

BO UL-MAD:
DYNAMIC JEWISH
EDUCATION FOR
FAMILIES AND

Bar/Bat
Mitzvah
Program

P.O. Box 77577
RPO Sheppard Plaza
Toronto, Ontario
M3H 6A7

CONGREGATION **Darchei Noam** 

A vibrant, egalitarian and inclusive community

www.darcheinoam.on.ca

Phone:(416) 638-4783

Fax:(416) 638-5852

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Contact Us!

Elliott Michaelson
Director of Youth Education and Programming
416-638-4783 x28
elliottdn@bellnet.ca

Rabbi Tina Grimberg
416-638-4783
rabbidn@bellnet.ca

Our Take on Jewish Education and the Bar/Bat Mitzvah Experience

This is an exciting time to be Jewish, but also one of the most challenging. We live in a country that grants us unprecedented freedom to not only be Jewish, but to engage and impact the broader community in positive and meaningful ways. It is this freedom that poses our great challenge. How do we relate to the world around us without losing our cultural sense? How do we balance the call of our tradition with the pull of a modern lifestyle?

How can we inspire our children to develop their own Jewish sense?

The Reconstructionist approach to education encourages families and children to be full participants in the act of meaning-making. Congregation Darchei Noam offers a values-based program for the Bar/Bat Mitzvah year that builds on the fundamental respect for Jewish tradition that was developed in previous years and which emphasizes the need to understand the significance of becoming a Bar or Bat Mitzvah. What are the responsibilities of a Jewish adult to the community and to Jewish civilization?

What are the responsibilities of a Jewish adult to oneself?

Our BBM class will address the convergence of three fundamental principles of Jewish adulthood: developing a sense of **theology**, understanding and fulfilling concepts of the values of *mitzvot*, and observing Jewish practice with *kavannah* (intention from the heart). By participating in weekend classes, Learners' Services on Shabbat, our annual retreat, and shul events throughout the year, our students will learn to find meaning in their own lives through the combined lens of these three principles.

Judaism is a life-long endeavour, and Darchei Noam is a congregation of learners. We look forward to learning and growing together.

Theology

Ways of Approaching God and Godliness

Of all the subjects a person will study in a lifetime of Jewish education, nothing is more abstract or difficult to approach than theology. Yet, an understanding of our relationship with God is fundamental to our understanding of Judaism. Over the centuries, there have been numerous attempts to explain the nature of God, but ultimately it falls to us as individuals to find our own comfort level with the concept of the Divine. In the Middle Ages, Moses Maimonides led a rationalist movement to explain God's presence by framing logical arguments. Modern concepts of theology have built on his ideas, as we see in the work of scholars like Mordecai Kaplan and Abraham Joshua Heschel. Despite their attempts to describe what is fundamentally not human, critical questions remain: to what extent is God a factor in our lives? To what extent is God aware of our actions? To what extent does God care? Is God an individual with independent thoughts and feelings, or is God a natural force in the universe without conscious thought? How can all this be reconciled with what our senses tell us about the world? Reconstructionists, along with other liberal Jewish movements, grapple with these questions, and the answers reflect a broad spectrum of opinions.

Our Bar/Bat Mitzvah program is not concerned with providing “the” answers. Participation in making new meaning is an ongoing, life-long process. **Our concern is therefore about framing questions in ways that will encourage the students to seek answers on their own.** By engaging in discussions on topics such as *BeTzelem 'Elohim* (being created “in God's image”), divine revelation, and their own experiences, our students will develop the tools they will need to become functional Jewish adults.

By the end of the year, the students will be able to:

- identify God as a universal Presence in the world;
- understand that there are different Jewish viewpoints regarding the nature of God, and that there is no single correct definition of “God”;
- understand that traditional and modern Judaism provide the means by which we can establish our own personal and individual relationships with God and/or Godliness;
- link “God” with the concepts of “holiness”, “mitzvah” and “kavannah”.

Assignments will include in-class activities and short, weekly journal entries at home.

Textbooks:

Paul Yedwab, The God Book. UAHC Press.

Mitzvot

Our Ethical Code

Judaism is a culture of “doing”. As early as the Talmud, our sages had a phrase that they used after a person had studied for long enough in school: *tze ulemad*, “go into the world and learn”. It isn’t enough to simply study Shabbat or the Holy Days for the purpose of participating in shul or even at home; eventually, we must leave these confines and act.

