

**INTEGRATION INTO THE GROUP AND SACRED UNIQUENESS;**

**AN ANALYSIS OF ADULT BAT MITZVAH\***

by

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Following Durkheim, anthropologists and sociologists have argued that religion may be regarded as functionally necessary to the integration of society. Myth, theology and sacred lore interpret the experiences of members of a society and place their activities within a shared system of ultimate meaning. Religiously sanctioned rules of right and wrong regulate their behavior into predictable patterns. Sacred objects and activities remind the individual of the constant presence of the moral authority of the group. And the integration of the individual into the group is accomplished and reaffirmed by sacred rituals. "By the mere fact," Durkheim wrote, "that their [ritual's] apparent function is to strengthen the bonds attaching the believer to his god, they at the same time really strengthen the bonds attaching the individual to the society of which he is a member, since the god is only a figurative expression of the society" (Durkheim, 1976:226).

Luckmann's thesis about the rise of "invisible religion" (1967) in modern society has been less widely accepted and remains controversial some twenty years after it was first argued (Bibby, 1983; O'Toole, 1984; Roberts, 1984:392-6; Fallding: 1974:12-13). In this paper, the argument is made that Luckmann's view of religion is in many ways parallel to Durkheim's and that research on "invisible religion" may fruitfully focus on an aspect not previously addressed -- the relationship of "invisible religion" to the modern enactment of ritual. As an illustration, a contemporary ritual is described and interpreted.

**PARALLELS AND UNRESOLVED ISSUES IN THE WORK OF DURKHEIM AND  
LUCKMANN ON THE FUNCTIONAL NECESSITY OF RELIGION AND ITS  
CONTEMPORARY FORMS**

Luckmann shares in Durkheim's assessment of the historical importance of organized religion to the integration of the individual into society. He writes, ". . . the values originally underlying church religion were . . . norms lending significance to individual life in its totality. As such they were superordinated to the norms of all the institutions that determined the conduct of individuals in various spheres of everyday life and spanned their biographies" Luckmann, 1967: 39). Developing his argument in a style reminiscent of Durkheim's *The Division of Labor* (1933), Luckmann continues, "Industrialization and urbanization . . . reinforced the tendency of institutional specialization. Institutional specialization, in turn, tended to 'free' the norms of the various institutional areas from the influence of the originally superordinated 'religious' values" (*ibid.*, see also p. 66)

Furthermore, both agree on the weakening of *traditional* religion under modern conditions of institutional specialization, while also arguing that "religion" is a functional necessity. Their comments about the functional necessity of religion, however, are somewhat different. "There can be no society," Durkheim wrote,

which does not feel the need of upholding and reaffirming at regular intervals the collective sentiments and the collective ideas which make its unity and personality. . . . this moral remaking cannot be achieved except by the means of reunions, assemblies and meetings where the individuals,

being closely united to one another, reaffirm in common their common sentiments . . . . If we find a little difficulty today in imaging what these feasts and ceremonies of the future could consist in, it is because we are going through a stage of transition and moral mediocrity (1976:427).

Luckmann, in contrast, discusses the functional necessity of religion in terms of the "anthropological" need of humans to integrate their actions into a system of meaning (1967:41-49). People interpret the meaning of their actions within a world view. Within the world view the domain "that deserves to be called religious" consists of "symbols which represent an essential 'structural' trait of the world view as a whole - . . . its inner hierarchy of significance" (*ibid.*, 56). "Daily life is apprehended as being subordinated to levels of significance that transcend everyday life. . . . The domain transcending the world of everyday life is experienced as 'different' and mysterious" (*ibid.*, 58). While Luckmann's emphasis is on the need for ultimate meaning rather than ritual affirmations of solidarity, he concludes this section with a familiar Durkheimian emphasis, "If the characteristic quality of everyday life is its 'profaneness,' the quality that defines the transcendent domain is its 'sacredness' (*ibid.*).

Despite his comments about the difficulty of imagining the religion of the future, Durkheim did speculate on the emergence of the "religion of humanity" (1975:63). The basis of this religion is found in the moral individualism of Kant and Rousseau (*ibid.*:61). For these philosophers, "The human person, whose definition serves as the touchstone according to which good must be distinguished from evil, is considered as sacred" (*ibid.*: 61-

62).<sup>1</sup> This religion is uncompromising in its individualism, energetic in its affirmation of the rights of man and jealously protects the individual "from external encroachments, whatever their source" (*ibid.*). The "first dogma" of this "cult of man" is "the autonomy or reason" and its "first rite . . . freedom of thought." (*ibid.*:65). Moral individualism, however, requires more than political freedom. Political liberties are simply the means for putting at the disposal of individuals "all possible means for developing their faculties (*ibid.*:71)."

