

D'var Torah Written by Bonnie Davis

I grew up in northeastern Pennsylvania in the 1970s during a resurgence of the women's rights movement. My family belonged to a Reform synagogue, thought to be liberal and progressive for the area and the era. However, in 1978, when I was 13 years old, it still was not customary for girls to become b'not mitzvah in my community. I didn't question it at the time, but looking back, I realize how exclusionary this practice was for us as young women.

As my sons were becoming b'nai mitzvah here at Congregation Beth Israel, I began to feel the impact of being excluded from this very important Jewish life cycle event, and that my Jewish education had been quite lacking – I couldn't even read Hebrew. So, I enrolled in the adult Hebrew class two years ago, which, under normal circumstances, would have culminated in an adult b'nai mitzvah at a Friday evening service.

So, this is my bat mitzvah. My welcoming into the adult Jewish community – 42 years late. But, so much has changed. Continued secular feminism has influenced female exclusion in Judaism. I believe that Congregation Beth Israel is a community that includes women in all aspects of Jewish life, prayer, and study. I am inspired by the intelligent, innovative, and caring female role models at Congregation Beth Israel - our clergy, our staff and our congregants. I feel heartened that Congregation Beth Israel is inclusive of all people, regardless of our differences.

In our Torah portion, G-d says "*Kedoshim tihyu*", "you shall be holy" – plural - G-d spoke to us as a whole community. I don't believe G-d was excluding anyone when speaking to the Jewish people. As a member of Congregation Beth Israel, I will continue to foster our inclusive community, where everyone has a voice and feels seen and heard. Now more than ever, it is important to be a role model and support the mission of Congregation Beth Israel as a place where every person makes a difference.