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Bar Mitzvah Speech
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The Torah tells a story of how the children of Israel were so close to entering G-d's Promised Land, but instead their journey lasted another 40 years as they roamed the desert. And each step along the way they were tested and retested as to their faith in G-d and to G-d's laws.

I too have had a similar journey that has also lasted me 40 years. A journey I too thought would be short; a journey to become a Bar Mitzvah when I was thirteen years old and to live G-d's law. But my family moved just prior to this special event in my life and for various reasons my Bar Mitzvah was put on hold.

My early Jewish religious training started when I was 10 years old in Chicago and lasted just 2 short years. I am very thankful I had this opportunity to first kindle the flame for the love of G-d and learn the essence of Judaism early in my life.

Although my parents, blessed be their memory, did not have much of a religious background themselves, they saw to it that I was given formal training at a Synagogue. During this time, I would go alone to Shabbat services almost every Saturday morning. It was always a special day for me.

There were several parts of the morning prayers that as a boy became part of my very heart and soul. There was the prayer that contains the words "*the G-d of Abraham, the G-d of Isaac and the G-d of Jacob*". As a young boy, each time when I heard these words in synagogue, I felt a sense of pride, a powerful sense of

belonging; a sense of wonderment that I was part of this ancient family; that after five thousands years, that my G-d was indeed the same G-d as our forefathers?

But, as a boy of thirteen, I found out that I wasn't getting Bar Mitzvah'd. And to make matters even worse, I no longer belonged to a synagogue. "*Where has my G-d gone?*" I asked myself. For the next several years until I finished high school, G-d was out of my life. It was not long after that that my search began for me to find "*Where my G-d had gone?*"



My search took me to many different places, places that provided me many different life experiences and many different life styles. Some good, some bad but they always moved me forward in my quest to find my G-d.

During the next thirty years, my search introduced me to such beliefs as eastern philosophies and religions, as well as New Age movements. I remember once I found myself looking for G-d in a Buddhist temple. There was something familiar I felt about the building. As I was sitting on the floor cross-legged, I looked around the room and there in front of me was a stain glass window and in it



was a Magen David mosaic, a Star of David. It was then that I realized that this building was once a Jewish Synagogue. How strange I thought. "Hello G-d" I said to myself. "Nice to be with you again."

During a business trip to Cleveland, Ohio, in 1993, I first met my wife. I was living in Minneapolis at the time and we began a long distance relationship. She told me that when the time was right to get married, she wanted to have a Jewish home and raise a family. These were very special words to me. I felt that this could be the

end of my searching for G-d. I could try this one thing I had always taken for granted, my heritage, Judaism from where I had started.

Three years ago, I went to the Netherlands on business, consulting for the Dutch Telephone Company. At the end of my trip, I spent a day in Amsterdam and visited Ann Frank's house and the Jewish quarter. There I saw a picture of the outside of Jewish Synagogue located just down the street from where I was at, that was taken during the Nazi occupation. Jews were coming down the stairs in



front of it after Shabbat services. They all were wearing a Star of David on the outside of their clothing. I walked to those same steps in front of the synagogue and closed my eyes. I imagined I was one of those Jews wearing a Star of David on the outside of my clothing. It was then I knew with no question in my mind, I was a Jew and that my love for G-d would always be eternal.

The following year it was suggested to me that I should consider participating in Anshei Israel's two-year B'nai Mitzvah program. And today is the culmination of those two incredible years of study. I am very grateful that such a program exists here at our synagogue and hope this opportunity will always be there for individuals who want to come home; a program that has allowed me to continue my study of Torah and G-d's laws and has provided me the key to understanding my life's journey past, present and future.

In closing, I want to share these final thoughts with you. As a young boy going to Shabbat services, I always enjoyed reciting the following prayer, "*You shall love the Lord your G-d, with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your might. And these words, which I command you this day, shall be upon your heart. And you*

shall teach them diligently to your children ...". Now that we have our son, I realize the importance of these words; that I as a Jew must implant the seed of Judaism and the love of G-d in our son and nourish them and just as important that I must teach him that he in turn must implant this seed in his children and nourish them for all generations to come. The ember of Judaism and the love of our G-d must always glow.

L'dor Vador (from generation to generation).

Shabbat Shalom