



B'nai Mitzvah Ceremony  
of

**Alyssa Gwen Andersen  
Francis Riederer Greenberg  
Lola Lorit Podolner**

June 6, 2021  
26 Sivan, 5781  
כ"ו בסיוון תשפ"א



Dear Friends,

We are delighted that you could be a witness and participant with us as we celebrate the B'nai Mitzvah of Alyssa, Frankie, and Lola. *Bar Mitzvah* literally means “Son of the Commandment,” and *Bat Mitzvah*, “Daughter of the Commandment.” Hebrew, as a gendered language, has a feminine plural for this term, *B'not Mitzvah*, Daughters of the Commandment, and *B'nai Mitzvah*, Sons or Children of the Commandment. These terms have come to refer to the age at which one is obligated to perform the Jewish *mitzvot*, commandments.

*Bar/Bat Mitzvah* as a distinct ceremony is a relatively recent development in the more than five thousand years of Jewish history. Technically, one automatically becomes a *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* upon reaching the age of majority, which for males is the age of 13, and for females, the age of 12. In Biblical and Talmudic times, the ages of 12 and 13 were seen as the ages at which girls and boys were no longer entirely subject to impulse, but were beginning to develop a conscience. Boys were welcome to practice religious obligations, such as reading from the Torah, at any age when they had developed the maturity and skills to do so. The only recognition of *Bar Mitzvah* was a prayer recited by the father thanking God for ending his responsibility for his son's observance of the *mitzvot*.

It was not until the Middle Ages, in about the 1300's, that limits were placed on the religious practices of children, such as reading publicly from the Torah. It was at this point that reaching this age became a significant milestone for Jewish boys. So the practice that we have come to know as *Bar Mitzvah* is new to us as Jews – only about seven hundred years old.

The practice of *Bat Mitzvah* is even newer. The first known *Bat Mitzvah* in the United States happened in 1922, and was in honor of Judith Kaplan, the daughter of Mordechai Kaplan, who was the founder of Reconstructionist Judaism. There is evidence, however, of earlier synagogue celebrations for girls in Poland, France, and Italy.

Within the Secular Jewish movement, the *B'nai Mitzvah* was originally a matter of lengthy debate and conversation. As Secular Jewish communities were forming around the country nearly 50 years ago, some people felt that *Bar Mitzvah* fell

strictly within the realm of religious practice. The focus of one's relationship with God and Torah did not seem pertinent to these developing Jewish communities whose focus was on learning about their history, cultural and ethical heritage, and on their obligation to social justice and *tikkun olam*, repairing the world. Other communities felt that *Bar* and *Bat Mitzvah* were important rites of passage and that there was a way to reshape these rites to reflect the values and practices of a Secular Jewish community. The first recorded Secular *B'nai Mitzvah* took place in 1973 in Cleveland and was adapted from the *B'nai Mitzvah* ceremony used on a secular *kibbutz* in Israel. Today, most of the nearly 30 affiliates of the Congress of Secular Jewish Organizations celebrate *B'nai Mitzvah* ceremonies.

While traditional *B'nai Mitzvah* learn the prayers of the traditional services, read from the Torah, and comment on that portion's meaning, the focus of our Secular *B'nai Mitzvah* is to deepen the students' knowledge and understanding of Jewish history, traditions, culture, and ethics, with a particular emphasis on the values of social justice.

The process of preparing for today's ceremony has also been a process of preparing our students to take on a new role in our community. We acknowledge as a community today that these students are at a new place in their lives -- one in which they have gained the maturity and skills to begin taking responsibility for their own obligations to this community. These obligations include nurturing a lifelong quest to learn more about Jewish life -- its history, traditions, literature, ethics, and music. Their involvement in our community requires continued exploration of our individual and collective Jewish identity, and it includes finding ways to make Jewish traditions feel meaningful to us. Most important, it involves contributing our heads, our hearts, and our hands to the effort to make this world a better and better place. With joy and anticipation, we welcome these students' heads, hearts, and hands to the community and the world that we are all involved in building. Thank you for sharing in this joyous moment with us.

*The Board of the Secular Jewish Community and School*

## § Hineh Mah Tov: All Sing

Melody: Unknown European; Lyrics: Psalm 133

Hineh mah tov u-ma na-yim,  
Shevet achim gam yachad.  
Hineh mah tov u-ma na-yim,  
Shevet achim gam yachad.

הִנֵּה מָה־טוֹב וּמָה־גָּעִים  
שְׁבַת אֶחָד גָּמִיד  
הִנֵּה מָה־טוֹב וּמָה־גָּעִים  
שְׁבַת אֶחָיוֹת גָּמִיד

*Translation: How good and joyous it is for brothers to live together in unity.*

## Welcoming Remarks: Elisa Lapine

### Choices: Parents and B'nai Mitzvah

To receive a Jewish education.  
That we have chosen for you.

To celebrate Jewish traditions with our community.  
That we have chosen for you.

To learn that more than one point of view exists.  
That we have chosen for you.

Now we ask you to choose for yourselves.