Luckmann's "invisible religion" thesis may be read as a parallel, more elaborate argument about the relationship of modern individualism to the contemporary social form of religion. "The somewhat illusory sense of autonomy which characterizes the typical person in modern society," Luckmann writes, emerged "from the interstices of the social structure that resulted from institutional segmentation" (1967:97). Consequently, "to an immeasurably higher degree than in a traditional social order" (*ibid.*:98), the individual is given choices, even the freedom "to construct his own personal identity" (*ibid.*). Structurally, the individual is an "autonomous" consumer who assembles his own idiosyncratic system of ultimate meaning from a complex of

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1. Durkheim links the respect for individual conscience to the influence of Christianity which, he argues, "was the first to teach that the moral values of actions must be measured in accordance with intention . . . The very centre of the moral life was thus transferred from outside to within and the individual was set up as the sovereign judge of his own conduct having no other accounts to render than those to himself and to his God" (*ibid.*:68). Anticipating elements of Weber's later work, Durkheim continues in this passage to find the possibilities of science and freedom of thought in Christian individualism and the radical separation between the transcendent and the worldly.

inconsistent cultural messages.<sup>2</sup> Luckmann gives examples of institutional forms which articulate meaning for individuals -- syndicated advice columns, tracts on positive thinking, *Playboy* magazine, *Reader's Digest* versions of popular psychology, and the lyrics of popular hits (*ibid.*:103). "The 'autonomous' consumer selects . . . certain religious themes from the available assortment and builds them into a somewhat precarious private system of 'ultimate' significance" (*ibid.*:102). The available assortement of ideas about what makes life meaningful is complex and highly variable, but it is not random. Systems of ultimate meaning which remain attractive in the market interpret the modern privatization of individual experience. Consequently, "The dominant themes in the modern sacred cosmos bestow something like a sacred status upon the individual . . . (*ibid.*:105)." Luckmann tentatively identifies some of the dominant themes of the modern sacred cosmos -- self-expression, self-realization, social mobility, sexual fulfillment, and familism (*ibid.*:109-114). These themes give meaning to the choices which the modern individual makes.

#### **THE SACREDNESS OF INDIVIDUAL AUTONOMY AND MODERN RELIGIOUS RITUAL**

Luckmann does not connect his argument to the Durkheimian importance given to ritual. Neither his book, nor subsequent research into the invisible religion thesis have paid much attention to innovations and modifications of ritual. The literature which deals with "invisible religion" is typically

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2. This view of the individual actively constructing his own identity from cultural sources is also found in Turner, 1974.

concerned with the identification and analysis of belief systems, using questionnaire and interview data (reviewed in Bibby, 1983).<sup>3</sup>

On the other hand, while Westley's study of six "new religious groups" which clearly locate the sacred as lying within the human individual" (1983:25) interprets their structures, beliefs and rituals in the context of Durkheim's prediction of the cult of man, their significance for the 'invisible religion' thesis is not explored.

Luckmann's argument contains a brief suggestion that "church religiosity" could continue as "one of the many manifestations of an emerging, institutionally nonspecialized social form of religion" (1967:100). This implies that the institutional structures of traditional religions could continue, and perhaps even flourish, in modern society with modifications in their content and style which reconcile integration into the group and the autonomous personality as the ultimate source of authority over meaning. This reconciliation would be collectively acknowledged by ritual scripts which either allow modification to accommodate individual preferences or even require a unique personal statement as part of the ritual.

In the analysis that follows, an innovative Jewish ritual - an adult bat mitzvah - is interpreted as one which combines the two themes of integration into the group and individual autonomy. The analysis is made complex by the fact that the innovative ritual is an adaptation of a well-established conventional pattern

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3. Nor have the writers on civil and political religion linked the sacred function of the modern state - to serve the individual welfare of its citizens - to the invisible religion thesis.

of bar and bat mitzvah at the age of thirteen. The conventional pattern is described first in order that the differences between it and the innovative ritual described will be clear.

