

LET'S HAVE SECOND, THIRD, AND LATER BAR/BAT MITZVAHS

I am proposing to the Jewish community additional opportunities for individuals to reflect upon and celebrate their commitment to our values and people. My idea is to have a bar or bat mitzvah every thirteen years, at 13, 26, 39, 52, 65, and so on.

Some might say that a person's examination of his/her Jewish ties should go on all the time and certainly occur more often than every thirteen years. Of course it should, but a recognized opportunity and special occasion would certainly help. As adults, we get busy with relationships/marriage, children, and careers. Jewish consciousness is crowded out by seemingly more urgent daily issues. I feel it would be very appropriate for the rabbinical leadership to offer this new idea to the synagogue membership.

What would this special occasion, a person's second, third, or other bar/bat mitzvah, consist of? Here are some suggestions. I want to make it thought-provoking, happy, and refreshing in a spiritual sense but not too material.

Most important is the personal thought that occurs around the anniversary but I would suggest these four specific components:

1. A weekly or bi-weekly discussion group at the synagogue for members approaching one of these later bar/bat mitzvahs. The group would deal with spirituality, the challenges of adult Jewishness, current events, etc. It would be suggested that a person take part for six months.
2. Preparation of a personal statement, an essay on the person's Jewishness of the past thirteen years and the next thirteen years. This would be both a critique and a plan.
3. A private discussion with a rabbi or other community leader about adult expressions of Judaism.
4. Participation in a bar-mitzvah anniversary synagogue service that might include:
 - a. Presentation of a personal statement to the congregation.
 - b. Some liturgical activity including a call to the Torah reading.
 - c. A special prayer/blessing that has to do with renewal of the Jewish people's and the individual's Covenant.
5. A modest celebration with family, friends, and congregation.

I am hoping that these renewal occasions celebrated at 13-year intervals by adults would bring about a greater consciousness of Jewish ethnic and religious identity and most importantly, a greater effort to incorporate Jewish values into all aspects of adult life (relationships, families, work places, and communal projects).

The addition of the bar/bat mitzvahs can be easily implemented at the synagogue level. As rabbis, please consider taking the following steps:

1. After getting the synagogue leadership's approval, explain this new possibility to the congregation, using sermons, newsletter, and in-person contacts.

2. Publicize the celebrations and the underlying ideas, using the city-wide papers or electronic media at your disposal.
3. Spread the new “custom” to the national level by taking advantage of the major forums of American Jewry.

I believe we will be doing a good thing in the area of revitalization and taking another nice step toward thoughtful adult Judaism. These are my motivations.

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