To value knowledge.  
This choice will be ours.

To challenge prejudice and injustice.  
This choice will be mine.

To be a morally committed and socially responsible person.  
This choice will be mine.

To take the risk of speaking our minds, even when it goes against the crowd.  
This choice will be ours.

To go out of my way to see and understand the misfortunes of others.  
This choice will be mine.

To continually make meaning of my Jewish heritage.  
This I have chosen for myself.

To be B'nai Mitzvah.  
This we have chosen for ourselves.

### **Teacher Reflections:** *Aaron Podolner*

### **Wisdom of our Guides:** *B'nai Mitzvah*

### **This I Believe:** *Lola Podolner*

### **Family Roots:** *Frankie Greenberg* *Alyssa Andersen*

## Credo

*The following credo is our adaptation of one written by Hershl Hartman, a leader of the Sholem Educational Institute in Los Angeles. We think this Credo expresses our sense of what it means to be Secular Jews with roots in the past and lives in the contemporary United States.*

I am a citizen of the world. All life on this planet nurtures me. I must assure its future.

As a human being, nothing that touches other human beings is strange or foreign to me. All people are my sisters and brothers.

As a citizen, the dreams of all the millions who came here -- who sweated, struggled, and died for a better life -- this is my heritage. The dreams are not yet fulfilled. Therefore, it is my responsibility to promote justice, peace, and equality.

As a Jew, my roots are deep in the millennia that formed my people's culture. As Secular Jews, we do not believe we are chosen: we are unique, as are all people.

The freedom-dream of Moses is my heritage, as are the picket lines of the sweatshops. I am a descendant of the Prophets, and the uprising in Europe's ghettos and death camps.

My inheritance is in the songs of Hirsh Glick and Solomon, in the wisdom of Maimonides, Sholem Aleichem, and Peretz, and in the heroism of Masada and Hannah Senesh.

The beauty of my people's dreams finds voice in Yiddish, in Hebrew, in Ladino, and all the languages of the world. Every person must have roots and these are mine.

My eyes and hopes are on the future. My identity and strength come from the past and the present. From the heritage of all our yesterdays, I will help build a humane tomorrow.

## This I Believe: *Frankie Greenberg*

## Jewish Humor: *B'nai Mitzvah*

### § Shalom Chaverim: All Sing

Traditional Hebrew folk song

שָׁלוֹם חֲבָרִים

Shalom chaverim, shalom chaverim  
Shalom, shalom.  
L'hitra'ot, l'hitra'ot  
Shalom, shalom.

שָׁלוֹם חֲבָרִים, שָׁלוֹם חֲבָרִים  
שָׁלוֹם, שָׁלוֹם.  
לְהִתְּרַאֵת, לְהִתְּרַאֵת  
שָׁלוֹם, שָׁלוֹם.

*Translation: Peace dear friends, peace. Until we meet again.*

## Bible Study: *Lola Podolner*

## This I Believe: *Alyssa Andersen*

### Research Project: *Alyssa Andersen* *Frankie Greenberg* *Lola Podolner*

## Social Action Project: *B'nai Mitzvah*

## § Ani V'atah: All Sing

Composers: Arik Einstein and Miki Gabriellov

Ani v'atah ne-sha-neh et ha-olam.  
Ani v'atah az yavo-u k'var kulam.  
Am'ru et zeh kodem l'fanai  
Zeh lo me-sha-neh.  
Ani v'atah ne-sha-neh et ha-olam.

Ani v'atah n'na-se me-hat-chalah.  
Yih'yeh lanu ra ayn davar zeh lo nor  
Am'ru et zeh kodem l'fanai  
Zeh lo me-sha-neh.  
Ani v'atah ne-sha-neh et ha-olam  
Ani v'atah ne-sha-neh et ha-olam

אני וְאַתָּה נִשְׁנָה אֶת-הָעוֹלָם.  
אני וְאַתָּה אֹזֵבּוּ אֲכָרְכָּם  
אמְרוּ אֶת זֶה קָדָם, לִפְנֵי, זֶה לֹא מִשְׁנָה,  
אני וְאַתָּה נִשְׁנָה אֶת-הָעוֹלָם

אני וְאַתָּה נִגְשָׁה מִתְחַדְּלָה  
יְהִי לְנוּ רֵעַ, אֵין דָבָר, זֶה לֹא נֹרֵא:  
אמְרוּ אֶת זֶה קָדָם, לִפְנֵי, זֶה לֹא מִשְׁנָה,  
אני וְאַתָּה נִשְׁנָה אֶת-הָעוֹלָם

*Translation: You and I will change the world -- then everyone will join us. It's been said before, but it doesn't matter. You and I will change the world. You and I will start from the beginning. It'll be tough but so what? It doesn't matter. You and I will change the world.*

## Secular Kaddish: Elisa Lapine and Community

Elisa: Jewish philosophy does not allow us to dwell on death or despair, for death is not the enemy of life.  
It is the understanding that our time is limited that makes our lives so precious.  
Kaddish strengthens our memories of those who came before us.  
Kaddish reminds us to pass on our memories to the next generation.  
Kaddish keeps us aware of the preciousness of our own lives.  
Kaddish is for us, the living.

