

**Beth Chayim Chadashim
Los Angeles**

**Davi's Bat Mitzvah
May 4th, 2001**

Journeying

First let me do all my thank you:

Thank you Fran and Bob for teaching the class; thank you Rabbi for spending whatever little time you have with each one of us; thank you Bracha, my love for helping me with my Hebrew and your constant support, that includes snapping me out of my comatose from writing this drash, thank you classmates for your supports and inspirations, thank you all of you who are here tonight, especially those of you who have travel far for this event; Thank you Victoria and Tim for making sure everything go smoothly, and last of all, I like to thanks the founders of Beth Chayim Chadashim for creating this very special community, because without a community, there is no B'nai Mitzvat

Five years ago, I went on a journey, a journey towards Judaism. I started this journey by journeying inward, taking a detailed inventory of my life. This journey has led me to re-examine my culture, my values, my feelings, and my lifestyle. I looked at my relationship not just with my love Bracha, but also with others at work, with my family, with strangers and friends. I looked at my relationship with myself, and my relationship with God. What I didn't know though when I set off on this journey, is that this journey has no destination. Don't get me wrong; it is not like getting hopelessly lost, traveling to No-Where-Land. The journey itself is so adventurous and fulfilling that I yearn for more, there isn't a good place to stop. For me the Jewish holidays and life cycle events, such as this Bat Mitzvah, are like little coffee shops along the way; places where I can take a break, get something to eat and re-orient myself in the direction I want to go next; places where I can sit down and empty those annoying little pebbles from my shoes before continuing on.

To be exact, my journey began on May 9th of 1996. As I have written in my journal, I came for the first time to BCC for a Thursday night Torah study. I had no idea until I got here that the Torah portion of that week was on the blessings and the curses in Leviticus. I still have vivid memories of that evening. ...Growing up, I was taught never to question God, that night, although I enjoyed the lively discussions of the class, I wouldn't dare say a word, I kept having these urges to look behind me, to make sure that no lightening was coming down from heaven to strike me dead. I am happy to report that I am still coming to the Thursday night Torah study, and I don't have those urges to look behind me anymore.

I guess because I am a visual person, I tend to fantasize and create images in my head a lot when I read. I think my brain sometimes just cannot comprehend texts. I learn better by watching and observing and by actually doing. In a way, the Torah is like a pictured travel guide for my ongoing journey. I place myself alongside the people in the stories, and

try to see what they see and feel what they feel. In the portion I just chanted, [Lev. 19:1-4], God is giving Moses a list of instructions to give to the Children of Israel.

Imagine for a second, that you are one of those people, sitting in the hot desert sun on hot desert sand. The hot dry air burns down your nostrils into your throat when you breathe. The sun is so bright and intense that you can hardly open your eyes to see. You are sitting there with thousands of others, silently waiting for Moses. A horrible thing had just happened not too long ago; you have heard that Aron's two sons Nadav and Avihu had died. Your neighbor told you that a great fire came out from the presence of God and consumed them. No one really knows why and what they did. So you are sitting there feeling a little confused and shocked and maybe even frightened. You know God is talking to Moses because you see this cloud coming down from the sky and hovering over the Tent of Meeting where Moses is. Now put yourself in Moses's shoes — well that's kind of hard to do because he's probably wearing sandals — actually, he probably took those off when he went into the tent, so just imagine Moses standing there inside this tent, feverishly writing in his Palm Pilot everything God is telling him. All right, I don't know what Moses is doing; the Torah never indicates that he takes notes on these commandments that God is giving him one after another. When Moses finally emerges from the tent, I could just see the image of thousands of people stirring, rising to their feet trying to get a glimpse, eager to hear what Moses will say.

Lev. 19 verse 1 and 2 tells us that God instructs Moses to ***Speak to the entire community of the Children of Israel, and say to them: Holy are you to be, for Holy am I, Adonai your God!*** My first reaction to these two verses was, "holy? How could anyone be holy?" Even if I lived my life according to the list of the do(s) and the don't(s) that follows, I still couldn't see how this holiness business would ever apply to me. Part of my problem, I think, is because I am so brainwashed with the Hollywood concept of holiness — that you've got to have a pair of wings, wear a halo and glow. But I think even if I were one of those thousands of people in the desert hearing it for the first time from Moses, I would still have trouble seeing myself as having the potential of being holy. What does 'holy' mean anyway?

These past few weeks, I spent a great deal of time struggling and thinking about the concept of being holy. I wasn't surprised when I took a mini poll of people here and at work, that so far, 5 out of 5 do not see themselves as holy, or having the potential to be holy. But a funny thing is happening to me. Because my portion for my Bat Mitzvah contains the Hebrew words "Kedoshim Tihyu" — "be Holy", I have no way of escaping it. Every morning when I wake up, I would start to chant it in the shower, I chant it in my car going to work, in the elevator, coming home from work I chant it. IT has kicked out all the other song viruses I had and taken up permanent residence in my brain. I am so possessed by it that I even changed my password for my work computer to "Kedoshim", so that I have to physically type in the word in order to log on. It's kind of scary, but I think I'm getting so used to my own voice reminding me to "be holy" [chant Kedoshim Tihyu] that it is no longer so strange to hear it.

I wonder if my behavior — the way I conduct myself in my everyday life will change or take on a new meaning, WHEN and IF I finally believe that I too can be holy? By the way, in Hebrew, the word for holy - "Kadosh" means "separate", "to set apart" or "distinctive and

unique". Substitute the word "holy" with "distinctive and unique", and the verse becomes "distinctive and unique are you to be, for distinctive and unique am I, Adonai your God,"

My next scheduled stop on my journey is at this little "All Night" coffee shop not far from here called Shavuot, maybe some of you can join me for a cup of coffee and a little chat before we move on again (pasue) – together.

Shabbat Shalom