#### **A COMMON PATTERN OF BAR/BAT MITZVAH OBSERVANCE**

In the *Mishneh*, the authoritative second century code of rabbinic law, the age of thirteen years and a day for boys and twelve years and a day for girls marks a major legal transition from minor to adult. The ritual celebration of a boy attaining this age - becoming a "bar mitzvah", a son of the commandments - with a combined religious and social event is known for at least 500 years (Rivkind, 1942). Bat mitzvah is a twentieth century innovation. In some congregations it was introduced as a group ceremony and reception, having neither the liturgical sanctity, nor the difficulty of preparation, nor the expense of bar mitzvah. In most non-Orthodox settings, however, bat mitzvah is now celebrated as the equivalent of bar mitzvah. The social side of bar/bat mitzvah has become elaborate in the past 100 years. In North America, bar mitzvah celebration is close to universal, and bat mitzvah almost as common.

Although there are many variations in the arrangements and performance of bar and bat mitzvah, the following scenario, based on observations and interviews, is a composite of frequently found features:

Each year an administrator in a synagogue or synagogue school examines the birth days of the ten year olds enrolled in the synagogue affiliated school and allocates to each a date for bar or bat mitzvah in three years time. Parents may contact a caterer



as soon as a date is set, but this is usually delayed until about a year before. Beginning six months to a year before the date of the ceremony, the child receives individual tutoring in chanting the sections from the Torah and the prophets read on the day of the bar or bat mitzvah. At the same time, the family is busy with the social side -- guests lists, locations of the social events, menus, color scheme, etc.

The ceremony, on Friday night or Saturday morning, takes place within the context of a regularly scheduled service. Jewish worship includes honorific participation during the service. These honors are almost always given to family of the bar or bat mitzvah. The bar or bat mitzvah is given the honor of being called for the first time to the reading of the Torah. This is followed by the bar or bat mitzvah's recitation of the weekly reading from the haftorah. The rabbi's sermon always includes congratulatory remarks to the bar or bat mitzvah and family, and there are usually personal fact-to-face remarks made by the rabbi to the bar or bat mitzvah while both stand before the Ark, the sacred center of the sanctuary.

The many guests who are invited to witness and participate in this service include friends of the bar or bat mitzvah, friends of parents, and, most of all, extended family. The social events surrounding the ceremony often include a Friday night dinner for close family, light refreshments for all those attending after services, and a dinner dance for invited guests. The dinner-dance may include speeches by the bar/bat mitzvah, parents, grandparents and siblings. There are, of course, many presents given and a

permanent record made in the form of a photo album or a videotape. And, for most b'nai mitzvot, the year of the bar or bat mitzvah is also the last year of formal Jewish education.

The strongest themes in this composite are the mutually reinforcing ones of Jewish identification and extended family. The child has had at least several years of continuous enrollment in a Jewish school. Despite the difficulty of developing Hebrew language competence and an understanding of a sophisticated tradition in a few hours after school and on weekends, children who attend Hebrew school in preparation for bar or bat mitzvah learn an important lesson. They learn that it is important to their parents that they identify themselves as Jews, that they know "something" about what it means and that they acquire a minimal ability to participate in communal worship. This lesson is connected to the dramatization of the family as a group extending laterally and through generations. The ceremony honors the bar or bat mitzvah, but it also honors the extended family, which periodically regroups as the cohort in each generation "comes of age."

In this interpretation ritual performs an integrating function. The group gathers together to renew its moral bonds, to symbolically assert its cohesiveness. Participation in ritual integrates the individuals into the group, affirming and strengthening solidarity.

It could be argued that there is also an invisible religion theme in this composite. The emergence of the modern individual as an "autonomous" consumer and do-it-yourself assembler of

meaning systems places the intergenerational continuity of group identity in some doubt. Among Jews, bar and bat mitzvah celebrate each early adolescent as a uniquely important member of the community of Israel. While the first impression of these rituals may be that they are initiation rites (see La Fontaine, 1985), they actually express a more complex social reality. Bar mitzvah has become an important ritual occasion only in the modern period; bat mitzvah, which has quickly become an important ritual occasion, has an even shorter history. They use the formal structure of the integration of new members into the group to address the modern transition of Jewish identity from "fate" to "choice" (Dawidowicz, 1977). They are modern rituals of identification more than they are traditional rituals of initiation.

