

**A CEREMONY
of
BAAL(AT) MITZVAH**

by

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For the children of my species

Who must all ascend

The ladder of life.

1.

MUSIC

Reader

We are the children of time. In time we are born, and in time we grow. We are gathered here together to celebrate a gift of time and growth; we have come to rejoice in the Baal(at) Mitzvah.

Reader and Group

The time of life does not pass in a single flow always the same. Living time is a chain linked by seasons, a chain we create and in which we are created.

Reader

To every thing there is a season, And a time to every purpose under the heaven;

לכל זמן ועת לכל־הפץ תחת השמים:

La-kol zeman, Ve-et le-chol che-fets ta-chat ha-sha-may-im:

Group

A time to be born, and a time to die, A time for planting, and a time for uprooting;

עת ללדת ועת למות
עת לטעת ועת לעקור נטוע

Et la-le-det, ve-et la-mut,
Et la-ta-at, ve-et la-a-kor na-tu-a;

2.

Reader

A time to tear, and a time to sew. A time to break down, and a time to build up;

עת לקרוע ועת להפור
עת לפרוץ ועת לבנות

Et lik-ro-a, ve-et lit-por,
Et lif-rots, ve-et liv-not;

Group

A time to scatter stones, and a time to gather stones together. A time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;

עת להשליך אבנים ועת כנוס אבנים
עת לחבוק ועת לרחק מחבק

Et le-hash-lich a-va-nim, ve-et ke-nos a-va-nim,
Et la-cha-vok, ve-et lir-chok me-cha-bek;

Reader

A time to weep, and a time to laugh. A time to mourn, and a time to dance;

עת לבכות ועת לשחוק
עת ספוד ועת רקוד

Et liv-kot, ve-et lis-chok,
Et se-fod, ve-et re-kod;

3.

Group

A time to keep silence, and a time to speak,
To every thing there is a season.

עַת לְחַשׁוֹת וְעַת לְדַבֵּר
לְכָל זְמַן

Et la-cha-shot, ve-et le-da-ber; La-kol ze-man.

(Ecclesiastes 3: selected verses)

Reader and Group

The seasons of life are many: infancy and childhood; youth and maturity. Each brings its challenge, and each its duty. Even as one season is enjoyed, the next and future seasons call to us. To their summons we must respond, for we are all our seasons, and their fulfillment is life's demand. Answering the challenges of our seasons, we are realized; responding to their desires, we travel in truth the stages of life's way.

Reader

We are creatures of past and future. As the future summons, so have we longed for it. From infancy's wishes, the child is born. From the yearnings of childhood, the youth is formed. Out of youth's striving, maturity comes to be.

Reader and Group

The fruit hidden in the seed whispers to the earth, entreating to be brought into view. So do the riches in each of life's stages lie secretly within, beseeching to come forth. May we discover the treasure each new stage stores for us, and bring forth the ripe fruit of every season. May we respond to the challenge of self-creation with courage and joy. For everything has been made beautiful in its season.

4.

(Group rises)

Reader

בָּרוּךְ מַעַיִן הַחַיִּים סִבַּת הַהַיְוָה אֲשֶׁר בְּכוֹחוֹ
נוֹצֵר הָאָדָם.

Baruch ma-yan hacha-yim, sibat ha-havayah, asher bechocho no-tsar ha-a-dam.

Blessed is the wellspring of life, ground of being, by whose power humankind is created.

Reader and Group

בָּרוּךְ כְּבוֹד הַיְצִירָה לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד.

Baruch ke-vod ha-ye-tsi-rah le-o-lam va-ed.

Blessed is the glory of creation forever and ever.

Reader

בְּרוּכָה יְצִירַת אוֹר וְחֹשֶׁךְ, הַחַיִּים וְכֹל זְמַנָּיו.

Be-ru-chah ye-tsi-rat or va-cho-shech, ha-cha-yim ve-choi ze-ma-nav.

Blessed is the creation of light and darkness, of life and all its seasons.

(Group is seated)

Reader

In the beginning, life is ruled by desire. When first we enter the world, without knowledge and without strength, desire guides us. We seek not the true and the good, only that which pleases. We know nothing of the wishes of others, only our own. Wishes create the infant's world, desire is its master.

5.

Reader and Group

The desires of life's beginning are innocent, yet they are unformed and have no end. Without limits, chaos threatens. We soon must rule over them, lest they rule over us. As the potter shapes clay to bring forth its hidden beauty, so must the impulses of infancy be fashioned to reveal their deep purposes. We turn then to mitzvah to govern our lives. Mitzvah is the commandment wisdom decrees to desire:

Thou shalt set these bounds, go not further;
These purposes shalt thou seek, pursue not others.

