

Making Connections

By: Ryan Meltzer

It was 2004, and in just two years I would become a Bar Mitzvah. But what does that mean? I know that it means that I would be counted in a minyan. I know that it means I would read from the Torah for the first time. It also means that I would be a Jewish adult who commits to live my life with Chesed, tzedakah, and tikkum olam. But how could I just wake up on the day of my Bar Mitzvah and say, "Ok, I am now a Bar Mitzvah" if I had not prepared myself. If I was going to accept the responsibilities of a Jewish adult, I had to understand what those responsibilities meant.

In order to truly understand what it meant to be a Jewish adult, I felt it was important to have first hand experience. I knew my religious school would prepare me to read the Torah and recite prayers, but I didn't think my Bar Mitzvah was just about the service. At the time, my Temple did not require students to do a service project, but I felt it was important to do a project because caring for others in the community was part of becoming a Jewish adult. Learning about chesed, tzedakah, and tikkun olam was my responsibility.

I knew that were Jewish elders living in Assisted Living facilities in my community. These elders could not go to Shabbat Services or celebrate other holidays at a Temple. I knew how important Temple was to me, and I knew that the residents must be sad that they no longer can attend Temple. I became a Jewish Family Service of Metrowest volunteer. Once a month my friends and I went to Farm Pond Assisted Living Facility to help lead Shabbat Services. We also helped to organize other holiday celebrations. My group of friends became the pilot for Kesher 13, a new program at Jewish Family Services of Metrowest.

Through Kesher 13, I had the opportunity to become friends with elders and feel that they have made me part of their family. They are always very interested in how my friends and I celebrate the holidays, and about our Jewish studies. They care about their religion and they want to know that people care about them. The older people at Farm Pond might not hear, see or talk as well as other people, but they are still very nice on the inside. A woman might use a wheelchair, but she can still tell stories and sing prayers with us. Another woman may not be able to sing, but she can still hum along.

We not only bring the residents Shabbat, we help them remember their traditions. They share how some traditions have changed while some have stayed the same.

As I stood on the bima last year, I felt confident that I was ready to become a Bar Mitzvah. Not only could I read from the Torah and lead the congregation in prayers, but I truly understood my responsibilities as a Jewish adult. As a Bar Mitzvah, I am commanded to make the world a better place for others. I feel my service project prepared me to say, "Okay, now I am a Bar Mitzvah," and really know what that means.

In addition to Keshet 13, I chose to decorate the bima with a basket filled with food to be donated to Lucy and Joes Food Pantry for Frail Elders at Jewish Family Service at Metrowest. Instead of flowers that I would just throw away, I was able to help feed the elders in my community who do not have the resources to get their own food.

The year is 2007. One year after my Bar Mitzvah. I continue to visit the residents at Farm Pond, not because I have to do a service project, but because the visits have become a part of my life. The residents have become my friends, and I look forward to seeing them every month. Those of us who have already had our Bar/Bat Mitzvah are helping the new Keshet 13 participants feel more comfortable helping elders. I am committed to chesed, tzedakah, and tikkun olam, and know that through Keshet 13, I have made the world a better place for the Jewish residents at Farm Pond.