

**Beth Chayim Chadashim
Los Angeles**

**Bat Mitzvah Drash
May 5, 2001
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Shabbat shalom ----- Why now? Why here? Who am I now?

About ten years ago our family was gathered around my cousins, Joan and Harry's table for the pre-nuptial Shabbat dinner for our son Brad and Sara his bride to be. People either had gone back for seconds or were drifting into other rooms. Just Harry and I were left talking and he said "I am not sure I have ever experienced a spiritual moment" and I agreed with him, but said I believed that wonderful evening was such a moment. That moment occurred for me at this year's Yom Kippur's Torah service, at BCC, when I was called to the Torah for a group aliyah. I was the only one up there with no Tallit. My friend Ahavah got up and placed her tallit around me. That became a defining moment for me and it was the moment that I decided to try to become Bat Mitzvah.

For the past eight months I have approached this day with excitement and fear. Now this Shabbat has finally arrived and I feel blessed. Almost 12 years ago my wonderful family's life was turned inside/out in the course of single day. In the morning I felt sick and told my secretary I needed to pay my doctor a visit. One doctor led to another and another. DNA had just become a new medical tool and after many tests and prodding I was given a diagnosis of Systemic Lupus Erythematosus and that I would be dead within 10 years. Obviously I left that doctor and moved on. One day I was an independent woman in the throws a promising career and the next day a chronically ill woman. My children in college, my loving mate was struggling with a worsening heart condition. Within a few days I got sick, lost my job, lost my medical insurance, and was so sick I could barely move from bed -- and that's bad news.

I thought I was defined by job of 15 years – My wonderful babies were just starting to spread their wings into adulthood and needed to think of what was in store for their future and God knew I didn't want them hovering. My hero of forty years said little except we will get through this! And as you can see we did just that. I had four knee surgeries Thank you Charlie! Hal was in and out of hospitals for angiograms, and angioplasties. Until the day he underwent a 7 way by-pass heart surgery. One more hip surgery, two broken jaws and many trips to the hospital for infections and tracking my kidney's inability to function. But here we are as good as it gets and better. As Hal always tells me that my head tells me go for it and my body Yells slow down. And he of course is right.

Now you know why. Which leads me to Why Here, But first a commentary on my Torah portion. Leviticus Chapter 19, VS 13 & 14 and as Fran explained it was like pulling dough apart and kneading pieces of Torah for study and as we did that each word or verse could be studied over and over until it became clear and we studied the torah verse by verse and after we had read many interpretations of each verse we could go on to the next verse. My portion was especially meaningful to me. First, Do not defraud your neighbor, but I liked Joseph Talusken's interpretation saying do not defraud your fellow which meant to me, community. If someone works for you must pay a fair wage for services rendered. Do not place stumbling blocks before the blind, nor insult the deaf. Works for me, as I am blind in one eye and deaf in one ear. All the commandments are a road map for community. I also felt

Hillel's commentary as it is told: "If I am not for myself, Who am I? If I am only for myself, What am I? And if not now, when? and do not separate yourself from your community. BCC is a community and it leads us to the bigger picture: the communities that we live in each day.

Mr. Bush if you are listening, contained in this, is a plan for world peace. All leaders should be ordered to read and understand and be tested publicly so we really would know which way they are thinking. This class or B'nai Mitzvot has been an amazing process, I walked in the temple and found a group great intellect and I almost went home, but as a body of women and Bob Levy I discovered that we were all there for similar purpose and we bonded as friends and study partners. Also I was humbled by how much I don't know. I hope to join a Torah study group next year. Now you know why now, and you need to know why here. First I found a teacher and guide who happened to belong to this synagogue at the time, although I did not have that information then, but this teacher showed me and gave me the tools to live with a chronic illness and I try never to wander to far from all that have learned. This wonderful teacher is here today as a loving, caring friend. Thank you!

To the person that first brought us here Stan Notkin, thank you as you are now not just a friend and part of mipochah! We had come here from a mainstream congregation that was affluent and bedecked with lots of stuff. We found ourselves as just out of sight/ out of mind. At BCC we found our selves openly embraced by the congregation and we found a quieter safer place where we were embraced by congregants----no questions asked and we knew we were. There are so many people to thank for this day of joy. My college sweetheart, Hal for getting me here each week, my children Julie, Brad and Sara I Love You. My cousins Joanie and Harry, Joanie is the only person here that knew me at birth. To Fran, Bob, and Lisa there are no words. To my classmates I have learned to love and enjoy. Where else could we have gone to get two gorgeous granddaughters — Suzie and Julie — and to there fathers Barry and Josh ---Thanks guys. Our friends and family and friends who came to celebrate this joyous day with me. Joan and Harry, Marcia and Earl —Dolly and Al —Orphy and Mel and all the rest of you who stayed in our lives no matter what. Yesterday I was reminded by you Linda that I also have three other grandchildren Cayla, Jonathan and Laurence who I have watched grow up since infancy and have brought so much to my life. To Tina who is my eyes, my hands and my legs. Thank you.

Thanks to Linda and Charlie for the flowers. So you can see I have lived many lives and have taken many journeys during this lifetime, but this is one journey I have chosen to take. May this day be a blessing for us all.