#### **AN ADULT BAT MITZVAH**

Descriptions of adult bar and bat mitzvahs began appearing in the mid-1970s. While they are structured around the adult doing something special in the context of being called to the reading of the Torah, other features are highly variable. Because they have not become institutionally routinized like bar and bat mitzvahs of thirteen year olds it is not possible to describe a typical composite. This difference has methodological and substantive implications. Methodologically, the above composite of common features of 13 year old bar and bat mitzvahs will be contrasted with one adult bat mitzvah. This adult bat mitzvah has features in common with adult bat mitzvahs elsewhere and illustrates the

adaptation of bar and bat mitzvah to include invisible religion themes, but no claim is made that all the details will be typical of adult bat mitzvah in general. The sample is simply insufficient. The bat mitzvah described below, however, is not idiosyncratic. Another adult bat mitzvah in the same congregation in the same year shared many features. Moreover, as will be discussed below, the choices made about the celebration of the bat mitzvah were socially structured by a loosely organized but self-conscious network of religious individuals and organizations. Substantively, the lack of institutionalized routine is itself indicative of the individualistic character of these rituals and celebrations, a preliminary indication of the value placed on the unique individual.

#### DECIDING TO HAVE A BAT MITZVAH

Miriam grew up in a very Jewish social environment. Her family lived in a Jewish suburb and was affiliated with a Conservative congregation, which they normally attended, as is common in many households, only on the High Holidays. She attended a Jewish day school which emphasized culture rather than religion and a summer camp sponsored by the Conservative movement (one of the numerous Camp Ramah's). She recalled that all the boys in school had bar mitzvahs at 13, but that it was not an issue for the girls.

I remember feeling completely relieved when I was 13 that I didn't have to have a bar mitzvah, that I didn't have to learn all that stuff and get up in front of everybody and take on that responsibility. I even remember saying "Thank God I was born a woman" that I didn't have to do that. . . .

I didn't have to go through the agony of learning for the bar mitzvah.

When asked whether she missed not having the associated party, she pointed out that girls got "sweet sixteen" parties instead, and added:

It was only in retrospect that I felt very betrayed.

While at university, close friends who were not Jewish but who were involved with personal, non-establishment spirituality

began to question me very deeply about my religious identity, something my Jewish friends and I never discussed . . . I couldn't answer their questions, and that really bothered me because I was known by many of my Jewish and non-Jewish friends as being very strongly Jewish.

Consequently she began looking for a way of combining the spirituality of these friends and Judaism.

When she returned from university, she found a group in which to do this. Non-Jewish friends from university were instrumental. They called to give Miriam the name and phone number of a woman in Miriam's city that they had found out about. This woman, an employee of the Jewish community who had studied at Yeshiva in Israel, was known as having an interest in women, spirituality and Judaism. Miriam called and was immediately invited to a Friday night dinner of women who meet monthly before Rosh Chodesh (the new moon -- traditionally marked as a "minor" holy day, now emphasized by a number of contemporary Jewish woman's groups).

Miriam talked about a ritual from her first Friday night dinner with the women's group. The Friday night meal conventionally begins with someone reciting the blessing over the wine, everyone drinking a sip of wine after the blessing, someone

reciting the blessing over the challah (the ceremonial twisted eggloaf made for the Sabbath), slicing the challah and everyone taking a bite. At the women's group dinner, when it was time for the blessing over the challah, everyone at the table put their hands on the challah, said the blessing in unison, and then pulled off a piece. When she had first arrived, Miriam had felt like an outsider; after this ritual she felt part of the group.

Through the women's group Miriam found out about a center for Jewish spiritual development in another city. About half a year after entering the women's group Miriam went to the center for a four day retreat during the High Holy Days. One of the sessions examined naming, the option of renaming oneself and the meanings associated with the participants' Hebrew names. Like many Jewish women, Miriam's parents gave her both a Hebrew name and an "English" name (i.e., one generally popular when she was born) which begins with the same letter as her Hebrew name. Role playing of biblical situations and relationships brought out the qualities associated with various Hebrew names. In discussion, one of the participants pressed Miriam (to preserve anonymity, her real names - Hebrew and "English" - are not used) about the biblical character whose Hebrew name she carries. What he told her about her Hebrew name "all fit what I was going through." She decided then that for her twenty-fourth birthday - which was the next one coming and was coincidentally exactly double the traditional age of bat mitzvah - she was going to have a bat mitzvah and speak about her Hebrew name whether or not the biblical reading from the week contained the woman whose name she

has.

