

EMETH'S B"NOT MITZVAH CLASS

Several years ago, Aileen Teren-Foster, a new member of Congregation Emeth in Morgan Hill, shared her dream to have a bat mitzvah as an adult. Her enthusiasm and determination were the inspiration for beginning an adult b'nai mitzvah class which has met weekly for the past two years, taught by Rabbi Debbie Israel. On June 14, the five students celebrated their bat mitzvah.

"I wanted to take my religious knowledge (or perhaps I should say, my lack of knowledge) to another level for years, " Teren-Foster said.

When the class began, it focused on general Jewish education and especially maturing reading Hebrew. The original class had eight students interested only in the Jewish learning; they stopped attending when the class moved into its second year and the focus was more directly on bat mitzvah training.

"I joined the class with no intention of having a bat mitzvah since I already had his experience,' said Susan Braun, who had also recently joined Emeth. "I was looking for Bible and prayer study from a new perspective and, as a new member to Emeth, it was a good way to immerse myself in congregational life and meet members. Somewhere along the way Rabbi Israel asked me if I would participate in the ceremony and I signed up."



L-R: Rabbi Debbie Israel, Aileen Teren-Foster, Susan Braun, Marby Lee, Susan Meyers, MariaElena Jarson

The students studied customs, laws, ceremonies, history, rituals, holidays, life-cycle ceremonies, and everyday Jewish living. They had a weekly mitzvah assignment. They read the Five Books of Moses, cover to cover, following the weekly Torah readings. Marby Lee, whose daughter Meghan will celebrate her bat mitzvah in June 2015, observed, "As I saw my daughter go through religious

school, I again saw how much I had missed in my religious upbringing. I realized that in order to raise her properly, I needed to complete my own religious training, and that's why I decided to pursue my bat mitzvah. Going through this process, I've seen how having belief in G-d gives you strength in the most trying and difficult of times and can make the most joyous events even better. It is one of the most important things I am passing on to my daughter - *l'dor va'dor* - from generation to generation."

Two years ago, when the class began, most of the students could not read the Hebrew alphabet. On June 14, they chanted from Torah, using the correct musical notations, called *trope*. "The day I held the Torah *yad* (pointer) and read the words that I had studied, I fulfilled a promise I made to myself several years ago," said Susan Meyers, who is also the temple's president. "When I was 13 this was not possible for me. I am deeply appreciative that I had this opportunity to study with a group of extraordinary women and a rabbi I admire and respect."

In the process, the bat mitzvah students became a group of friends who could discuss their innermost thoughts. They challenged Torah concepts and they challenged the rabbi. They grew in their learning and knowledge and their participation in services was an inspiration to everyone attending. "As a member of the b'not mitzvah class--learning, practicing, joining in without reservation--I've found my place in Judaism, my spiritual home at Emeth, and discovered a deep and lasting peace within myself," said MariaElena Jarson. "As a student and as a member of this amazing group of women, I realized that the beauty of the Jewish tradition is that it encompasses all of us, whether we are born Jewish, or found Jewish, or loving Jewish. This pathy of study, from my soul at Mount Sinai to this very moment as a 38-year-old bat mitzvah, has been one of the most rewarding and deeply meaningful transitions in my life."

In reflecting on the experience of teaching these dedicated students and observing their spiritual growth during the past two years, Rabbi Israel said, "The sages of the Talmud said, 'I have learned much wisdom from m teacher, more from my colleagues, and the most from my students.' Teaching this class has been my honor and privilege. Frankly, I'm sad it's over. I looked forward to it every week!"

Congregation Emeth will soon be forming its next adult learning / b'nai mitzvah class. Anyone who is interested in participating in a class or who would like more information about South Valley's only Jewish community or synagogue should contact the temple at info@emeth.net. Emeth can also be reached at (408) 778-8200.