

»13N 772

Remarks

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In July, 1983 the first American woman, the third woman in world history, was rocketed into space. Next year, two Jewish astronauts, one of them a woman, are expected to soar. (Will heretofore unthought of questions of Jewish law be posed? How will there be Shabbat in outer space?) In Congregation Bnai Israel, last year, a woman, a very young woman, soared to a spiritual heights as she became the first here to read from the Torah. Toni would also have read this morning had it been possible for her to be here.

Today I had the honor, privilege, and thrill of reading from the Torah for the first time before a large congregation. Thank you for this splendid opportunity, for myself, for my family, for my mother who had her first aliyah on this occasion.

I feel so at home as an adopted member of the family of the family of Bnai Israel, in this congregation, which, under the learned leadership of Rabbi Marcovitz, Cantor Heiser, and Reverend Haalman, is both traditionally observant and progressively forward looking. Where, in the coined phrase of Rabbi Mordecai Kaplan, the past has a vote, but not a veto.

I feel so at home where the leadership and congregants are sensitive and compassionate, friendly and helpful, and always with a sense of humor. Where people care about one another. Where they actively pursue learning. Where by every definition the synagogue is a בית תפילה, בית מדרש, בית כנסת a house of worship, of study, and of assembly.

My first acquaintance with Bnai Israel occurred when Bev Slater found that among her Sisterhood presidential duties was transporting me to teach in the Adult Education Program. No one could have been more gracious, and thus a friendship began.



In the Bat Mitzvah class a similar situation occurred. We began as acquaintances and became friends and comrades in pursuit of Jewish learning. Each one contributed to the experience both intellectually and emotionally, in academics and in relationships.

There's a verse from an American theater musical by a lyricist of Jewish ancestry which reflects the essence of a saying from our rabbinic sages. "It's a very ancient saying, but a true and honest thought/That if you become a teacher, by your pupils you'll be taught." These words describe my experience as an instructor of the adult Bat Mitzvah class. Guiding a group of enthusiastic and highly motivated women has been a stimulating challenge, with very gratifying results. As a Bat Mitzvah candidate myself, I shared this especially exciting dimension of the class goals. I am proud of my students; they are giving me much "naches." I hope I am doing the same for them.

D/J

What does it mean to be an adult Bat Mitzvah? It's certainly not the same as it might have been at age 13. It means the experience of combining Bat Mitzvah preparation with any or all of the responsibilities of being a wife, mother, grandmother, volunteer, professional. The challenge is well worth the effort. It means starting out in small, insecure steps and graduating to larger, more confident strides.

Each of us has reached this milestone in our lives with the help of others. Cantor Heiser, thank you for your artful, sensitive, and patient instruction. Rabbi, thank you for your guidance and support. Reverend Haalman, thank you for your assistance and encouragement.



Many thanks to my students and classmates for your assistance within the class, and to me, personally, as friends. Cousin Sharyn <sup>אני</sup> for capably handling class business; Beverly <sup>אביב</sup>; Ann <sup>אני</sup>; Marjorie <sup>אביב</sup>; Myrna <sup>אביב</sup>; Esther <sup>אביב</sup>; Della <sup>אביב</sup>; Adair <sup>אביב</sup>; Beth <sup>אביב</sup>.

My co-Bat Mitzvah, Thelma, <sup>אביב</sup>, we did it--together--sharing every step of the way because you adopted me and I you in good friendship.

To my family--my parents, Dorothy and Max Podolsky--my gratitude for having started me on the way to Jewish learning.

My teachers--most especially Dr. Aharon Kessler, Dean Emeritus of the School of Advanced Jewish Studies.

My appreciation to my husband, Micha, and my sons, Immanuel Hai and Shmuel Hannan, without whose mentorship, help, and cooperation nothing would have been possible.

Adult Bat Mitzvah is a commencement for developing Jewish female potential. It is an opportunity to begin to compensate for education previously denied or neglected. In a time of serious threat of assimilation we must tap 100% of our population's intellectual and spiritual resources. Adult Bat Mitzvah is affirmative action for Jewish womanhood and a simha for the Jewish people.