



# JCSS



## Jewish Cultural School & Society

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### Yom Kippur Reflections, 2008

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I'm certain that many of the adults here have been in my situation: early 20s, just out of college, finding your first real job, yet still dependent on your parents for support. It's a transitional phase, one where I have questioned myself, my religion, and my place in the world. Looking back at the past few months, I realize that I am becoming increasingly comfortable in my situation more resistant to the frightening change of growing up and taking responsibility for myself. I need something that will push me out of my comfort zone and my tendency towards inaction, and mark a definite line where my youth ends and my adulthood begins. In short: My bar mitzvah was ten years too early.

Judaism, like all religions, is a social construct designed to guide people through difficult life changes. The bar or bat mitzvah is a ritual which is supposed to recognize that one is fully subject to the torah's commands and religious law, and is no longer considered a minor in the eyes of the community. This may hold true in orthodox communities, but in a secular humanistic congregation in modern America, the bar mitzvah carries less importance. In our society, we are either blessed or cursed with the gift of extended adolescence that lasts into the mid-twenties. America provides no personal

ceremony to mark the end of youth, or at least, none that don't involve reckless alcohol consumption.

My question is, how is Judaism relevant to me, right now, in this time in my life? When does it shout, "You're now a man, move out of your parents' basement!" I have no real answer for myself, other than suggesting a reinterpretation of the coming of age ceremony. Asking an orthodox rabbi, his response along the line of marrying a nice Jewish girl and having lots of kids. This misses the point, if I'm not ready to take responsibility for myself, how am I ready to get married?

Perhaps my answer lies in the Jewish approach to atonement, which is sought on this holiday of Yom Kippur. Atonement is a returning to your past, a reflection on those times in the previous year where you tried and failed, in the hopes of improving your future. It's similar to the American ritual of the "new years resolution," with the important addition of forgiveness. Forgiveness, not just by some higher power, but forgiveness of yourself, and perhaps more importantly, of each other. I am optimistic that my reluctance to move beyond the protective sphere of my youth will change after today. I hope that you are all able to find forgiveness for your errors, in your faith, your friends, or yourself.

*Michael Consoli is a JCSS graduate and current member of our faculty.*