(Music for Silent Meditation)

Reader

The Sages of Israel have ever loved wisdom, and proclaimed her right to command mitzvah. Thus it is written that Solomon, king of Israel, saw wisdom as in a vision, and his words tell of her demand.

Reader and Group

Wisdom cries aloud in the streets,
She lifts up her voice in the squares.
At the head of noisy streets she calls,
At the entrances of the city gates she utters her words:

חֲכָמוֹת בַּחוּץ תִּרְנֶה,
בְּרַחְבוֹת הַתֵּן קוֹלֶה.
בְּרֹאשׁ הַמִּיּוֹת תִּקְרָא,
בְּפִתְחֵי שַׁעֲרִים בְּעִיר אֲמַרְיָה תֹאמֶר.

Choch-mot ba-chuts ta-ro-nah, Bar-cho-vot ti-ten ko-lah. Be-rosh ho-mi-yot tik-ra, Be-fit-che she-a-rim ba-ir a-ma-re-ha to-mer.

6.

Reader

If you will but turn and pay heed to my counsel,
Behold, I will pour out my spirit upon you,
I will make known my words to you:

תָּשָׁבוּ לְתוֹכְחָתִי,
הִנֵּה אֲבִיעָה לָכֶם רוּחִי,
אוֹדִיעָה דְבָרֵי אֲחֻכֶּם:

Ta-shu-vu le-to-chach-ti,
Hi-neh a-bi-ah la-chem ru-chi,
O-di-ah de-va-rai et-chem.

Group

My child, if you will receive my words,
And store my commandments within you.
Inclining your ear to wisdom,
And applying your heart to understanding.
If you appeal to intelligence,
And lift up your voice to reason.
If you seek her as silver,
And search for her as hidden treasures:

בְּנֵי אִם-תִּקַּח אֲמָרִי,
וּמִצְוֹתַי תִּצְפֹּן אֲתָד.
לְהִקְשִׁיב לְחֻכְמָה אֲזַנְךָ,
תִּפְּהַ לְבָבְךָ לְתַבּוּנָה.
כִּי אִם לְבִינָה תִקְרָא,
לְתַבּוּנָה תִתֵּן קוֹלְךָ.
אִם-תִּבְקֶשְׁנָה כַּכֶּסֶף,
וְכַמְטָמְנִים תִּחְפְּשֶׁנָּה.

7.

Be-ni im ti-kach a-ma-rai, U-mits-vo-tai tits-pon i-tach. Le-hak-shiv la-choch-mah oz-ne-cha, Ta-teh lib-cha lat-vu-nah. Ki im la-bi-nah tik-ra, Lat-vu-nah ti-ten ko-le-cha. Im te-vak-she-nah cha-ka-sef, Ve-cha-mat-mo-nim tach-pe-se-nah.

Reader

Then you will understand righteousness and justice,
And keep to every good path.
For when wisdom finds a welcome within you,
and knowledge becomes a pleasure to you;
Discretion will watch over you,
Reason will guard you:

אִם תִּבְיִן צְדָק וּמִשְׁפָּט,
וּמִיִּשְׁרָיִם כָּל־מַעְגַּל־טוֹב.
כִּי־תָבוֹא חֲכָמָה בְּלִבְךָ,
וְדַעַת לְנַפְשְׁךָ יִנְעָם.
מִזְמָה תִּשְׁמַר עֲלֶיךָ,
תִּבְנֶה תִּנְצֵרָכָה.

As ta-vin tse-dek u-mish-pat, U-me-sha-rim kol ma-gal tov. Ki ta-vo choch-mah ve-li-be-cha, Ve-da-at le-naf-she-cha yin-am. Me-zi-mah tish-mor a-le-cha, Te-vu-nah tin-tse-re-kah.

Group

My child, forget not my teaching,
But let your heart keep my commandments.
For a long and happy life,
And peace, will they bring to you:

בְּנֵי תוֹרָתִי אֵל־תִּשְׁכַּח,
וּמִצְוֹתַי יִצַּר לִבְךָ.
כִּי אֲרֹךְ יָמִים וְשָׁנֹת חַיִּים,
שְׁלוֹם יוֹסִיפוּ לָךְ.

8.

Be-ni to-ra-ti al tish-kach, U-mits-vo-tai yi-tsor fi-be-cha. Ki o-rech ya-mim ush-not cha-yim, Ve-sha-lom yo-si-fu lach.