The decision was confirmed by a further coincidence. "It wasn't serendipity," she said when telling about it,

it was supposed to happen. . . . Not only was [the biblical woman whose name she has central to the Torah reading] on the weekend of my birthday, it was a complete woman's weekend. All these women's characters . . . It was magical. You had to see my face when I checked the weekend and found it was [her name], and then I knew I had to have my bat mitzvah then.

#### PLANNING

Miriam called a "family council meeting" with her parents to tell them of her plans. Although they had questions about the bat mitzvah, throughout the planning they were "completely supportive." Miriam arranged for the ceremony to be held at a small synagogue (both the sanctuary and social hall accommodate comfortably slightly over one hundred people) which she had found through the women's group. This congregation, whose services are led by members, does not make gender distinctions in ritual privileges. Its liturgy has been amended to include references to the matriarchs in prayers where the patriarchs are mentioned but otherwise follows the traditional prayerbook. One of the caterers who is permitted in the synagogue's kitchen was hired for the reception. Miriam asked a Jewish communal worker who works in the same building that she does to tutor her on the reading of the Torah and haftarah.

. . . His personality, his values represent something very important to me. There's a story about the Baal Shem Tov [founder of Hasidism], that he was a very simple, modest man who did his own thing, but was really very powerful and effected people. This is how I see [tutor's name], very unassuming, very modest, a kind human being. . . . Almost every day during my one hour [lunch] I would go into his

office and we'd study together, discussing its [her Torah and haftorah portions] meaning. . . .

In addition to preparing her Torah and haftorah readings, much time and thought went into Miriam's "d'var torah" (commentary on the weekly Torah reading delivered during the service). Her preparations were shared with a close friend, a "strictly orthodox" woman who "helped me along the whole way, coached me, gave insights to me." As well, this close friend prepared a brief commentary for presentation during the reception following the service.

Miriam invited about forty-five people - friends, family and friends of her parents whom she thought of as family.

Making up the invitations was special for me. I personally wrote every single invitation and wrote something different to each person about why I wanted them to be there. I was making a personal connection to every single person . . .

Not everyone invited was able or expected to come. An invitation went to a friend doing volunteer work in Africa. A close friend from university was unable to come, but sent the tallit (prayer shawl) Miriam wore during the service.

#### THE WEEKEND

Friends of the family invited about thirty people - relatives, out of town guests and Miriam's close friend to dinner on the Friday night before the ceremony. Although not normally observant, the hosts prepared for the Sabbath evening rituals of candle lighting, blessing the wine and blessing the bread. Miriam introduced them to the ritual of blessing the bread which she learned at the women's group. "I felt like I gave them something. They loved it." The evening had a festive atmosphere. "Many of



my parents friends and my family came in from out of town. They hadn't been together for a very long time. These are friends of my parents since high school. This was a simcha to bring them together after a period of time." When, after four and a half hours, Miriam and her friend left to walk home, they were the first ones to leave. As they walked, they discussed Miriam's d'var torah and other things that were to happen the next morning.

Very early the next morning Miriam and her friend walked to the synagogue, put things in order and talked until other people began to arrive. Services began as scheduled at 9:30. What was special for the bat mitzvah began with the Torah service at about 10:30. Family were given the honours of opening the Ark in which the Torahs are kept, being called to the reading of the Torah, lifting and dressing the scroll at the completion of the Torah reading, and closing the Ark after the Torah was replaced. It was important for Miriam that her grandmother have the honor of being called to the reading of the Torah. Since her grandmother can't read Hebrew, Miriam wrote out for her phonetically the blessings which are said before and after the Torah is read.

The leader of the women's group had the honor of calling people up to the reading of the Torah. As is the normal custom in this congregation, she chanted the formula "Rise up [first name] [second name] son of/daughter of [parent's first name] [parent's second name] and [other parent's first name] [other parent's second name]" when calling each person up, and chanted a blessing for each after their section of the Torah had been read.

As is the case at all bar and bat mitzvahs, the congregat to

became particularly attentive when Miriam was called up for the concluding aliyah. The blessing chanted after she concluded included a song about women rejoicing in the Torah which was written by the women's group leader. The Torah was then rolled and dressed, and Miriam chanted the haftorah. When she had completed the concluding blessing over the haftorah, the congregation, as is often the case at bar and bat mitzvahs in this synagogue, called out "Mazel Tov" (literally, "good luck," colloquially, "congratulations") and threw candies at her. Miriam was lead down from the bimah (the elevated platform on which the Torah is read) and most of the congregation joined hands, dancing through the aisles singing "Simmen Tov u' Mazel Tov" (a traditional song of congratulations).

