

Shabbat Shalom and good morning. Thank you for being here with me on this very special day. It is important to me that you are all witnesses today as I affirm my Jewish identity.

I would like to start out by discussing what becoming a Bar Mitzvah means to me. One of the most important aspects of becoming a Bar Mitzvah is that I am now responsible for performing mitzvot. To those of you who may be unfamiliar with the term mitzvot- they are positive acts, links between God and humanity.

Before today I did mitzvot all of the time but it was by choice. Now that I have become a Bar Mitzvah, the Torah **commands** me to perform mitzvot. On that note, throughout this past year I chose to perform the mitzvot of

*gemilut hasadim* (acts of loving kindness) and *Tzar Ba'alay Hayim* (kindness to animals) by volunteering at Faithful Friends (a no-kill animal shelter).

Every Sunday after religious school for a few months, I went to the shelter and spent time with the cats doing anything from playing, petting and holding the cats to cleaning out their cages and feeding them. Although this doesn't seem like a lot- it was an important job and very meaningful to me because what I was doing was helping to make the cats more adoptable.

The more time the cats spend with human contact the more they like people. During the months I volunteered at Faithful Friends I saw many of the cats become friendlier and lots of them get adopted. I plan to continue volunteering at this shelter as it is now an obligation to perform mitzvot.

Becoming a Bar Mitzvah is a rite of passage in the Jewish religion. This tradition has happened for many years. Rites of passages happen in cultures all over the world. Recently, I was watching a T.V. show called Human Planet and it talked about a rite of passage in the country Mongolia. When a boy in Mongolia turns 15, he goes out into the wilderness with his Dad and has to take a baby eagle from its mothers nest. The boy has to train his eagle how to fly and be a strong hunter. When the boy thinks his eagle is ready, they take it to the top of the mountain where his eagle has to spot a fox and catch it. If the eagle succeeds, the boy is considered “a man of his people”.

This Mongolian rite of passage is a tradition that has many similarities to becoming a Bar Mitzvah. The boy’s training of the eagle to become a strong hunter is like the years of preparation to become a Bar Mitzvah. The day of

the eagle's test is similar to today as I become a Bar Mitzvah. Finally, once the boy has proven he trained his eagle well, he is considered a "man of his people" just as I am now considered an adult in the Jewish religion.

As I become a Bar Mitzvah I also get to read from the Torah for the first time. This is a pretty amazing experience for me because these are the same words that were read by my ancestors thousands of years ago. The portion of the Torah I read today was part of Bech'a'lotecha chapters 8-12 from the book of Numbers. I only read a portion of this chapter because if I read the whole thing, I would have taken even longer than it has already! Seriously though, each entire Torah portion is separated into 3 parts. Each year we read 1/3 of the portion consecutively.

I can easily relate this Torah portion to my life. When the Israelites asked Moses a question about the second Passover and Moses didn't know the answer- he said he would check with God and get back to them.

This shows great character...Moses wasn't afraid to admit he didn't have the answer. The main message is if you are unsure of something don't be afraid to ask someone with more knowledge for help.

I can relate to this because the same thing happened before in my life. There was a time at school when a teacher didn't know the answer to a question that a student asked so she told the class she would look it up and get back to us with the right information. This made me respect her even more. Another point is that if someone doesn't know the correct information and just makes something up and then I find out later that it was wrong

information- I will lose trust in that person. At school when I'm not exactly sure about instructions, I always ask so that I make sure I am doing it correctly. It is always OK to admit you don't have all of the answers!

I would like to end with some important thank-yous. Thank you to the Temple Beth El synagogue for creating a supportive community that let me grow as a Jew. Thank you to the Temple Board, Sisterhood and Men's Club for the Kiddush cup, Candlestick holders and the Jewish Book of Why. Thank you to the catering committee and all of sisterhood for the delicious Oneg last night and the Kiddush to follow soon. Thank you to Rabbi Micah, and all of my religious school teachers for all of the Jewish education you have provided me over the years.... To my Bar Mitzvah tutors (Mr. Hannaford, Mrs. Romeo and Mrs. Dior) for helping me prepare for becoming a Bar Mitzvah.

Thank you to XXXXXX for helping me with my Maftir and to XXXX for being there along the way. Thank you to XXXX and XXXX XXXX for my awesome tallit and to my XXXX for helping me with my prayers. Mom and Dad, thank you for all of the planning that went into today, helping me to prepare and for all of your support. Thank you most of all for passing the Jewish religion on to me. Lastly, I appreciate all of my family and friends for coming out here today in honor of me becoming a Bar Mitzvah!

Shabbat Shalom!