(Proverbs 1-3: selected verses)

SONG

Baal(at) Mitzvah

Fire is a symbol of wisdom's power and light. As fire kindles and brightens, so do wisdom's flames ignite the lamp of commandment, and her rays illumine the shadowy recesses of desire. Thus do I, on this day of my Baal(at) Mitzvah, in dedication to the life of mitzvah, kindle these flames.

(A lamp or large candlestick is lit.)

בְּרוּכָה סִבַּת הַתְּוִיָּה אֲשֶׁר בְּכוֹחָהּ אֲנִי [מְדַלֵּיק]
[מְדַלֵּיקָה] נֵר מִצְוָה בְּיוֹם [בַּעַל] [בַּעֲלַת]
מִצְוָה הַזֶּה שְׁלִי.

Be-ru-chah si-bat ha-ha-va-yah a-she-er be-cho-chah a-ni mad-lik (ah) ner mits-vah be-yom ba-al (at) mits-vah ha-zeh she-fi.

Blessed is the ground of being by whose power I kindle the lamp of commandment on this day of my Baal(at) Mitzvah.

כִּי נֵר מִצְוָה וְתוֹרָה אֹר, וְדֶרֶךְ חַיִּים
תוֹכְחוֹת מוֹסֵר.

Ki ner mits-vah ve-to-rah or, ve-de-rech cha-yim to-che-chot mu-sar.

For the commandment is a lamp, and her disciplines are the way to life.

9.

בְּרוּכָה סִבַּת הַחַיִּיהָ אֲשֶׁר בְּכַחֶהּ מוֹשְׁלַת הַחֻמְבָּה
בְּלֵב הָאָדָם.

Be-ru-chah si-bat ha-ha-va-yah a-sheer be-cho-chah mo-
she-let ha-choch-mah be-lev ha-a-dam.

Blessed is the ground of being by whose power wisdom
rules the heart of humankind. Amen.

(Blessings may be repeated in song)

Reader

In Eden's garden, when very young, humankind has not
the knowledge and the power to be master of the
commandments that govern life. We receive the help of
others to guide action and rule desire. Over infant and
child, the right to mitzvah is given in trust to parents and
community, to teachers and tradition.

Reader and Group

With the learning and growth of passing years come
knowledge and power. The task begins to establish
mitzvot of our own for ourselves. Slowly we receive
from others the right to mitzvah held for us. Advancing
into life, step by step, we take responsibility for our
actions and desires. The age of Baal(at) Mitzvah arrives,
the time to become master of the commandments that rule
our lives.

Reader

The age of Baal(at) Mitzvah brings profound progression
in body and mind. As with all growth that fulfills life,
the age of Baal(at) Mitzvah knows both darkness and
light. Anguish and joy, fear and courage, conflict and
decision, storms and serenity, aloneness and
togetherness, all accompany the passage of existence
deeper into itself, all are companions of freedom's
challenge.

10.

Reader and Group

In the age of Baal(at) Mitzvah, we are summoned to
shape the power freed by life's forward flow. From the
fountainhead of existence, we are called to create and
choose mitzvot to obey. We respond everyone alone,
each from our uniqueness, for mitzvot true to personal
being arise from the private heart. In creating mitzvot,
we create ourselves. In choosing mitzvot, we choose
ourselves. From the challenge of Baal(at) Mitzvah are
born the fullness and dignity of humankind promised at
life's beginning. Only they are truly free who are Baale
Mitzvah, masters of the commandments that rule their
lives.

Reader

In seeking the power of Baal(at) Mitzvah, the strength
and will to rule ourselves in wisdom, we climb a difficult
path to lofty heights. Yet though the ascent is steep, the
community Israel has reached upward to mitzvah
through the ages.

Reader and Group

Thus it is written that the prophet Moses, at the very
moment of Israel's birth, ascended to Sinai's lonely
mountain summit to reach the power of mitzvah. As it is
for every pilgrim who begins the journey, the way to
mitzvah was covered with deep mist. Thick darkness
shrouded Sinai's peak, and clouds hid the prophet's
path. Still, in the solitude of his soul's journey, Moses
came to the power of mitzvah for which he sought.

11.

Reader

Moses descended from Sinai's peak to share with all Israel the power of mitzvah he had found. The community Israel was young, and of itself could not climb Sinai's heights. With the years, Israel grew in strength and will. Their time of freedom came, to create and choose mitzvot of their own. So do all who are young receive mitzvot from others. In the age of Baal(at) Mitzvah, we turn to the voice within to establish mitzvot for ourselves.

