



# Masorti's Bar/Bat Mitzvah Program for Children with Special Needs



The Masorti Bar/Bat Mitzvah Program for Children with Special Needs is the only one in Israel carrying out a nationwide effort to give children with special needs, and their families, the opportunity to celebrate a bar or bat mitzvah.

Starting in 1995 in just one school, the program has reached 30-40 schools, educating up to 300 children a year. Approximately 3,500 young Israelis and their families have already celebrated this Jewish milestone in a way most never thought possible. In 2010, the Shalem Foundation, one of Israel's foremost national social service organizations, awarded its coveted Excellence Prize to the Masorti program, citing its role in pioneering the development and utilization of state-of-the-art alternative communications devices.



Program participants come from the underserved population of children with a variety of special needs, including those with autism, cerebral palsy, Down syndrome, mild and moderate mental retardation, hearing impairments, ADD, ADHD and other behavioral challenges.

Participants are selected by their school and not by Masorti. **The program is open to children from all backgrounds:** Masorti, Orthodox, Reform and secular, and with varying special challenges. The children and their families are eager to actively participate in Jewish communal life and in the wider Israeli society.

My younger brother Ro'i is a teenager with autism. When he turned 13, we ruled out the possibility of his having a bar mitzvah. We felt it would mean more to us than to him, and that dealing with the Orthodox bureaucracy would be too hard.

When I found out Ro'i was being called up to the Torah through the Masorti movement, I was thrilled. Somewhere deep inside, I really wanted him to have a Bar Mitzvah, but I never thought it was possible. I thought to myself - he deserves it too!

Being there with him when he was putting on tefillin, praying, reading Torah, singing and dancing with his friends made me happy beyond words. I want to say thank you. Thank you for your devotion to teaching my brother, for respecting him, for treating him as an equal human being, for letting him find his place in the group and as an individual. Soon I will start my studies as a special education teacher. I can't wait for the day my students will have a bar mitzvah through the Masorti movement, so I can have that special experience again.

*(Excerpts of letter translated from the Hebrew)*

Yishar Koach,  
Yarden Gilboa and the entire family

# Netaim

*An integrative experience  
for children with special needs*



Netaim, or "seedlings" in Hebrew, was developed following the success of the Masorti Bar/Bat Mitzvah Program for Children with Special Needs when the Masorti movement saw the absence of Jewish opportunities for children with special needs. The nurturing and fun atmosphere of the Ramah/NOAM Summer Camp seemed an ideal locale for integrating a camp experience for these children. Judaism is expressed in fun and innovative ways at the Ramah/NOAM camp, providing a unique opportunity for children with special needs to experience a pluralistic summer camp environment alongside the Ramah/NOAM campers.



The development of the Netaim program has provided a way for children from the special education system in Israel to develop their Jewish identity as part of an accepting Jewish and social community. The program has been extended to include Maayan, which provides staff positions at Ramah/NOAM for young adults with special needs. Netaim is intended to provide youth with special needs an informal

education summer experience at an overnight camp as an integral part of the Ramah/NOAM Summer Camp. It has proven to be an exceptionally meaningful experience for both regular campers and Netaim participants and has helped increase awareness of people with special needs among the other campers.

In addition to the summer camp, Netaim programming also carries into the school year, providing an excellent experience and platform for teaching the Jewish values of outreach and assistance to those in need. NOAM participants spend time throughout the academic year outside of camp with Netaim youngsters on hiking trips and Shabbatonim. During the yearly programming, the friendships created and connections made at camp are strengthened, which translates to a direct support for the youngsters and their families.



**Make your donation today and support Masorti's programs for special needs children in Israel.**

Send your check to:

Masorti Foundation for Conservative Judaism in Israel, 475 Riverside Drive, Suite 832, New York, NY 10115

or go to [www.masorti.org](http://www.masorti.org).

For more information, call 212-870-2216 or email [info@masorti.org](mailto:info@masorti.org).