

CONGREGATION B' NAI YISRAEL OF ARMONK

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PRINCIPAL'S NEWS

April 30, 2002

Dear Congregation B'nai Yisrael Religious School Family:

As we come to the end of our school year I'd like to pass on some of my observations about Reform Jewish education. For 150 years Reform Jews have thought and worked very hard to create an educational framework that suits a very demanding strain of Judaism. We must remember that, when we train our children to become Reform Jews, we are training them to **educate themselves** first of all.

By that I mean that we believe it is the Jewish adult's responsibility to know Judaism and to choose those parts of traditional observance that are meaningful to each individual. Let's be clear: in Reform Judaism where we have the obligation to make decisions about observance, we have the obligation to dedicate ourselves and our children to Jewish education sufficient to make those informed choices. And what is the shape of a child's Reform Jewish education? We bracket it by two moving ceremonies: **Consecration and Confirmation.**

That's right. **Just two.** Consecration is the ceremony when parents dedicate—"consecrate"—their children to study of Torah; a Jewish education. This occurs at the beginning of their religious education. Most Reform temples perform the Consecration ceremony at Simchat Torah during the children's first grade year. That's what we do here at Congregation B'nai Yisrael.

A high point of Reform Jewish education takes place in the 10th grade, when a child is ready to assert—**to confirm**—that he or she is ready to take on personal responsibility for the ongoing Jewish education necessary to making the choices required continually of an adult Reform Jew. This may be the single most important educational ceremony a Reform Jewish child takes part in.

In order for every child to fulfill the promise of Bar or Bat Mitzvah, where he or she took part in a public ceremony showcasing their dedication to Jewish education, they must continue to Confirmation. I suspect that people allow their children to become "dropouts" from their Jewish education because they themselves are unaware of the fact that our People for 2000 years have dedicated themselves to a **lifetime** of study. I hope this letter helps.

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Now, a word about the Bar and Bat Mitzvah ceremonies: Many of our parents were educated in other streams of Judaism. In the Orthodox tradition, a boy becomes an adult, and thus ready to read Torah or get married when he is 13. This was a momentous occasion, particularly since a **choice about observance** was no part of the tradition. Especially the ability to start a family was a pivotal event in a child's life.

This has very little to do with Reform Judaism. We retain the ceremonies in deference to families' traditions and more observant family members' expectations. It's a lovely milestone in a child's educational life, but not terribly important in terms of what **must** follow if a child is to have an adequate educational start in life. The question for all our families is this: **Would you consider allowing your children to drop out of school after Middle School?** I would be very surprised if any of you answered "yes" to this question. And yet I have had a conversation with more than one parent in which I am told that parents have allowed children to choose at the age of 12 or 13 whether or not to continue their Jewish education. The question then becomes, **"What are we saying to our children about the importance of Judaism if we leave the choice to them?"**

I hope all of you will consider this long and hard over the summer. I'd be delighted to chat with anyone who wants to discuss these matters. I can think of nothing more important.

On this note I urge all of you to bring all of your children to the **Confirmation Service—an important milestone in our Jewish educational program—on Erev Shavuot, 8pm May 16th, 2002**. I believe it is vitally important that all of our families, and especially our children, see and participate in this culminating service when a group of young people become fully fledged Reform Jews. Jews who know how to study, act and live Jewishly, making personal choices at every step according to Jewish values.

I hope to see you all there.

Sincerely,

Dr. Pamela Gaber
Principal