



# Congregation Emanu-El of the City of New York

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*What members of the Readers Panel*

*say about participating in this experience...*

“Serving as a volunteer reader for the daily service has enriched my own spiritual life. It also has allowed me to appreciate our liturgy in a new way. Reading the cadences of our beautiful prayer book aloud in a sacred space and standing before the open ark proclaiming the Adoration each time feels like I’m at Sinai.

Whether I’m reading for visitors or members, recent mourners, those observing a *yahrzeit* or seekers of the comfort found in communal liturgy, or indeed if I’m alone with God in Greenwald Hall, I always know I’m sharing in the ‘work of prayer’ that our temple maintains and carries forth. To me it is an honor and privilege to participate in our prayer life in this special way. But for my own spirituality, it is also a great blessing.” — **Frederick Roden**

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## **A Conversation With God**

By Bettijane Eisenpreis

On September 14, 1995, one month after my 60<sup>th</sup> birthday, I became a bat mitzvah in the Beth-El Chapel of Temple Emanu-El. I made the decision after much careful thought and studied long and hard to be able to read my Torah portion, *B'chukotai*. But read it, I did, with my son, Steven, reading the blessings. I don't know which of us was more nervous, but we did splendidly, if I do say so myself.

Only a few weeks later, my ex-husband, Alfred, approached me with a suggestion...or was it a dare? "Women are going to read daily services," he said. "Why don't you sign up?"

Yikes! Me, read Hebrew? In front of strangers? My first reaction was, "You've got to be kidding!"

But he wasn't kidding. And read I did—and do. In the 20 years that have passed, I never have ceased to be awed by those moments in which, reading the familiar words, I feel a bond with something larger than I am.

I really believe in the presence of God. Also, I feel I am performing a real service. Many people who have come during the year of mourning or to observe a *yahrzeit* have thanked me for reading the name of their loved one. But also there are some who have come only for a quiet moment, and they too are appreciative. I am so grateful to be able to perform this *mitzvah*—for myself, for the congregation and for the larger community.

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“Whenever I lead the Sunset Service, I pray beforehand; I pray to God to help me lead in such a way that it will, indeed, be a service: to those who are present, to those who are mourning, to God. I pray that the service be for the highest good, for each and for all.

I pray again during the silent prayer. This is a way to keep me focused and to take the pressure off—for it helps me remember that I am but a conduit.

I find being a member of the Readers Panel a great privilege.” — **Rita Sherman**