you have this dream job that's the envy of all your friends. Then, one day you receive a summons to the boss's office. The conversation goes something like this:

**Boss:** "Have a seat."

**You:** "Thank you."

**Boss:** "You've been here -- what is it, twelve years now?"

**You:** "Yeah, it's almost that already. You guys take such good care of me..."

**Boss:** "We pay you a comfortable living wage, plus full health benefits, free day care and spa privileges, 31 days annual paid vacation..."

**You:** "Yes. I'm truly thankful."

**Boss:** "And what are your duties and responsibilities?"

**You:** "Nothing. Nada. Zilch. I've no duties or responsibilities."

**Boss:** "You don't even have to come to work, if you don't want to."

**You:** "Oh, but I do. Lots of times. It's fun. I hang around the office, see how things are done. Sometimes they even let me help out. You'd be surprised at how much I've learned. And I participate in all the company banquets and outings. I wouldn't miss those for anything..."

**Boss:** "Well, young lady, the party's over."

**You:** "W-what do you mean?"

**Boss:** "The party's over. Here, take this manual. It spells out your obligations..."

**You:** "Uh, it's sorta big and heavy. There must be almost a thousand pages in this book..."

**Boss:** "Actually, what you're holding in your hand is a very basic

summary. The rest is in the library downstairs..."

**You:** "Oh, I know the library. There are tens of thousands of volumes there..."

**Boss:** "Well, we're doing important work here. And, starting tonight at sundown, you're going to be expected to be doing your part. You'll begin by following instructions, but to do your job right, you'll also need to understand the whys and the hows behind those instructions... You've picked up quite a bit in your time here, but we have guys who've been here all they're adult lives and are still learning. Anyway, congratulations and good luck. I'll be watching your progress over the next 108 years..."

**You:** "... a hundred and eight years?"

**Boss:** "At least. Hopefully longer. Oh, by the way, don't forget to pick up your new ID tag at the front office on your way out."

After a conversation like that, would you run home and throw a party to celebrate? My daughter did. This week, she celebrated her Bat Mitzvah, the day that she became twelve years old. A Bat Mitzvah is not an oversized birthday party. Leah's had eleven of those already. This is very different. What she celebrated was the fact that on the eve of her twelfth birthday she became bat mitzvah - a person who under Torah law is commanded, obligated and responsible to fulfill the mitzvot of the Torah.

She celebrated the fact that the Boss had called her into the office and told her that the party was over. Until now, she'd received everything her heart desired from Above and was not required to give anything in return. She was in learning mode -- hanging around the office, picking up knowledge, getting a feel for how things are done. Now, she's a full-fledged employee, with a long list of duties and responsibilities. More than that -- she's been made a partner in the company, fully responsible to make the enterprise work.

She's delighted. She threw a sumptuous party for her friends and family. We feasted, sang and danced and celebrated the event as the happiest day of her life to date.

It may be that life as a free lunch has its attractions. Very quickly, though, it becomes tedious and meaningless, forcing the free-luncher to work harder and harder at all the contrivances that pump artificial meaning into life. But the fun leaks out faster than the most vigorous pumper can pump, leaving one deflated and defeated.

That's why we Jews don't throw retirement parties. Instead, we celebrate the day that we're handed the big fat book filled with duties and obligations and the ID tag that reads "Fully Responsible Member." Because we know that there is nothing more gratifying than being given a life that is truly our own.

# The Knowing "I"

By Tzvi Freeman

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**W**hy do we become a bar/bat mitzvah at adolescence? Because something dramatic happens to our minds at this time: A sort of awakening, a state of consciousness, a realization that "I exist."

The Jewish sages called it da'at--roughly translated as "knowledge" or "consciousness." Knowledge usually means knowledge about things outside of oneself. But this da'at is the knowledge of the one who is knowing. The "I."

Nothing is more frightening than this knowledge of "I"--yet nothing is more empowering. Without it, there is no accountability, no freedom, no way to take your life into your own hands. All of these things become possible only once you can look back at your own self and say, "Why did I do that and not this?" "Is this really what I want to do?" "Is this really who I want to be?" Only then can we call you a bar/bat mitzvah.

No, it is not sudden. Gaining da'at is a gradual process. It seems closely related to the development of language.

By the age of three, most children have enough da'at to start learning the difference between right and wrong. That is why three years old is the age a Jewish child traditionally begins his or her formal education. New discoveries of self continue at critical stages of childhood--and even later. It's not until twenty years of age, the sages determined, that most people develop a "mind of their own."

But no transformation in life can compare to that of adolescence. At that age, da'at unravels from its cocoon and a human being emerges. For that is a human being: A being that knows itself.

Knowing is everything. The world comes into being, the Kabbalists say, because G-d knows it to be. If so, knowing is the fabric of which all things are made: Everything is knowing.

Electrons know the direction of the positive and negative poles of their electromagnetic field--if they did not, we would have no electricity in our homes. Every atom knows of every other atom in the universe--otherwise we would have no gravity.

Every living cell knows the code to its own reproduction and the pattern of its own survival. The bacteria that invade a host organism know just how many of them there are after multiplying within that host--so that all as one, at the moment they reach critical mass, they can release their toxins and weaken their host. Or else, they would suffer certain expulsion and bacterial illness would be unknown.

Spiders know the geometry of their webs. Beavers know the structure of their dams. Birds know the skyways of their migrations. Each animal knows its rituals of mating, grooming, hunting and being hunted, of life and death.

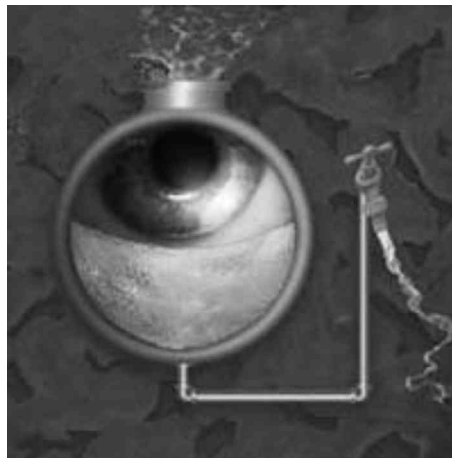
But none of them will sit and ponder its own ritual. The spider will never question its urge to spin, the birds will never discuss the wisdom of their migratory routes. The electrons will never strike a rebellion against their electromagnetic field.

The raven, the prophets tell us, is miserly with its young and the eagle is kind with its eaglets. But never will you find an assembly of crows discussing a gentler form of child rearing, or of eagles discussing "tough love."

Only one creature sits and ponders, "Should I be as a crow or as an eagle? A sloth or a beaver? Fat or thin? Weak or strong? Where is my life going to and what am I creating with it? Is life worth living? Is there a reason to be?"

And only on account of this pondering can we claim to stand at the top of the pyramid of all knowing things. For in every other playing field, there will be another creature to surpass us: in strength, in swiftness, in sharpness of senses, in beauty, in longevity--even in the wisdom of survival--we will find animals that render us fools.

Only in the knowledge of our own selves and the choice to become whatever we desire to become--in this we stand even beyond the angels. And that is the pinnacle to which we climb on the day we become bar/bat mitzvah.



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