The service resumed, the Torah was paraded through the synagogue and returned to the Ark, and Miriam returned to the bimah to deliver her d'var torah. While chanting her portions from the Torah and haftorah, Miriam, like the others who had the honor of being called to the Torah, had been facing the Ark. Now she was turned away from the Ark, towards the congregation, to deliver the talk.

The d'var Torah lasted about fifteen minutes. It was structured, as is conventional for a d'var Torah, as a commentary on the Torah and haftorah reading. In developing the commentary, quotations are used, events and personalities in the readings are discussed, and printed commentaries are quoted, but the intent is to use these sources in an original, personal way.

Miriam's d'var Torah discussed the women who were central to

the content of the week's Torah and haftorah portions. The role of woman as mother was acknowledged and honored and the implications of the biblical reference to a prophetess as "a mother of Israel" explored. Motherhood was presented as implying more than the physical act of bearing, but also including teaching and leadership. Different women leaders "mother" the "children of Israel" in different ways, some through scholarship and rationality, some through emotions and ritual. By exploring the personalities of these biblical characters contemporary Jewish women can find role models to guide their own relationship to tradition and contemporary Jewish life.

Miriam returned, accompanied by hand-shakes, kisses and congratulatory wishes, to her seat, and the service continued for about another twenty minutes, to about 12:30.

The entire congregation was invited to a buffet lunch in the social hall. Congratulations and expressions of pleasure continued. Miriam had been concerned that "many people in my family didn't understand where I was coming from" before the bat mitzvah, "asking questions about why have a bat mitzvah, why does a woman have to have a ceremony." After the ceremony, from what people said and how they acted during the reception and through the rest of the day, Miriam felt that their questions had been answered and that they understood.

My grandmother said to me . . . 'I don't understand why you have to observe Shabbat like that, just like in the shtetl' - like why do you regress like that? - I had to try and explain to her that I wasn't regressing, it was just getting in touch with something special, but she saw it as a definite regression. After my bat mitzvah, she said, 'Now I understand . . . '

Many other relatives expressed the opinion to her that they now thought that everyone should have their bar and bat mitzvah as an adult because Miriam's bat mitzvah, unlike many for thirteen years olds they've attended where the emphasis is on the party, had shown its "real meaning."

The celebrating continued that evening with a dinner party at Miriam's parents' home which lasted until about 1 a.m. More people attended than the night before. The night before was more for family, the night after more for friends.

There was no possibility of extending celebrations further because the next day Miriam had to leave the country as part of a group engaged in a Jewish communal welfare project. The awareness, shared by family, friends and the congregation, that Miriam was to leave on this trip underscored the seriousness of her bat mitzvah. Her ritual acceptance of responsibility was followed the next day by action which was an extension of her continuing commitment.

#### COMMENTARY

Miriam's bat mitzvah was a combination of the traditional and the non-traditional, a dual statement of integration into the group and of commitment to spiritual autonomy.

#### INTEGRATION INTO THE GROUP

The rituals and the social events through the weekend contained many integrating elements. While an adult bat mitzvah is still unusual, the form of bat mitzvah and its theme of identification were familiar to family, friends and congregation. The bat mitzvah dramatized the affirmation and reintegration of

family ties, participation in a religious congregation, identification with Jewish women and commitment to the broader ties of Jewish peoplehood.

FAMILY. Parents were involved early in the planning. Extended family were invited and their participation honored. The social events Friday and Saturday night were hosted by family.

RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY. Ties to a religious community were symbolized by the decision to have the ceremony in the context of a normal synagogue service instead of arranging one in a private setting as is sometimes done. Miriam participated by doing things that are usually done at a bar or bat mitzvah - chanting the concluding section from the Torah and the weekly section from the prophets and giving the d'var Torah. All members of the congregation attending on the day of the bat mitzvah were invited to the reception after services, regardless of whether they had received a personal invitation.

JEWISH WOMEN. The role of the leader of the women's group in the ceremony and sharing the preparations with a religious friend were both symbolic and practical. The bat mitzvah dramatized participation in a congregation and in a community of religious women. These two groups share some members, but they are distinct. The special role of religious women in the synagogue ceremony indicated their importance to the bat mitzvah. The dramatization of identification with Jewish women was also linked to identification with the Jewish people in the d'var Torah. The conjunction of these two elements is discussed in the next section.