MUSIC

(Group rises)

(Ark is opened. Parent removes and holds Torah Scroll.¹ If ceremony is performed at home, or Torah Scroll is otherwise unavailable, a Book of the Torah may be used in its place.)

(Group is seated)

Parent

(Parent holds Torah Scroll or Book of the Torah.)

Torah is the voice of Sinai. Its words speak of Sinai's eternal mystery, the human struggle for mitzvah. As (I) (we) now hold the Torah, so have (your father and) (your mother and) I held in (my) (our) hands your right to mitzvah. Yet this right has been (mine) (ours) for but a little while, to be kept in trust until this age of Baal(at) Mitzvah. Now (I) (we) hand to you the Torah as a symbol of the power of mitzvah you will henceforth, with ever greater zeal, seek for yourself.

(Torah or Book of the Torah is handed to the Baal(at) Mitzvah.)

¹ See Note A, page 17

12.

Parent

Sinai calls to you as Moses was called, to establish mitzvot to rule your life. The vision of Sinai promises, as Moses was promised, that the power of mitzvah awaits. At the time of Baal(at) Mitzvah, every person prepares to ascend the heights of Sinai within. Although the path of Baal(at) Mitzvah is travelled alone, you take as part of you the love and hope of the past years. They will ever be your companions, as we, your parents, will stand ever beside you.

Parent(s)

May your way be blessed.

יְהִיָּה [דַּרְכְּךָ] [דַּרְכְּךָ] מְבֹרָךְ.

Yi-he-yeh (dar-ke-cha) (dar-kech) me-vo-rach.

May wisdom's light shine upon you.

יָאֵר [עֲלֶיךָ] [עֲלֶיךָ] אֹזֶר הַחֲכָמָה.

Ya-er (a-le-cha) (a-la-yich) or ha-choch-mah.

May your journey bring you peace.

יְתֵן [לְךָ] [לְךָ] [מִסְעֶךָ] [מִסְעֶךָ] שְׁלוֹמִים.

Yi-ten (le-cha) (lach) (ma-sa-acha) (ma-sa-ech) sha-lom.

13.

Baal(at) Mitzvah

As I have received the Torah from your hands, so do I accept the challenge of Sinai that comes to me on this day of Baal(at) Mitzvah. Yet Sinai's vision speaks not only of freedom, but of duty, not of self alone, but of community. I am mindful, therefore, on this day of Baal(at) Mitzvah that, as my freedom has been affirmed in community, so am I called upon to affirm the freedom of others. As my promised portion has been confirmed in community, so am I called upon to confirm the fullness that has been promised others.

It is written that on the day of Sinai Israel entered into a covenant with heaven and earth; so is it my heritage on this day of Baal(at) Mitzvah to enter into a covenant of freedom with Israel and every living being. May the blessing of this freedom covenant bring peace and fulfillment to the community of earth, and the joy of Sinai to humankind everywhere.

(The Torah Scroll or Book of the Torah is set in place: on the lectern, if to be read; otherwise, may be displayed as a visual symbol.)

Reader

Torah is the ground of our dedication to truth. Its power has infused the search of centuries. From its devotion to wisdom, we derive the charge to strive for wisdom; from its commitment to the good, we are impelled to seek the good. The spirit of Torah abides with us as we turn to the lesson of this day of Baal(at) Mitzvah.

(If Torah is to be read, the Torah and Haftarah blessings on pages I-C-3ff. in The Community Service Book may here be read, and then continue on page 14.)

14.

LESSON²

(Music. Group rises at the conclusion of the Lesson when, if the Torah Scroll has been used, the Ark is opened and the Scroll is returned.)

SERMON

MUSIC

(Group rises)

(Grape juice or wine is poured by parent(s) into a goblet held by Baal(at) Mitzvah.)

Reader

Let us rejoice in the everliving creation, and give praise to the greatness that is manifest throughout the world. In the heavens above and the earth below, the divine glory stands revealed. Yet creation is never ended and the universe never full. Potentialities remain unrealized and promises unfulfilled. Thus even as we affirm the present, we commit ourselves to the richness of the coming life.

(Alternately, the service may be ended by proceeding with the Kiddush and Concluding Sections in The Community Service Book.)

² See Note B, page 18.

Baal(at) Mitzvah

Blessed is the wellspring of life whose creative power fashions the fruit of the vine.

בְּרוּךְ מַעַיֵן הַחַיִּים אֲשֶׁר כָּחוֹ הַבְּרִיאָה בּוֹרֵא
פְּרֵי הַגָּפֶן.

Baruch may-yan hacha-yim asher kocho habri-ah borei peri hagafen.

