

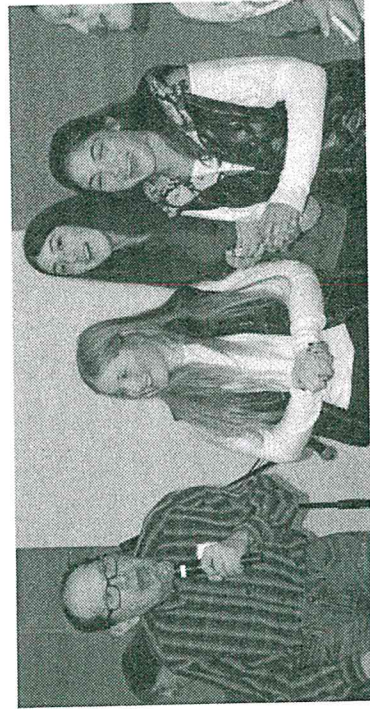
Havorah: A Time for Celebrating Jewish Traditions

BY SARAH POLAND, WJCS

Jewish individuals with disabilities are often isolated from mainstream Jewish life - whether they live with families, in group homes, community residences or institutions. But for more than 20 years now, the WJCS Partners in Caring program has sponsored annual Havorah celebrations in collaboration with synagogues and Jewish community centers throughout the county. They offer participants unique opportunities to experience Jewish ritual and practice, meet clergy and gather with community members.

These cultural experiences stem from Jewish

tradition that teaches about the obligation to treat all people with respect and dignity. This is a mitzvah that is defined as both a good deed and a commandment. Judaism first introduces this concept in the book of Genesis 1:26-27. And G-d said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness...' And G-d created man in His image, in the image of G-d He created him; male and female He created them.' One interpretation of this verse comes from Mishnah Sanhedrim 4:5. "A human being mints many coins from the same mold, and they are all identical. But the holy one, blessed by G-d, strikes us all from the mold of the first



human and each one of us is unique." With this in mind, WJCS honors the Mitzvah of exposing and teaching those with disabilities according to their needs and abilities. (Proverbs 22:6)

For some individuals, Havorah is their only con-

nection to Judaism. WJCS collaborates with each synagogue to carefully craft the events. The rabbis, cantors and education directors enthusiastically lead the programs, lighting up the rooms with their songs and stories of the holidays. Guests who

regularly attend the Havorah become familiar with the clergy members and look forward to seeing them each year.

Havorah is led by lay leaders. Hundreds of volunteers come together to prepare food, greet guests, sing and dance, decorate, make name tags, and ensure an unforgettable Jewish experience for the community. Families join in lighting the Menorah, place each piece of Parsley on the Seder Plate and encourage dancing during the Shabbat program. At Passover, teenagers come to sing and perform along with the

Westchester Klezmer Program under the musical direction of Kenny Green.

The WJCS Havorah program includes two community Passover Seders at which a three-course traditional dinner is served to 200 guests, their caregivers and families. Community partners including synagogues, schools, lay leaders, volunteers, restaurants and goods' donors fulfill the Mitzvah with an enlightening, entertaining and meaningful experience for all the attendees.

For more information about the WJCS Havorah program, contact Sarah Poland, coordinator, at 914-761-0600 x154 or spoland@wjcs.com.