

**Beth Chayim Chadashim
Los Angeles**

Adult B'nai Mitzvah class

**Fran Chalin, Cantorial Soloist
May 2001**

I welcome you all tonight to BCC's very special Shabbat weekend. It has been almost 10 years since our synagogue has had B'nai Mitzvah classes. I want to begin by acknowledging my co-teacher, Bob Levy, who approached me almost 2 years ago wanting to team-teach a B'nai mitzvah class here.

Thank-you you Bob for your creativity, your energy and your lovely gentle way as a teacher. It was wonderful to teach with you, and I thank you for being willing to share your expertise. This is the first Adult B'nai mitzvah class I have taught, and my experience with you and with these students only leaves me wanting more.

Our group met last week to talk about the structure of the class, what worked, what didn't, how should it be revised. Some people missed the role of family in the planning of their bat Mitzvah, they wanted more family involvement in their right of passage. Of course thinking back to my own Bat Mitzvah, I had wished that at least part of my family was in a different time zone! Others in our group said that as GLBTs and as progressive Jews, we are used to creating our own family, and that they specifically waited for an adult B'nai mitzvah class at BCC as to experience this passage with their community. I want the congregation to know how important you are, for these women and the women who will chant tomorrow. You are their intentional community, their family of choice. You are the family before whom they stand, the people for whom countless conversations were had about how you should be fed! I thank you for the love and support you have shown them, never underestimate your importance in their lives.

As many of you may know, this B'not Mitzvah service was really scheduled for sometime in June, but when Bob and I discovered that Kedoshim occurred in the beginning of May, we decided it was most fitting for these women. Mind you, they were a bit um ... concerned about the shortened length of time for learning, but Bob and I wanted them to have the gift of these words in particular.

In this week's Torah portion, as you have heard from these learned women, we read about what G-d has in mind for God's people Israel; God is outlining the blueprint for an intentional holy community. God has liberated the Israelites from Egypt where their very souls were enslaved, and has said, you will enter your new land as conscious human beings, Conscious of the ways you treat the soil, the plants, your food, animals and each other. God wants all the Israelites to live this way, and in so doing, to create a Holy Land. The idea of holiness writes Bernard Hamburger, one of the editors of the Torah, a Modern Commentary, implies that what we do and what we

make of our lives, matters not only to us as individuals, not only to society, but to the entire cosmos. God took slaves who were taught that they were no more than a poor excuse for work animals and said, Strive to be a holy people and who you are and what you do, will change the course of time forever.

And so it is true with you 3, and the 5 women who will follow you tomorrow. You have changed the course of time for our congregation, our rabbi, Bob, me, and yourselves, forever. You have begun a path of exploration that will change who you are as Jews, that will change who you are in this community. And with regard to community, I want also to tell you how much you mean to us. In Talmud it is written, one who concerns themselves with the needs of the community is as one who labors with Torah. The six women who are becoming Bat Mitzvah, and those joining them with the Haf-Torah, have been Torah laborers for quite some time and our community has benefited from their good work. We are blessed to have you in our midst

The other comment many of you made last Tuesday night is that you wished the class had been longer, a whole year longer! (No doubt that all of us who studied as children felt this same way!!!) You wanted more time with this group to explore not only this portion, but the whole Torah, You wanted to learn more Hebrew, more prayers, you wanted more. Rabbi Tarfon said: "Do not avoid an undertaking that has no limit, or a task that cannot be completed. My prayer for you is that you come to know that this task is as rewarding as it is limitless, and that everything you do matters. Lisa asked me how this experience was for me as a teacher. Harriet Perl once said that when you teach, you feel like you're writing in water only to find out years later you're really carving in stone. When you teach kids, you write in many bodies of water wondering for years and years. Well, the waters in which Bob and I wrote was mayim Chayim -- living waters. It felt like that water we used to grow rocks in; remember those rainbow colored crystals which seemed to grow before your very eyes? Your questions your determination against great odds charged the waters around you and you are those crystals strong, creative, and vibrant, Congratulations and Shabbat Shalom.