Blessed is the wellspring of life, ground of being, by whose power we have lived, abided, and reached this season.

בְּרוּךְ מַעַיֵן הַחַיִּים סִבַּת הַחַיָּה אֲשֶׁר בְּכוֹחוֹ
חַיֵּינוּ וְקָמְנוּ וְהִגַּעְנוּ לְזֶמַן הַזֶּה.

Baruch ma-yan hacha-yim, sibat ha-havayah asher bechocho cha-yi-nu ve-kam-nu v-hi-ga-nu laz-man ha-zeh.

(Baal(at) Mitzvah sips from the goblet.)

MUSIC

CONCLUDING MEDITATION

NOTE A

17.

The three paragraphs that follow (on pages 11,12) for which the reader is designated as "Parent," are written for a Baal(at) Mitzvah ceremony in which one or two parents participate. If one parent participates, that parent reads all three paragraphs. (The parent may, however, wish to ask some other person, a relative or close friend, to share the reading.) If two parents participate, it is suggested that the parents share the reading, dividing the paragraphs as they desire. The third paragraph, containing three blessings (page 12) may be read responsively by the parents.

If a person or persons who stand(s) in loco parentis to the Baal(at) Mitzvah (such as grandparents or a guardian) participates in the Baal(at) Mitzvah ceremony, such a person (or persons) simply read(s) the paragraphs indicated as read by "Parent." The variations suggested in the proceeding paragraph may also be implemented.

If a rabbi, or some other representative of the liberal (Polydox) religious community, (rather than parents of the Baal(at) Mitzvah, or a person who stands in loco parentis,) participates in the ceremony in place of the first two paragraphs (designated as read by "Parent," pages 11, 12) may be read.

Rabbi or Representative of Community
holding Torah Scroll or Book of the Torah

Torah is the voice of Sinai. Its words speak of Sinai's eternal mystery, the human struggle for mitzvah. As I now hold the Torah, so have (your mother and father) (others) held in their hands your right of mitzvah. Yet this right has been theirs to be kept in trust only until the age of Baal(at) Mitzvah. Now I hand to you the Torah as a symbol of the power of mitzvah you now seek for yourself.

18.

(Torah Scroll or Book of the Torah
is handed to the Baal(at) Mitzvah.)

Rabbi or Representative of Community

Sinai calls to you as Moses was called, to establish mitzvot to rule your life. The vision of Sinai promises, as Moses was promised, that the power of mitzvah awaits. At the time of Baal(at) Mitzvah every person prepares to ascend the heights of Sinai within. Although the path of Baal(at) Mitzvah is travelled alone, you take as part of you the love and hope of the past years.

They will ever be your companions, as we, your (mother) (father) community and friends, will stand ever beside you.

NOTE B

The Lesson, if possible, should consist of a passage chosen by the Baal(at) Mitzvah. The Lesson does not have to be taken from the Bible, but may come from any source the Baal(at) Mitzvah considers appropriate and relevant. Accordingly, the Lesson may be taken from the Bible; a philosopher such as Maimonides; a depth psychologist such as Freud; or a cosmologist such as Einstein.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am very grateful to Dr. Werner Weinberg for his generous contribution of time and effort in serving as a resource person for the preparation and transliteration of the Hebrew passages contained in the Baal(at) Mitzvah Ceremony. The Romanization Table employed in the transliteration for the conversion of Hebrew to Roman script can be found on pages 10 and 11 of Dr. Weinberg's authoritative, How Do You Spell Chanukah? A General-Purpose Romanization of Hebrew For Speakers of English.

SONGS

LIFE'S MANY SEASONS

Life's, life's many, many, many seasons,
 Have their beauty, their beauty and reasons,
 Links in a chain, a chain of days, promising tomorrows
 to yesterdays,
 Links in a chain of days, in a chain of days, promising
 tomorrows to yesterdays,
 To yesterdays, promising tomorrows to yesterdays,
 Promising, promising tomorrows to yesterdays,
 yesterdays, promising.

WISDOM

Wisdom, creation of the ages,
 Born of children and of sages;
 Guide that leads in present days,
 Sign that points to future ways;
 Gift of mystery, of life, of life and history.
 Gift of mystery, of life, of life and history.

SINAI

Sinai, mountain within that always is,
 From whose pinnacle we see above life's mist.
 We seek strength through your vision,
 To rise to heights of self-decision,
 Overcoming fear and life's aloneness,
 By touching the healing power of oneness.
 Sinai, mountain within that always is.
 Sinai, mountain within that always is.