This sense of responsibility is fundamental to understanding the significance of becoming a Bar or Bat Mitzvah, and our BBM class will focus on this transition into assuming the responsibilities of Jewish adulthood.

Each week will feature a different ethical concept discussed by our sages. We will examine these concepts in light of traditional and modern approaches, and we will link them to our own concepts of divinity and holiness.

By the end of the year, our students will be able to:

- understand that the performance of everyday *mitzvot* is a key element in becoming an involved Jewish adult;
- understand that the performance of everyday *mitzvot* is a holy act;
- understand that the term “mitzvah” refers to a code of ethical behaviour to which practicing Jews are bound, in the context of Torah and in everyday life;
- understand that even though the Holy Days are time-dependent, the outlets they provide for social action are year-round;
- demonstrate their knowledge of one or more of the mitzvot we will cover in class by engaging in an ongoing Mitzvah Project;
- identify links between “mitzvah”, “God” and “kavannah”.

Assignments will include in-class activities, possible field trips, and an ongoing Mitzvah Project to be done outside of the class over the course of the year.

Textbooks:

Bradley Shavit Artson, It’s a Mitzvah. Behrman House.

Bradley Shavit Artson and Gila Gervitz, Making a Difference. Behrman House.

Joel Lurie Grishaver, You Be the Judge 2 & 3. Torah Aura Productions.

Kavannah:

Service from the Heart

Our sages identified two key skills that one must have in order to pray successfully: *kevah* and *kavannah*. In modern times, these skills are also seen as necessary components to all areas of Jewish practice. *Kevah* refers to intellectual knowledge – knowing the melodies, words and choreography of prayer, or knowing the order in which the candles are lit on Chanukah. *Kavannah* means “intention”, and it refers to the inherent spirituality of our actions. After years in Jewish supplementary or day school programs, most students develop a basic sense of *kevah*, but few if any have a developed sense of *kavannah*. Yet, without this element, prayer, Holy Day and Shabbat observance, and mitzvah become meaningless and, over time, obsolete.

Through participation in class, in our annual retreat, and in our Learner’s Services on during the year, our students will start to develop their own sense of *kavannah* by seeing the inherent spiritual value in Jewish “doings”.

By the end of the year, our students will be able to:

- understand that fulfilling mitzvot can have repercussions beyond ourselves, and that it can be one way of turning our hearts toward God;
- understand that when we fulfill mitzvot, we are turning our hearts toward the people we are trying to help;
- understand that prayer has many purposes, among them a path to introspection;
- understand that Shabbat and the Holy Days provide opportunities for self-reflection as well as outward action;
- establish links between the concepts of *kavannah*, “God” and *Mitzvah*.

Assignments will include in-class activities, participation in our annual Fall Retreat, and participation in all four Learner’s Services.

Textbooks:

See teacher resources.

Class Schedule

September	16	Sunday pm 1:30-3:30		
	30	Sunday pm 1:30-3:30		
October	13	Shabbat am 11:00-12:30	Family Program	Learners' Service
	27	Shabbat pm 6:00-9:00	Family Program	Havdallah; Speaker: Diversity in Judaism
November	9~11			Retreat Weekend
	24	Shabbat am 11:00-12:30	Family Program	Learners' Service
December	2	Sunday pm 1:30-3:30		
	5	Wed. pm	Parents & Students	BBM Jan to Mar 2008 only
	15	Shabbat am 11:00-12:30	Family Program	Learners' Service
January	12	Shabbat am 11:00-12:30	Family Program	Learners' Service
	20	Sunday pm 1:30-3:30		
February	10	Sunday pm 1:30-3:30		
	13	Wed. pm	Parents & Students	BBM May to Jun 2008 only
	24	Sunday pm 1:30-3:30		
March	2	Sunday pm 1:30-3:30		

	30	Sunday pm 1:30-3:30		
April	6	Sunday pm 1:30-3:30		
	13	Sunday pm 1:30-3:30		
May	4	Sunday pm 1:30-3:30		
	6	Tues. pm	Parents & Students	BBM Aug to Nov 2008 only
	9	Friday pm 6:00-8:30	Family Program	Kabbalat Shabbat & Graduation