JEWISH PEOPLEHOOD. The identification with the Jewish people is a presupposition of Jewish liturgy. The traditional prayerbook is written as communal worship in which each congregation expresses its prayers as part of the Jewish people. In addition to the traditional liturgy, this congregation, like most, recites a prayer for the State of Israel during the service.

The theme of identification with the Jewish people was strongly expressed in the d'var Torah delivered to the congregation. The d'var Torah was special for this occasion because it examined biblical precedents for the contemporary participation of women in Jewish life. Its focus was not on private and domestic virtues, although these were acknowledged, but on the special contribution women could make as leaders and public persons.

The exploration of the meaning of the bat mitzvah's Hebrew name - in the process leading up to the decision to have a bat mitzvah and publically during the d'var Torah - was an important part of the dual integration into the social roles of "woman" and "Jew." The symbolic importance of the Hebrew name recalls the tendency in many mystical traditions to find a hidden significance in the names of things. In mundane reality, names of things are necessary so that we may distinguish "this" from "that." For mundane purposes, any arbitrary labels will do. Languages, however, are not arbitrary. The names of things carry connotations, associations with other words, historical periods or persons; they communicate more than just what they signify. In many religious traditions, mystics have approached the names of

things as clues to their essence, seeing the name as a guide to the reality of the thing which is not apparent on the surface. Personal names, even more than the names of things, are symbolically rich. Carrying the name of a deceased relative - as is common among American Jews - in some mysterious way keeps that personality alive. Carrying the name of a biblical person - as is also common among American Jews - creates the potential for psychological identification with the biblical role model.

The naming patterns of American Jews add a twist to the mystical tendency to seek the essential personality in a person's name. Because the Hebrew name of most American's is different from their "English" name, it is used only in special Jewish settings such as synagogue or family. The exploration of this name and public identification with it is a symbolic indication of the importance of these settings to one's identity. It is a symbolic drawing of boundaries in which the person says that his/her real name is the one connecting him/her to other Jews, not the one known in society at large.<sup>4</sup>

#### SPIRITUAL AUTONOMY

The bat mitzvah also dramatized individualistic spiritual autonomy. The bat mitzvah was not held to fulfill a traditional or family obligation but as a personal choice. Miriam had become

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4. There are many, many instances in contemporary Jewish literature, e.g., Weisel (1982) and Cowan (1982), of the emotional importance of exploring one's Hebrew name while coming to terms with one's identity as a Jew. As the story by Wiesel indicates, the contrast between the public name and the private, hidden name suggests an analogy between American Jews and 16th century Iberian Marranos, an analogy developed polemically by Borowitz (1973).

more ritually observant than her parents, who are affiliated with a Conservative congregation. She had not, however, identified herself with Orthodoxy, in which general compliance with standards of observance is mandatory, but with a style of religious experimentation and seeking which is perhaps best expressed in the following quote from the part of interview in which the question of authority in Judaism was discussed:

. . . on a level of religion and feelings and spirituality, you always have to have a teacher . . . to guide you and give you resources, but you have to do it on your own because God is defined by your own person. I really don't like the idea of people sitting in a large synagogue and being passive. . . . Everyone has their own definition of God. You can't let someone else dictate to you what the meaning of Judaism and God is. . . . Many people in large, large congregations feel safe because they don't have to face the real meaning of why they're there because the rabbi is doing it all for them. . .

The bat mitzvah was a sufficiently flexible ritual to allow the introduction or emphasis of what was personally meaningful. Rather than follow a routinized institutional script, Miriam made choices all through the process - involving her family, finding a setting which was open to what she wanted and adapting the ritual script.

The ritual script was adapted to express her personal experiences as a woman, a Jew, a member of her family, a girl who had watched while the boys had their bar mitzvahs and an individual seeking spiritual meaning in life. The decision to have a bat mitzvah crystallized around desire to speak about the meaning of her Hebrew name. The ceremony was arranged at a congregation where gender distinctions are not made in ritual and where a d'var Torah is given by a member instead of a sermon given by a rabbi. She chose someone she personally respected to work



the themes that they expressed connect them to approaches to Judaism found in a loose but active network of individuals and organizations. Miriam's way along the path that led to the particular bat mitzvah she had was structured for her by an interfaith network of individuals exploring spiritual issues, a loosely organized woman's group, a sophisticated center for Jewish spiritual development and a congregation combining a commitment to gender equality and tradition.

