



Celebrating the Outstanding Work of our Students

“What My Bar Mitzvah Means to Me”

by Mattori Birnbaum

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Phew, I’m finally here. This is the fruit of my two year labor preparing for my Bar Mitzvah. Not to say that I’ve been working without breaks for the whole time or that it was completely exhausting and tedious. Granted, there were some parts that were more difficult than others, like working on my Bar Mitzvah while also being busy with regular schoolwork, piano lessons, the Middle School play, plus other extra-curricular activities. I’m not saying I didn’t have **any** time to relax. It was pretty hard work and I’m proud of it, a “labor of love” if you will.

I didn’t do all that work just to get it over with. I really did see value in the process. It was a learning experience that taught me many important things. For example, I learned about my family’s history and values. I’m proud of all the good things my family’s done.

What I’ve learned about my family’s past will affect what I do in the future. For example, I feel like I have a family tradition of helping others to build upon.

I think it’s important to learn about your history because it can definitely give you insight for later times. Some history shouldn’t be repeated if possible. We must learn from other people’s mistakes, as well as from our own. Some history is an inspiration to act in certain ways, and even to build upon what others have accomplished.

I’ve learned that even though I’m a teen I still have values, even if I may not realize it all the time and though I had never thought about it before starting work on my Bar Mitzvah. Also, my values aren’t exactly the same as my parents’. I have my own values and my own ways of viewing things.

As you may have noticed, this isn’t exactly the traditional Bar Mitzvah with readings from the Torah and the majority of the program in Hebrew. However, that doesn’t mean I haven’t been working as hard as my other Jewish friends who have had Bar and Bat Mitzvahs. It’s just been a different type of work, a humanistic-ified experience. I did write six essay papers altogether: Family Values, Personal Beliefs (not included in the service), Heroes and Role Models, Major Project about the Golden Age in Spain, Community Service, transcriptions from my interviews with family members about family history (which ended up being about the same amount of work as writing a paper), and this final What My Bar Mitzvah Means to Me paper. That’s a lot of work, insight and analysis for a 12/13 year old.

Of course, there are some things that are the same in this Bar Mitzvah as in a more traditional one. I too am leading a ceremony to demonstrate that I am growing into a responsible adult. I definitely have convinced myself. Hopefully I have convinced you as well!

On a less serious note, like at other Bar Mitzvahs I'm sure my peers in the audience are still chattering quietly, chewing gum, and trying their best to stay awake. Probably some adults too. I promise we're almost done.

However, I didn't do it all alone. I'd like to thank my mentor, Jennifer Lewis, Rabbi Peter, and Isabel Kaplan, all of whom gave me advice for writing my papers and helped me to keep moving forward. Additionally, thank you to Aram Rubenstein Gillis for providing us with this great music. I have enjoyed his singing and guitar playing at other Bar and Bat Mitzvahs and at Kehilla Circle at KidSchool. An extra thank you to Aram for doing the "Imagine" duet with me. I also want to thank my various family members who filled me in on our family history. Thank you to my parents, who helped me to gather information, edit the papers, and for keeping me on track whenever I got distracted by video games, Facebook, and other non-Bar Mitzvah stuff.

Last but not least, thank you to all of you for coming today to help me celebrate my Bar Mitzvah.

**The City Congregation for Humanistic Judaism
30 W. 26th Street, #11L, New York, NY 10010
212-213-1002 / info@citycongregation.org**