

Mass Bar—Bat Mitzvah For Retarded Slated

Twenty-one Jewish boys and girls, all residents of Western Pennsylvania institutions for the retarded will be bar-bat mitzvah in Shaare Torah Synagogue on Sunday, Nov. 25, Rosh Hodesh Kislev (first day of the month of Kislev).

The residents, who are between the ages of 14 and 31, and whose IQs range from 24 to 66, are from Cresson, Polk, Western and Ebensburg State School and Hospitals, and one girl is from Dixmont State Hospital. This will be the first time any of them have even been in a synagogue.

Rabbi Leib Heber, chaplain at seven State institutions, originated the idea and has been working with the residents individually since June, painstakingly teaching them small portions of the service. He believes this will be the first time

any such "mitzva" has taken place anywhere.

Out of the 21 bar-bat mitzvah boys and girls, only nine will actually read or recite. The others will participate to whatever extent they are capable. "They understand what they will be doing", Rabbi Heber said, "and their happiness is impossible to imagine."

The institutions will provide transportation for the residents to and from the synagogue, and provide nurses to accompany them. Rabbi Heber noted that it is largely through the efforts of Joseph Columbatto, superintendent at Polk, that the mass bar-bat mitzvah is possible.

Among those invited to attend the service are Governor Milton Shapp, State Secretary of Health and Welfare Helene Wohlgemuth, twenty-five officials from Harrisburg and all the clergy from the participating institutions.