The Jewish network developing a path of personal, voluntaristic spirituality reached many people through the three volumes of *The Jewish Catalogue* (Seigel, Strassfeld and Strassfeld, 1973), *The Second Jewish Catalogue* (Strassfeld and Strassfeld, 1976) and *The Third Jewish Catalogue* (Strassfeld and Strassfeld, 1980). These publications developed out of the "havurah movement," but the approach to Judaism they contained appealed to many in the Jewish mainstream. This approach to Judaism is organizationally supported by the National Havurah Committee and its publication, *New Traditions*. It is also found in the "alternative" Jewish magazines *Moment*, *Sh'ma* and the feminist magazine *Lillith* and in occasional articles in other publications. As well, the network is sustained by personal contacts within mainstream denominational and educational organizations. Within established synagogues ways have been found of accommodating alternative services which are characterized by informality, lay participation, rotating leadership and experimentation with innovations and revived traditions, in addition to maintaining more formal conventional services

conducted by ecclesiastical specialists (see, e.g., Furman (1981)).

A rationale for exploring traditional Judaism in a search for personal meaning is found in the work of the influential Jewish theologian Franz Rosenzweig (1886-1929; see Rosenzweig, 1961, and also Guttman, 1964:367-397). Rosenzweig's theology dissolved the union found in the early period of the Reform movement between the ideas of individual freedom and the rejection of a traditionally distinct way of life. The individual search for a meaningful life does not lead to the reformation of Judaism as a rationalist abstract faith, but to a new basis for commitment to traditional values and practices. For Rosenzweig, a Jewish way of life comes at the end of man's search for meaning, not as a given. Accepting the modern individual's freedom of conscience, Rosenzweig argued that traditional beliefs and practices could be adhered to because they are personally meaningful, not externally obligatory. This argument gave a theological justification for the selective reintroduction into Reform practice of many traditional observances which had been earlier removed.

Using the language of Durkheim and Luckmann about religious trends in modern society, we may say that Rosenzweig's theology recognizes the modern Jew's freedom of thought and structural position as consumer in a marketplace of meaning systems. In Rosenzweig's work, the freedom to search for meaning led to sophisticated, rigorous philosophical inquiry. In its popular form, the search for what is personally meaningful legitimates the personal exploration and adaptation of traditional beliefs and practices.

### *INDIVIDUALISM AND MODERN RITUAL*

The adult bat mitzvah which has been studied illustrates the blending of symbols of group integration and symbols of individual uniqueness. This blending expresses the desire to bring the external demands of group tradition and the sacredness which modern culture accords to individual autonomy into a harmonious relationship -- a desire to experience religious-communal commitment as choice as well as fate. This bat mitzvah is used only as an illustration, suggesting where Luckmann's comment that "church religiosity" could continue as "one of the many manifestations of an emerging, institutionally nonspecialized social form of religion" might lead research on the contemporary meaning of religious affiliation and participation.

In a society in which the individual has the structural freedom to build personal identity around meanings appropriated from a wide variety of cultural sources, a religious tradition becomes one resource among others upon which an individual may draw. Some will choose not to draw upon it; others, to connect in a tentative way around life-cycle events such as birth, marriage and death. Others will choose a deep involvement as they confront the problems of personal meaning and social ethics.

Campbell (1978), using Troeltsch's discussion of types of religion, argued that the search for meaning under the conditions of structural individualism in modern society leads to mysticism, belief in the possibility of spiritual growth, tolerance, and syncretism. This "spiritual and mystic" religiosity separates

itself from established religions and seeks to replace them (*ibid.*:147). Because this form of religion has "no place for formal organization or communal ritual" (*ibid.*:150) and attaches no special importance to formal statements of belief (*ibid.*), it is, in Troeltsch's adjective, "secret."

The emphasis in Campbell's argument on personal, eclectic mysticism reflects the modern sacredness of the individual recognized by both Durkheim and Luckmann, but it underestimates both Durkheim's insistence on the social importance of collective ritual and the flexibility of institutionalized religion. Theology and practice may be adapted - and legitimated by a modern reading of basic sources - to accommodate a personal, selective, tolerant pursuit of spiritual growth. In an age in which religion is chosen rather than given, the fact of choice and the meaning of that choice to the individual reshape religious rituals, leading to the simultaneous dramatization of integration into the group and individual spiritual autonomy.

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