

I have found the Bar/Bat Mitzvah *d'rasha* or *d'var Torah* or what it used to be called “speech” (where it exists.) an insult to the congregation and the Torah. The notion of a thirteen-year-old teaching a congregation *torah* demeans Torah learning. It may be cute, but it is a highly symbolic statement to the assembled about the amount and depth of wisdom and acumen required for one to engage in meaningful study. It is also a burden on the thirteen-year-old far beyond his/her capabilities and maturity. Beyond that it is often programmed into their mouths by adults prodding and coaxing them on.

The Boy scouts of which I was a member before we knew what homophobia was knew about early teen-age education.

They understood what 13 year olds could do. They could take a pledge (the boy scout oath which follows about concepts they had little grasp of, i.e.

On my honor I will do my best To do my duty to God and my country and to obey the Scout Law; To help other people at all times; To keep myself physically strong, mentally awake, and morally straight.

The Scout Law was to be;

TRUSTWORTHY

A Scout tells the truth. He keeps his promises. Honesty is part of his code of conduct. People can depend on him.

LOYAL

A Scout is true to his family, Scout leaders, friends, school, and nation.

HELPFUL

A Scout is concerned about other people. He does things willingly for others without pay or reward.

FRIENDLY

A Scout is a friend to all. He is a brother to other Scouts. He seeks to understand others. He respects those with ideas and customs other than his own.

COURTEOUS

A Scout is polite to everyone regardless of age or position. He knows good manners make it easier for people to get along together.

KIND

A Scout understands there is strength in being gentle. He treats others as he wants to be treated. He does not hurt or kill harmless things without reason.

OBEDIENT

A Scout follows the rules of his family, school, and troop. He obeys the laws of his community and country. If he thinks these rules and laws are unfair, he tries to have them changed in an orderly manner rather than disobey them.

CHEERFUL

A Scout looks for the bright side of things. He cheerfully does tasks that come his way. He tries to make others happy.

THRIFTY

A Scout works to pay his way and to help others. He saves for unforeseen needs. He protects and conserves natural resources. He carefully uses time and property.

BRAVE

A Scout can face danger even if he is afraid. He has the courage to stand for what he thinks is right even if others laugh at or threaten him.

CLEAN

A Scout keeps his body and mind fit and clean. He goes around with those who believe in living by these same ideals. He helps keep his home and community clean.

REVERENT

A Scout is reverent toward God. He is faithful in his religious duties. He respects the beliefs of others.

Scout Motto

Be Prepared
Scout Slogan

Do a Good Turn Daily

I was never a girl scout, but I assume they programmed similarly. If you look at their website which says what The Girl Scouts are;

It's All About Fun, Friends, and Fantastic Opportunities

Most girls join a local troop or group for fun and friendship, but they also find out about building character and self-esteem and serving their communities—the core qualities of Girl Scouting. In Girl Scouts, girls find a safe place to grow and share new experiences, learn to relate to others, develop values, and contribute to society.

These were the general precepts. What they meant in practice was left for maturity to hone and develop those attributes. They understood that 12-13 years of age is about learning skills. For us Boy Scouts, as far as skills were concerned, it was all about knot tying, tent arranging, and gathering merit badges for accomplishing a variety of tasks. Theoretical learning needed to wait until the hormones had done their work.

Teaching our children, and that's what they are at this point in their lives, the skills they need for Jewish life such as davening, Torah reading, benching etc. is terrific for a Bar/Bat Mitzvah. Teaching them that those skills make them eligible for "tenderfoot" level entry into the adult Jewish community. Playacting intellectual learning by an eighth grader is a farce and an insult to the community they are preparing to be initiated into.

The reader should know that I received much flack for this e-mail. Though I respect my colleagues, I think my position remains cogent in terms of the maturity and learning needed to teach a congregation.