

RJ: Do you believe that, as the CCAR Statement of Principles says, “the partnership of God and humanity will ultimately prevail”?

Martin Graffman: Yes. And to partner with God in the midst of evil means that not only must I take the responsibility to fight that evil; I must also sensitize myself so that I can recognize the evil.

Barbara D. Holender: I do have faith that the partnership of God and humanity will prevail, if only because it is unthinkable that man can survive on his own resources. We can sit around till eternity waiting for God to come along and make things right; it’s not going to happen. Once people stop expecting God to fix everything and take full responsibility for themselves and their world, there is strength to be found in faith on its own terms. God is that reservoir of strength, the source of resilience and the belief that we can be better and more creative than we think we are. □

Celebrating...
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Barbara D. Holender: The crowning event of my adult life was my bat mitzvah at age 70. Our cantor, David Goldstein, taught me trope. I learned to chant. And I selected as my Torah portion *Parashat Nitzavim* because of two words: *B’charta ba-chaim*.

“Choose Life” is my guiding principle. I wrote a poem, “Torah,” which I read first, and a *d’var Torah*, and I chanted *Nitzavim* with all my heart. I had borrowed my grandsons’ b’nai mitzvah *tallit*, in a nice reversal of tradition. Would you believe that when I lifted that Torah I felt it in my body as my tree of life, my backbone?

Nothing in my life will ever supersede that experience. With my family and friends and the congregation all sharing my day, and with my heart and soul fully engaged in Torah, it was the culmination of my life’s efforts. Even now, in my 80th year, I can still chant my *parashah* from beginning to end. It is permanently present in my mind. □

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