Everyone: In the rising of the sun and in its going down,  
*We remember them.*

In the blowing of the wind and in the chill of winter,  
*We remember them.*

In the opening of the buds and in the rebirth of spring,  
*We remember them.*

In the blueness of the sky and in the warmth of summer,  
*We remember them.*

In the rustling of the leaves and in the beauty of autumn,  
*We remember them.*

In the beginning of the year and at its end,  
*We remember them.*

When we are weary and in need of strength,  
*We remember them.*

When we are lost and sick at heart,  
*We remember them.*

When we have joy we crave to share,  
*We remember them.*

As long as we live, they too will live, for they are a part of us,  
*As we remember them.*

## Words of Remembrance

## Family Remarks

# Secular Blessings

Blessing over the Wine:

ברוך האור בעוֹלָם. ברוך האור באדם הננהנה מפרי הגפן.

Ba-ruch ha-or ba-oh-lam. Ba-ruch ha-or  
ba-ah-dam, ha-nehena mi-pri hah-gah-fen.

Blessed is the light of the world. Blessed is the light in humanity that has allowed us to enjoy the fruit of the vine.

Blessing over the Challah:

ברוך האור בעוֹלָם. ברוך האור באדם המוציא לחם מן הארץ.

Ba-ruch ha-or ba-oh-lam. Ba-ruch ha-or  
ba-ah-dam, hah-mo-tzey le-chem min ha-ah-retz.

Blessed is the light of the world. Blessed is the light in humanity that has brought forth bread from the earth.

Shehekeyanu (Commemorating significant first events):

ברוך האור בעוֹלָם. ברוך האור באדם שהחינו, וקיינו, והגינו לזמן הזה.

Ba-ruch ha-or ba-oh-lam. Ba-ruch ha-or ba-ah-dam,  
shehekhi'anu v'kimenu v'higi'anu la'zman ha'zeh.

Blessed is the light of the world. Blessed is the light in humanity that has preserved us and sustained us and brought us forward to this moment.

## § Bashana Haba'a: All Sing

Lyrics: Ehud Manor; Music: Nurit Hirsh

Chorus:

Od tireh, od tireh, kama tov yihiyeh  
Bashana, bashana haba'ah

Bashana haba'a, neshev al  
hamirpeset  
Ve'nispor tziporim nodedot,  
Yeladim bechufsha, y'sachaku tofeset  
Bein habayit l'vein hasadot. (chorus)

פָזָמוֹן

עַזְדָּתְרָאָה, עַזְדָּתְרָאָה כִּמְהֵטָב יְהִי  
בָשָׁנָה, בָשָׁנָה הַבָּאָה.

בָשָׁנָה הַבָּאָה, נִשְׁבָּעַל הַמְּרֻפֶּת  
וְנִסְפֵּר אֲפָרִים נָזְדוֹת.  
יַלְדִּים בְּחַוְפָשָׁה, יַשְׂחַקְוּ תֹּופֶסֶת  
בֵּין הַבָּיִת לְבֵין הַשְׁדּוֹת. פָזָמוֹן

*Translation: Next year we will sit on the porch and count migrating birds. Children on vacation will play catch between the house and the fields. You will yet see, you will yet see, how good it will be next year.*

§§§

## Acknowledgments

Our children's achievements would not have been possible without the help of our community. Today's celebration represents the culmination of incredible efforts from many teachers, leaders, and mentors over the years, including Ann-Marie Greenberg, Kristine Schultz, Valeriy Shafiro, Mark Sigunick, Carl Schultz, and Rebecca Irwin. We especially wish to recognize the teacher who so thoughtfully led our efforts this past year: Aaron Podolner. We want to acknowledge Nadav Kertcher who was extremely helpful in assisting with the education of this B'nai Mitzvah class. Moreover, JC Ravage helped us interpret bible stories, Sara Kimble gave us insight into effective presentations, and John Slocum influenced our work with charity. All of these teachers shared their wisdom and knowledge with energy and enthusiasm as they guided our study of Secular Jewish history, literature, music, culture, and values. We understand that teaching is not just a labor of love, but one of our most cherished mitzvot, and for this we thank them all most sincerely.

We also greatly appreciate the many contributions of Gail Fisher and Elisa Lapine, whose vision, passion, and commitment have shaped this organization and guided us all in our quest to find community and to make meaning in our lives as Secular Jews.

And finally, we thank all of you for sharing in our joy today. Whether you came from around the corner or from the other side of the country, your loving presence in our children's lives makes their world a richer place.

*Parents of the Secular Jewish Community & School B'nai Mitzvah Class of 2020/2021*







The Secular Jewish Community and School teaches and celebrates Jewish history, culture, music, literature, values and identity in a secular, humanistic context.

Our curriculum emphasizes the values of love of learning, ethical action, tzedakah, social justice, respect for life, personal responsibility for our actions, pluralism, and a rational basis for thought and action.