

Summer 2016 Message from Rabbi Dubin

Dear Friends,

I hope you will all join us on Friday Night, June 10, as the JCNWJ community gathers for our annual Confirmation service. In years past, this service has taken place on Sunday mornings. This year, in order to elevate our joy (and enable more congregants to attend), we have chosen to conduct Confirmation on Shabbat, complete with Torah reading for the day.

Because June 10 is very close to the end of the school year, it might be assumed that we chose this date to *kvel* for that very reason. Such an assumption, however, while reasonable and logical, would also be wrong. Allow me to explain.

While it is commonly understood that the Jewish ceremony of Confirmation, which was developed and introduced at the turn of the 19th Century in Germany, developed at least in part out of a desire to include and honor participation in Jewish life not just by boys but by girls as well (for whom the ceremony of Bat Mitzvah had not yet been developed) this cannot have been the only reason.

After all, while the first recorded Confirmation service occurred in 1803 (Dessau, Germany), the first girls were not confirmed until 1814 (Berlin, Germany). Still, though, inclusion of girls by 1814 should hardly be understood as an inconsequential event. It set the stage for so much more to come.

This said, we cannot ignore the fact that at least part of the impetus for Jewish Confirmation came from an appreciation of its practice in the Christian world. As well, as I will discuss below, there was a growing dissatisfaction with the *Bar Mitzvah* ceremony as it stood at the time.

From Germany, the Jewish practice of Confirmation spread quickly, first to Denmark, Russia, and England, and then to the United States, where Isaac Mayer Wise presided over America's first Confirmation service as the Rabbi of Congregation Beth-El (Albany, NY) in 1846.

As Confirmation continued to find its place in American Judaism, Reform communities began in increasingly serious ways to question the legitimacy of *Bar Mitzvah* itself at 13 years of age (the first *Bat Mitzvah* ceremony didn't take place until Rabbi Mordecai Kaplan presided over his own daughter's coming of age on March 18, 1922). How, it was asked, could 13 possibly be the age of adulthood in the modern world? Therefore, not only did most Reform congregations (and many Conservative ones as well!) begin to emphasize Confirmation, but many (including B'nai Israel of Albany, GA where I served as a student rabbi during Rabbinical School) went so far as to actually **ban** the practice of *B'nei Mitzvah* at 13. It wasn't until the 1970s that this prohibition came to be lifted in many communities. By then, however, Confirmation had become so ingrained in the Reform mindset that it has

continued to stand as a major life-cycle event in the lives of our young people and, indeed, our entire communities, ever since.

And so now, back to the timing of our Confirmation service. It is no accident that we celebrate Confirmation during the second week of June this year, because this is also when Jews around the world (on the evening of June 11, 2016) will come together to usher in the festival of Shavuot. Confirmation is perfectly suited for this holiday because it is at this moment in the Jewish calendar that we commemorate and celebrate our receiving of the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai. At its core, Shavuot is about accepting responsibility. Our Confirmands, through their previous celebrations of becoming *B'not Mitzvah*, have already shown themselves capable of performing the fundamental rites of Judaism. Now, at Confirmation, it is different. Now, with some years of further maturation behind them, they are now ready and willing to (re)confirm their acceptance of responsibility to live lives of Jewish commitment.

Our Confirmation Shabbat service will take place Friday night, June 10, at 7:30. We look forward to seeing you all there.

L'Shalom,

Rabbi Dubin