Gesharim

Bar/Bat Mitzvah Program

Did you have a Bar Mitzvah? A Bat Mitzvah? Was it a meaningful event? For many Israeli children the Bar / Bat Mitzvah rite of passage simply passes them by. More often than not, it is an awkward moment in a synagogue followed by an evening in a catering hall surrounded by family and friends, but totally devoid of religious meaning.

To meet this challenge, the OU Israel Center launched the Gesharim (Bridges) program to give pre-adolescents a Bar/Bat Mitzvah that is filled with meaning and significance that they will carry with them their entire lives.

The program consists of a three-month series of learning activities aimed at imbuing basic values in a relevant fashion. The program goes way beyond learning how to read the Torah in the traditional chant, and how to put on Tefillin. Gesharim offers a curriculum of important themes that enhance religious observance and the beginning of their road to adulthood:

- Growing up Stages in life. What differentiates an adult from a child?
- Accepting responsibility
- The Individual, What makes you special?
- Belonging to a group, Peer Pressure
- How do we relate to those who are different?
- The Jewish Calendar
- Responsibility
- Being an Israeli and a Jew - Individual Identity
- Jewish Symbols
- Israel: the Land & the State
- Zionism
- Exploring our Jewish Roots
- Jewish Rites of Passage
- Me & My Family

In addition to weekly activities, the young people participate in craft workshops, trips and Shabbatonim to create a bond to Yiddishkeit and a strong connection to Eretz Yisra'el.

At the end of the course, each child presents a project on a topic related to what has been studied. The presentations are made before an assembly of family and friends. Many groups also include a trip to the Western Wall (Kotel) in Jerusalem as part of the closing ceremonies of the course.

Every year, 900 young people become more committed to their Jewish heritage and to Israel because of their experience in Gesharim.

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