

Bat Mitzvah Club 2010 - 2011

In Bat Mitzvah Club we learn about a vast variety of topics that hold special importance for Jewish women. We focused on famous women throughout Jewish history and the impact they have on us today as we become Jewish Women. In addition we learned and studied about many holidays and mitzvot so we can have a greater understanding and appreciation of our Jewish religion.

Starting off with Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah, the four Matriarchs (Mothers) who built up our Jewish nation. Our Sages tell us that Sarah had a higher degree of prophecy than Abraham. In the merit of Sarah G-d blessed Abraham with wealth and with all other blessings. The greatest blessing for Abraham was that he merited to have Sarah as his wife. As long as Sarah lived, a "cloud of glory" hovered over her tent, and a light burned from Erev Shabbos to Erev Shabbos, and her home was full of blessing.

We then moved along in history to the time period of the judges to learn about Devorah and Yael. The fourth of the judges who ruled over the Jewish people after the death of Joshua, was not a man, but a woman, one of the most famous of all times, the Prophetess and Judge, Devorah. She was one of the seven women prophetesses whose prophecies are recorded in the Bible. She was wise and G-d fearing, and the people flocked to her for advice and help. Deborah held court beneath a palm-tree, in the open air. The entire Jewish nation respected this great prophetess. At this time the Jews were threatened by the Caananites, with Devorah's prophecies and encouragement the Jews went to fight. And no one will ever forget how Yael risked her life to kill the leader of the Cannanites, Sisera by piercing the

tent's pole through his temple. The oppressors were defeated and the Jews were free again to live their own life in peace.

The Holidays of Chanuka and Purim have strong women as heroines in the stories. We learned of the great sacrifices Yehudis and Chana by Chanuka and of Queen Esther's major role in the story of Purim. Each of these women put themselves at great risk in order to successfully save the Jewish people.

Jewish women throughout history have played an active role in keeping our religion every holiday there are special things we do to celebrate and everyday there are mitzvot we do showing our commitment and pride to being a Jewish woman. Here are just a few of the many we touched upon:

Hebrew Name: A Jewish name is the keystone of Jewish identity. Our sages tell us that although more than two centuries of exile and slavery had all but assimilated the Children of Israel into the pagan society of Egypt, they remained a distinct entity because they retained their Hebrew "names, language and dress," and thus merited their miraculous redemption. Your Hebrew name is your spiritual call sign, embodying your unique character traits and G-d-given gifts. Ideally, you should use it 24 hours a day, not just when you're called to the Torah or when prayers are offered on your behalf. Your Hebrew name functions as a conduit, channeling spiritual energy from G-d into your soul and your body. This is why, say the Chassidic masters, an unconscious person will often respond and be revived when his or her name is called. According to Jewish custom, a critically ill person is sometimes given an additional Hebrew name -- somewhat like a spiritual bypass operation to funnel fresh spirituality around their existing name and into their

bodies; with the influx of spirituality, the body is given renewed vigor to heal itself.

Kibbud Av Va-aim: Honoring parents is one of the select mitzvahs featured in the Ten Commandments. The Torah tells us, "Honor your father and mother" and it tells us, "Honor your G-d"—implying that honoring parents is on par with honoring G-d. After all, no matter how much respect we give our parents, we can never repay them for their part in bringing us into this world. But that's not the only reason to honor them, It's also a mitzvah. Serve and assist your parents however possible and whenever necessary. When Mom or Dad enters, stand up. Remain standing until they sit down or are no longer within eyesight. Or tell you to sit down. If your father or mother has a special place to sit, don't sit there. Don't contradict your parents to their face. There's always a discreet way to work with this. When not in their presence, you can express an opposing opinion, but in a respectful manner. Unless you are asked for your parent's name, don't call—or even refer—to your parents by name—even posthumously

Tu B'shevat: Tu B'Shevat, the 15th of Shevat on the Jewish calendar is the day that marks the beginning of a "New Year for Trees." This is the season in which the earliest-blooming trees in the Land of Israel begin a new fruit-bearing cycle. We mark the day by eating fruit, particularly the 'Shivas Haminim' which are the fruits that are singled out by the Torah in its praise of the bounty of the Holy Land, Israel: grapes, figs, pomegranates, olives and dates.

Shabbat Candles: Every Friday night 18 minutes before sunset woman and girls over the age of 3 light the Shabbat candles. Single girls light 1 candle and married woman light 2; many have the custom to add an additional candle after the

birth of each of their children. The primary function of the Shabbat candles is to bring peace and tranquility into the home and to enhance our enjoyment of the Shabbat meal. The candles also serve to remind us of the spiritual aspect of Shabbat: just as a physical candle reveals the otherwise unseen parts of a room, so, too in a spiritual sense, the Shabbat candles reveal the unseen G-dly energy which permeates our existence. The Jewish woman is an “Akeret Habayis” – the foundation of the home. She is the foundation and inspiration of the home, so it is most fitting for her to light up the home with her Shabbat candles.

Challah: I’ll bet you thought challah refers to the two braided loaves of bread reserved for Shabbat meals. It does. But mainly, challah is the small chunk of dough we tear off and burn before baking any bread. Originally, that dough was given to a kohen, a descendant of Aaron who served in the Temple. In Messianic times, we’ll reinstate this practice. Meanwhile, we need to burn that challah before we can eat the bread from which it was taken. Taking challah tells us that whatever we are given is not for our use alone. If we have wisdom, money or good health, our first step is to put them towards a G-dly purpose. Jewish women traditionally prefer baking their own challah for Shabbat over buying from a baker. It’s a mitzvah, so why give it away? It’s also a very feminine kind of mitzvah, nurturing the bodies and souls of the family and guests. How? After you knead the dough, before shaping it into loaves, place all your dough in a single pan or bowl and recite the blessing. Separate a small piece (approx. one ounce) and say: “This is challah.” Wrap the challah in foil and place it in the empty broiler or oven, or burn it by any other method.