

Bar/Bat Mitzvah Tutoring in the Home



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.

These situations have brought these families to Cantor Barbra's lifecycle business. Since officially starting her business five years ago, Cantor Barbra 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 guidance to supplement their 15-20 minute sessions at the synagogue.

Cantor Barbra will tutor students in the convenience

of their homes in Bergen and Rockland Counties and she has several groups of students in the vicinities of Glen Rock, Ridgewood, River Vale and Upper Saddle River. She has recently received requests outside the area to conduct lessons by Skype or FaceTime. Skype and FaceTime have become popular with long-distance college learning, voice lessons, and now Bar/Bat Mitzvah lessons. Cantor Barbra prefers to supplement home based lessons with Skype or FaceTime, however sometimes a student's schedule temporarily conflicts with Cantor Barbra's opening up the option to have a Skype lesson for a few months.

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 siddur 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. There has also been the trend of "intimate" ceremonies in the families' living rooms.

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 takes 5 plus years of intense study. But 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."

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 has been singing with the NJ Cantors Concert Ensemble since 1995. For the past six years, she has been conducting a High Holiday choir. In addition, Cantor Barbra officiates at Baby Namings, funerals, unveilings, and Jewish weddings.

To contact Cantor Barbra, please visit her website: www.cantorbarbra.com or call: 201-788-6653.