

Cantor Barbra Lieberstein's JEWISH LIFECYCLES

By Pam Teel

Cantor Barbra received ordination from The Academy for Jewish Religion, a pluralistic seminary for rabbis and cantors in New York City. She is also certified through the American Conference of Cantors (Reform) and the Cantors Assembly (Conservative). She is a member of the Women's Cantors Network and was a member of the N.J. Cantors Concert Ensemble. Cantor Barbra also conducts High Holiday services to all her B'nai Mitzvah families. In addition, Cantor Barbra officiates at Baby Namings, funerals, unveilings, and Jewish weddings.

Eleven years ago she started a lifecycles business. Since then she has received many calls from families desiring guidance in the life cycle support and traditional rituals. Whether the family desiring Cantor Barbra's assistance is synagogue-unaffiliated or affiliated, the additional guidance enriches a meaningful religious event.

There are families who are unaffiliated, and want to give their child the opportunity to enter the "Jewish Rite of Passage." There are also students who belong to synagogues, but need extra support to supplement their 15-20 minute sessions at the synagogue. For several years, Cantor Barbra's Jewish Lifecycles has been tutoring students in the convenience of their homes in Bergen and Rockland Counties. Due to the pandemic, lessons have become virtual, enabling Cantor Barbra to expand throughout New Jersey.

Because of his family's after-school activities, Jordan didn't attend Hebrew School and although his family felt connected to the Jewish traditions and holidays, they weren't affiliated with a synagogue. The schedule made it impossible for Jordan's parents to drive him to Hebrew School twice a week, but they were looking forward to celebrating Jordan's Bar Mitzvah. Melinda was on a dance team and could not miss a day of practice to study at Hebrew School. Evan attended Hebrew School, but needed extra help reading the Hebrew, chanting the prayers, and his Torah portion. Cantor Barbra offered Bar/Bat Mitzvah tutoring in the home for them.

Cantor Barbra accommodates each family by tailoring the Bar/Bat Mitzvah service according to the student's strengths and the family's preference. She normally uses the Reform liturgy for Shabbat morning or Havdalah services. However, one family rented out the sanctuary of a Reconstructionist synagogue for a Havdalah service using the Reconstructionist liturgy. Another family who came from a more traditional background requested a Conservative Havdalah service.

Since the pandemic, there has been the trend of "intimate" ceremonies in the families' living rooms or their backyards live streaming or using zoom to include more virtual guests.

Just like in religious school, Cantor Barbra encourages her students to complete a Chesed project or community service. The Jewish Federation of Northern New Jersey has been helpful in suggesting mitzvah projects, but some of her students created their own. One of her Bar Mitzvah students was an avid basketball player. During the spring break, he taught a group of 2nd graders a game of basketball. One student worked with Asperger children, and another visited the concentration camps in Poland with her grandmother, a Holocaust survivor. Social action projects are adapted and accommodated to the student's interest and skill.

B'nai Mitzvah parents have joyously witnessed growth in their children's Hebrew knowledge, prayers, and Torah study, and have observed low frustration levels in their children's preparation under Cantor Barbra's tutelage. Although it's difficult to leave the families after the Bar/Bat Mitzvah, Cantor Barbra hopes that the foundation she has given to her students will encourage them to continue to study Judaism and the Torah.

At a recent interview with a new family, the parents asked Cantor Barbra what makes her unique from others who seem to be doing the same practice. She thought for a while and then responded, "There are some tutors out there that are trying to copy what I do, however most are lay people or Jewish educators who have never been trained or ordained as a cantor or rabbi (which by the way, takes 5 plus years of intense study). But what makes it the most special is that many perform a 'cookie-cutter' Bar/Bat Mitzvah. I pride myself on creating an individualized service for each and every child. No two B'nai Mitzvah ceremonies are ever alike. It may be more work, but the end results are spiritually rewarding for the family." The parent then responded to Cantor Barbra with a line that still makes her laugh. "I guess what you're saying Cantor is that I wouldn't go to a lawyer if I had a broken leg. In other words, we shouldn't go to a non-ordained clergy to have a spiritually moving service?" "Exactly," said Cantor Barbra.

To contact Cantor Barbra, please visit her website: www.cantorbarbra.com, facebook page: @Cantor Barbra Lieberstein's Jewish Lifecycles, or call: 201-788-6653.

Celebration and Education FOR YOUR FAMILY

Jewish lifecycles are a time of growth when we express ourselves through ritual. Cantor Barbra is available to serve your needs whether it is a Bar/Bat Mitzvah for your child, your own wedding, or the naming of your child.

- **CERTIFIED CANTOR WITH 12+ YEARS OF PULPIT EXPERIENCE**
- **OFFICIANT AT BAR/BAT MITZVAH CEREMONIES, BABY NAMINGS AND WEDDINGS**
- **PRIVATE OR SMALL GROUP LESSONS CONDUCTED VIRTUALLY**
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Ceremonies conducted in person or virtually



CANTOR
Barbra Lieberstein
Certified Cantor with 12+ years of Pulpit Experience
201-788-6653
cantorbarbra@aol.com

WWW.CANTORBARBRA.COM